



St. Andrew's Church

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The Feast of St. Barnabas June 11, 2020

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

We are six months out from the time of year when G.F. Handel's *Messiah* (1741) regularly graces our radios and concert halls. This sweeping oratorio seeks to follow the life of Jesus of Nazareth and highlight the significance of the Messiah. Charles Jennens (1700-1773), who prepared the text that Handel would set to music, sought to craft as complete a view of Jesus' life, ministry and purpose as possible. Drawing from the Old Testament and the New, Jennens highlighted the many facets of the Messiah. One invaluable resource for Jennens was the writings of the Prophet Isaiah. It is from many of these excerpts from Isaiah that the image of what Godly Justice look like begins to take shape.

In the pastoral letter I issued last week, I explored Godly Peace. At the conclusion of that letter, I noted that with an understanding of Godly Peace we can begin to glimpse what Godly Justice look like. The close relationship between peace and justice is seen in the psalms where we read: "justice and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10). So we begin,

What does justice mean?

Ordinary, day-to-day, justice may be defined as "the quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness: to uphold the **justice** of a cause". As is often the case with definitions, this is not necessarily a helpful definition.

Stepping away from the "textbook" definition of justice, briefly consider some common understandings of justice that are present in our society: Justice is "righting a wrong". Justice is making sure there is punishment for something done wrong. For many, this is justice. But there are additional layers to justice.

What are some of these additional layers of justice?

As we expand our exploration of justice we see that another understanding of justice is striving for equality. Justice for an oppressed people may look like the cessation of oppression and opportunities to narrow the gap. Justice may mean allowing more voices to be heard on a particular issue than just a few voices. Justice, in this regard, is not a "punitive" justice, but a justice established by the sharing of authority and influence and power – in others words, a levelling.

What do we glimpse of God's judgement in Scripture?

God's justice is a combination of both a punitive understanding of justice and a "levelling" understanding of justice. We see numerous examples of justice as "righting a wrong" in scripture - particularly in the Old Testament.

As we turn our attention to the New Testament, the notion of justice as "writing a wrong" is still present - particularly in the writings of Paul. The gospels contain this understanding as well; however, Jesus seeks to temper this notion of justice by highlighting that it is God who is the arbitrator of justice and who wields ultimate justice. While Jesus notes the important of justice in this sense, he challenges those are seeking to apply justice themselves to first and foremost look at themselves and their actions, sins, and shortcomings, and allow that to meter their judgement.

God's justice is also very much focused on the great levelling. Here we return to the Prophet Isaiah.

³ A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.' (Isaiah 40:3-5)

This is such familiar imagery, perhaps too familiar - meaning that we do not take the time to consider the implications of this type of divine justice. A straight path is just that - a straight path. There are no twists or turns; there are no blind spots, just straight travel for all. No one lives in the valleys of despair and none live on pinnacles so far above others that all they know to do is look down and oppress those below. There are no cracks or potholes or obstacles to overcome (disproportionately for some compared to others), all walk the same, level path.

This is when the glory of the Lord is revealed. This is when a true understanding of justice is glimpsed. This is when all people shall see the straight and level and balanced love and grace of God - that is the promise for every child of God.

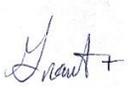
What then is the Christian's role in God's Justice?

The Christian's role in God's justice is two fold: 1) to make sure that all justice (in the sense of "righting a wrong") is administered with mercy, fairness, and righteousness, without allowing prejudice or vengeance or excessiveness to be present. 2) to seek to make a smooth, level existence for all people focusing not on that which makes us different, one from another, but on that which is the binding tie - that we are all beloved children of God. Here's Paul makes a clear point: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

God's Justice is something that we as individuals have to grow in understanding. Only in doing this personal work will our communal understanding and administering of justice be different. To begin this individual work,

we have to take the time to look into our own lives and see where our vision of justice is lacking. As we find areas in ourselves that require some work, we turn to an understanding of repentance. Just as peace and justice are intimately connected, so too is repentance connected with peace and justice. Repentance is that which helps set our feet on a new path – a path of God’s Peace and God’s Justice.

In the Peace of Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "T. Grant +". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

The Reverend T. Grant Ambrose
Rector