

Gospel Continuity: The People of Mission

Text: 1 Peter 2:4-12

6-25-17



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

"How would you define justice?"

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to _____..." (Luke 4)
How would you complete that statement?

"Where, in your life, do you feel the gravitational pull of distraction? What is it that's preventing you from noticing the injustice around you?"

"In what situation (relationship) are you afraid to let mercy win for fear of losing? Are you more interested in being right or helping to set something right? What if allowing yourself to be wronged was the only way to be right?"

Justice experiment:

- Make a commitment, for (1) week, to look directly into the eyes of each person you meet. Pause to see yourself in them; to see Jesus in them.
 - Each morning, for (1) week, ask God for the opportunity to "set something right" in his world... perhaps, righting an injustice you created.
 - Spend (10) minutes writing a Psalm about how you long to see the Kingdom come in some injustice of which you are aware.

Teaching Notes...

We cannot allow ourselves to become convinced that Christianity is anything other than establishing the 'shalom' of God in every facet of our lives and demonstrating to people what it looks like to live "collaboratively" under the reign of God.

Stuart Murray, in his book, *"Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World"*, discusses some transitions he observes: The church has moved...

- From the center to margins: we no longer have "*home field advantage*", in the culture.
- From control to witness: without the capacity of privilege to exert influence over a culture, we exercise influence only through witnessing to our story and its implications.
- From settlers to sojourners: from feeling at home in a culture which spoke their language and shared some familiarity with their story, to a place where we feel 'unsettled'.

Most of the people that we, as a community of faith, desire to reach currently have no intention of walking through those doors, no matter how seamless our presentation or how consistent our capacity for “pulling the perfect shots”.

Whatever ‘cachet’ the church had, it is rapidly diminishing, if not already dissipated. In the process, it’s hard to know where to land: we feel caught somewhere between “*indiscriminate approval*” and “ugly self-righteousness”, neither which proves to be the best reflection of the gospel.

Peter employs the metaphor of ‘**exile**’ to encourage a group of Christ-followers who desired to be faithful to the gospel in their own “zip code”. Our “theology” always has a “geography”.

Peter says, “*Given the nature of our present context, how do we remain actively present and involved, yet decidedly unwilling to adopt its values/ethics, as our own? How do we live as ‘aliens’ without alienating ourselves?*”

Peter assumes, in this context, that we will be “*peculiar*” (2:9, literally, ‘to make something and then surround it with a circle, indicating ownership.’ These people are mine!) and living “*questionable lives*” (1 Peter 3:15); that others will be asking questions of us for which the gospel is the only answer.

“*I will walk among you; I will be your God and you will be my people.*” Leviticus 26:12

It will be our own experience of grace--- of the unprovoked movement of God toward us in our own vulnerability and helplessness--- which compels our sense of justice and righteousness.

“*No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: [stop: grammatically, the ‘colon’ signals that what you are about to read is an explanation of the previous statement] to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*” Micah 6:8

[Isaiah 1:17; Luke 11:42]

When it comes to worship, we rarely, if ever, hear God say, “*You’re not doing it right!*”, but, we do often hear him challenge expressions of worship which attempt to give ‘glory’ to him, while ignoring the very things in which *he glories* [Isaiah 1: “*What do I care about your sacrifices? Your burnt offerings? Your celebrations?*”] Do you hear God distancing himself from all of that?

God is always challenging claims/expressions of faith which have no definable impact on our relationships, or which fail to address injustice, in its various forms.

How you live reflects the kind of God in whom you believe.

“*The Lord is a God of justice...*” Isaiah 30:18

“*Let not the wise man boast... but that he understands and knows me...*” Jeremiah 9:23-24

Injustice says, “*You don’t know me.*” (If you really knew me, ...)

“What is justice?”

Quite simply, it our understanding is birthed out of the declaration, “***That’s not fair! That’s just not right!***”

It presumes: 1) the idea of fairness (a way it ought to be), 2) the presence of inequity (not as it ought to be: evil), 3) some recognizable and viable standard of measure.

"I will test you with the measuring line of justice and the plumb line of righteousness". Isaiah 28:17

In its most fundamental, Storied-expression, justice is, “**setting things right**”. This IS the mission-dei.

Psalm 33:5 “*The Lord loves righteousness and justice ...*”

Righteousness and **justice** form what is technically called a “hendiadys”: a single, complex idea expressed in (2) words.

“**righteousness**”- *straight; fixed; fully what it should be, therefore, able to serve as a standard by which something else can be measured.*

“**justice**”- *to put things right; to be qualified to intervene in a situation that is not as it should be and remedy it.*

Justice never produces love. The result of love is justice.

We love well when we use the power and authority and resources available to us in order to serve the “good” of the other, particularly the more “under-served”, of our population.

Justice is never abstract or philosophical, but is a set of actions which conform to rightness. Righteousness is about right relationships: with God, with others.

We are not interested in a gospel that daydreams about the world to come if it means that we have to abandon the one in which we are currently living.

“The church exists to set up in the world a new sign which is radically dissimilar to the world’s own manner and which contradicts it in a way that is full of promise.”

Karl Barth

As people of mission....

... we realize that we are able to exert influence only from ‘within’ the culture.

We don’t simply “*pray for the Kingdom to come*” (Matthew 6), we make it happen, all around us. Justice says that in the midst of all that is chaotic and disorderly, we are never given permission to disengage from the world and concede to the dysfunction.

... we commit to bringing God’s loving rule to bear through persuasion, rather than coercion.

We see “needs”, not just “needy” people. The hope is that through the many touch-points of grace, the dream of God will be favored over their own self-indulgent approach to life.

... we find mission in the rhythms of life.

In **causes** and in the **commonplace**. Our waking, eating, recreating, working lives provide the context for mission. Therefore, it’s not just “busy” work or “grunt” work, but “sacred work”, because it is connected with God.

Historically, Christianity has allowed for this ‘dichotomy’ to exist: one which either over-emphasizes the personal/individual aspect of faith (private spirituality), or one that suggests that faith is primarily “philanthropic”: it’s about being a ‘good humanitarian’.

There’s certainly a danger in reducing the message to simply humane acts of kindness without any suggestion of deep, personal, inner- transformation because it ignores the evil which is responsible for the brokenness and dysfunctionality, in the first place!

But, neither is a message which becomes simply about one's personal spiritual experiences and has nothing at all to say about the renewal of the world in which we live. Neither is robust enough to be called "the gospel" (good news). "It's not either-or... it's both!"

In setting things right, someone will be called upon to absorb the consequences of injustice--- all that's gone wrong.

"Mercy triumphs over judgement" (James 2:12-13)

"... he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus" (Romans 3:26)

If we are to be in relationship with God, then he must address all of the ways that we fail to live faithfully in that relationship--- not simply dismissing or overlooking them (that wouldn't be truthful)--- but actually absorbing within himself all of the ways that we fail to live faithfully in that relationship (that would be grace-full).

Jesus was wrongfully accused, wrongfully tried, wrongfully condemned --- in order to set us right. He didn't just sympathize with the poor, he *"became poor"* (2 Corinthians 8:9). He didn't just bemoan our sin, he *"became sin"* (2 Corinthians 5:21) --- SO THAT! It is the *"so that we might become"* which is the compelling component of the gospel.

"Thanks be to God!"