

Social Justice

October 6, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry. This week's message is titled "Social Justice." The scripture reading is Psalm 33, 1-5. Thank you to Amy, Geoff, Toluwani, and Don for being part of the video. Happy birthday to Tina and happy anniversary to Jo and John.

Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Good morning and welcome. I'm glad that you are here today. I have a few announcements to just start our time. Birthdays this week, happy birthday to Ernie and to Lynn, who we are so happy to see back with us and to Christina. Upcoming events, Wednesday evening we are having continuing our Psalms of Jesus study in the library at 7.30. Anybody is welcome to join us.

Some prayer requests. Goldie Whitehead passed away September 20th. Len Graham passed away September 4th. His celebration of life is in October. And we are continuing to pray for those who are mourning: the Kirkland family; the Cook family; the Ellis, Whitfield, and Smith families. Let's open our time and prayer together.

Holy God, we thank you for community. We thank you for this space and time set apart that we can come together and worship. God we thank you for the changing season. We thank you for all the ways that you show your creativity through nature, through weather, through things that happen around us. God we thank you for this community of believers gathered together and we pray that we will edify you and that we will go out into this community and be your hands and feet. In Jesus' name, amen.

Communion

Donny has chosen the 33rd Psalm to speak about today. It's a Psalm that calls us to praise of our God. It begins with an exuberant appeal to sing, which we've just done. He says, "Sing joyfully and in newness, for the Lord's gifts are renewed." They're renewed with each dawn. But the real heart of this Psalm is found in the nature of God. He's deserving of our adoration because he is upright and true. And in verse 5, especially, we learn of his faithfulness. Your translation may use words like unfailing love, loving kindness, or loyal love. The Hebrew word is hesed. God's hesed love is unbounded and unbroken for his people.

If you've been watching the clock, you know that today, this morning, earlier, the seasons changed. From the warmth and heat and growth, the green and maturing of summer, to the bearing of the trees as they hunker down for winter. Yet, even in that, God's hesed love is being painted in brilliant hues as nature in a final act against that die-off. This lays God's promise that this is just for a short time. And the next equinox will bring back those vibrant greens and new growth. But God's hesed love is not just demonstrated in nature. It has never been more clearly demonstrated than his long-awaited lamb. We meet now to celebrate that event. Humankind perverted God's plan for one-on-one relationship in the garden.

Yet, God patiently waited for just the right time, for just the right person, in fact, the one and only free person, his son, to give up his life as a ransom for all the others. And we just sung about that,

too. In his hesed love, God watched as his son was given over to sins he did not commit. Nature shuddered, and the sky grew dark in the middle of the day. The rock shattered as Jesus gave up his spirit. And the temple veil that separated God from humanity was torn apart. A few days later, he appeared to his friends. The wounds were still showing to prove God's hesed love would not abandon them. And he left this earth while God still patiently waits, till his church is complete to send him back in glory.

Just as the autumn colors promised the spring rains, the loyal, unfailing, the hesed love of God is assurance that he will come again in glory to take home his own. And we meet with these small emblems today to celebrate the fact that Jesus came and won a victory we never could. Let's go to God in prayer.

Father, we adore you for your justice, and yet your love that even overcomes a gulf that we could never bridge. Thank you now, Father, as we break this bread and we remember that he came and trod those dusty streets of the Middle East. Father, as he lived and walked and talked with those around them, pointing them to you. And Father, most importantly, when the time came, he set aside his needs for our needs. He set aside his desires for yours. We thank you, Father. We celebrate your love that gave us this opportunity. We celebrate the blood that washes us clean. Father, we thank you for his great gift. We thank you for your unfailing hesed love. And we look forward with joy to the time when he will return to bring back his own. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Psalm 33:1-5

Today's Bible reading is from Psalm 33, verses 1 through 5.

"Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous. It is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the Lord with the harp. Make music to him on the 10-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song. Play skillfully and shout for joy. For the word of the Lord is right and true. He is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of his unfailing love." Thank you.

Sermon

Social Justice

Morning everyone. Thank you for being with us today. Have you ever been accused of saying something you didn't say? Or have you ever been accused of doing something you didn't do? I think I was in grade six at the time and I was called into the principal's office and I was waiting outside the principal's office. I didn't know what he wanted. He wanted me to do something but I didn't know what it was. And when it was my turn to go into his office I could tell this is not going to be good. He had a look at me like you are a murderer. And I said what? And he didn't say a word. He looked at me with slanted eyes and a mean, mean, mean look. And he said you have been slicing the tires on children's bicycles. And I said no. I would never do such a thing. And then I said, which was true. My father's a minister and he would taught me better than that. I would never ever do such a thing. He didn't believe me. And it was silence. And he just stared at me. After a while I didn't want to look at him but he never said a word. And finally he said get out. So I went out. And then as I was leaving he yelled at me again and said, "Sit there." And then another young man was

called in and he said, "Don didn't do it." He said, "I did it. I'm sorry. I apologize." Now I don't know what happened to that student afterwards. I really have no idea. But have you ever been accused of saying something or doing something that you didn't say or that you didn't do and nobody believed you? Where does justice come? And I want to talk about that. In truth, my 46 years of preaching, I really didn't realize in scripture how often the word justice is used multiple multiple times.

A gentleman by the name of Thomas Brakewell wrote regarding justice these words in a kind of old-fashioned. He says old friends of God be living examples of justice so that the mercy of God the world itself may see in your actions that you live and manifest the attributes of justice and mercy. You have been justified. And we have been justified even though we've said terrible things and done terrible things and that we've sinned we are justified because of Jesus. Isn't that powerful? Justice is not limited. It's a universal quality. The mercy of God in the world can see us justice. It's going to be carried out, justice does, from the highest to the lowest. Justice must be sacred and the rights of all people to be included. May all of us be just. May we never harm nor speak ill of others. Hey, do you know what so-and-so said about so-and-so? Don't listen to it. Don't listen to it unless it's something very good. Justice is not limited. It is a universal quality. May we never harm or speak ill of others, but may we be concerned for the interests of others even if they've been accused.

Believe it or not, February 20th is called the World Day of Social Justice. Anybody know that? It includes efforts to tackle and promote social justice, poverty, gender equality, social protection of human rights. And God wants us to help restore all that is broken and especially all people who are broken. And even if there's nothing you can do to help someone, you can always sit beside them, hold them, hug them, and love them and say, "I will be with you," because that's what God says. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I am always with you.

Even if people are accusing you of doing something you didn't do or saying something you didn't say, God's justice is for us. God encourages us to be advocates of helping others. Isaiah, one of the great prophets of all time, talks about justice. He says this, "Learn to do what is right, to do so by seeking justice. Defend not only yourself, but defend the oppressed. Take up the fatherless and plead the case of the widow."

In the Psalms, there are multiple scriptures dealing with this. In the book of Psalms, it says, "Justice is here." Chapter 7, verse 6, "Arise, O Lord, in your anger. Rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake my God and decree justice." Chapter 11, verse 7, "The Lord is righteous." Listen to this. "The Lord loves justice." Now, the Lord loves sinners, but the Lord loves justice and those people who manifest justice. 106, in verse 3 of the Psalms, "Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right, even if you're accused otherwise." And then Psalm 112, in verse 5, "Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice." In Psalm 140, notice how often in the Psalms they write these things. "I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. Surely righteousness will praise your name and the upright will live before you."

There's a man by the name of Abdul, and I couldn't pronounce his last name, but he advocates justice all over the world. He said, "O friends of God, be living examples of justice, so that by the mercy of God the world may see in your actions that you manifest the attributes of justice and of

mercy and of friendship and of faith and overwhelming love. Never simply talk about it. Let it be part of who we are. It must be carried out from the lowest to the highest, and it must be sacred, being just, impartial, and fair, treating one another the way Jesus treats us."

So listen to these scriptures. The word "justice," as I said, have been used so often. Way back in the book of Exodus, he says, "Don't follow the crowd in doing and do not pervert justice." First Samuel chapter 8 and verse 3, the Israelites turned aside from God, and they perverted justice. And so in 2 Chronicles, to try to fair this out, says, "Maintain justice and righteousness."

Chapter 9 and 8, the Lord will govern people with justice. So God knows when we've sinned, but we have a mediator, God himself, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. And I also like to think that our loved ones who are already with God are encouraging us to love each other, to love God, to do everything we can to help others. Psalm 9 and 8, the Lord will govern the people with justice. Psalm 33, the Lord loves righteousness and justice. Isaiah chapter 1, seek justice and encourage those who are sad and oppressed. Micah chapter 3, you leaders of Israel, should you not know about justice and live justice, Zechariah 7 and 9, administer true justice, show mercy, and have compassion to one another.

But I just sort of felt when that principal was accusing me that I was the worst sinner in the world, I realized, yeah, we're going to be accused. People are going to say things about us that aren't true. So what do you do about that? You can just live your life in such a way that honors God with love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness, faithfulness and self-control, and it isn't easy. But we can still smile because of what God says. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I am always with you, even when you are being accused.

Many of us remember the powerful words by Martin Luther King Jr. standing behind that podium with literally thousands upon thousands of people seeking justice because of racial discrimination. Here are some of his words.

That all people are created equal. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial justice. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children. Then he says, no, we are not satisfied. We are not satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. Let not wallow in the valley of despair. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all people are created equal. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh will see it together. This is our hope and it still is today. And with this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that one day we will be free. And when we let freedom ring, then we will be able to join hands and sing the words free at last, free at last. Thank God almighty we're free at last.

I don't know that we've ever truly completed that as of yet. The dominant theme in Amos is social justice. The wealthy oppressing the poor. There were some who lived in extravagant indulgence and yet corruption and oppressing the poor. Israel had become politically secure and spiritually smug. God's patience was coming to an end. Israel became paganized and they lived a worldly view. They were cheating, perverting justice, crushing the weak and the poor. And as a result, God would uproot his chosen people by the hands of a pagan godless nation. However, God did not

abandon Israel. God reminds them that the Lord is the great God who rules the entire universe even today. Israel needed to remember their faith and trust in the Lord. And it's true today for us. Amos reminds the prophets not to prophesy, especially when they're not living a faithful life. And so Amos listens to God's teaching. They've fallen short.

And here are some pretty strong words. I apologize, but it's in the scripture Amos chapter four. He says to the people, "Hear this you cows of Bashan." God isn't holding back his anger. "You women who oppress the needy and say to our husbands, bring us more wine. But the time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks in your mouth. The last of you with fish hooks. You have not returned to me, you have not returned to me, says the Lord." And God repeats this over and over again. Verse six, he says, "You have not returned to me." Verse nine, he says, "You have not returned to me." And verse 10 says, "You have not returned to me, declares the Lord." And verse 12, then he says these words, "Prepare to meet your God."

With these warnings, God continually gives the opportunity for them to return to him, to be faithful to him. And so God says, "Seek me and live. You who would turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground." So Amos, now that he's got everyone's attention, says this, "Seek good and not evil so that you may live. Then the Lord Almighty will be with you. Just as you say he is. Do this. Hate evil. Love good. Maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps, perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy of the remnant of Israel." And these powerful words, "But let justice roll on like a river. Righteousness like a never-failing stream."

And because of their lack of faith and little appreciation for what God has done for them for generation, Amos writes, "The days are coming, declares the sovereign Lord. Well, I will send a famine into the land. Not a famine of food or thirst, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord." People were going to give that up, but God never leaves his people alone. Here's what he says, "God promises a restoration of faith by saying these words, "In that day, I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places. I will restore its ruins and build it as it used to be so that all nations may bear the name, declares the Lord." Have you ever been accused of saying something, doing something that you didn't say or that you didn't do? And there was no forgiveness. So what do you do? You just give it to him, knowing that he loves us and he's with us every step of the way.

So let's conclude with these words, "I will bring back my people of Israel. They will rebuild the ruined cities and they'll live in them again and be prosperous. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine and they will make gardens and eat their fruit, maybe like the Garden of Eden. I will plant Israel in their own land. Never again will they be uprooted from the land that I've given them." And it's true. It's very true. Sometimes justice seems like a long way away. But as Amos and as God and as Jesus and as Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us, free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty. We are free at last. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Today's reading was from Psalm 33 and for our closing prayer, I'm going to read a paraphrase of portions of Psalm 33. So let's pray together.

We praise you Lord, for your word is right and true. You are faithful in all you do. You love righteousness and justice. The earth is full of your unfailing love. By your word the heavens were

made, their starry hosts by the breath of your mouth. You gather the waters of the sea into jars. You put the dead deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear you Lord. Let all the people of the world revere you. For you spoke and it came to be. You commanded and it stood firm. You thwart the purposes of the peoples and foil the plans of nations. But your plans stand firm forever. The purposes of your heart through all generations. We wait and hope for you Lord. You are our help and our shield. In you our hearts rejoice. We trust in your holy name. May your unfailing love be with us Lord, even as we put our hope in you. Amen.

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