

Isaiah 42:1-11 ^(NIV)

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." ⁵ This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ⁶ "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. ⁸ "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. ⁹ See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." ¹⁰ Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them. ¹¹ Let the desert and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops.

"Things that Will Endure: Justice"

My first experience with justice wasn't exactly what I would call just. I was in the 9th Grade. I had a girlfriend who had been leading another guy along. This guy was the guy who was almost 18 and still in 9th grade and a bit of a bully. One Saturday morning I was walking over to her house, a trip that involved going through the city park across a bridge and across a field that was cut off from the view of anyone's house. That morning the guy and his two brothers and then two more of his friends were waiting for me to come through the park. They followed me to the field and the he commenced to pick a fight. Knowing I was out numbered, I decided to do the right thing and do my best to walk away. It culminated with him sucker punching me and breaking my jaw.

So, we had him charged with assault and battery. When trial time came, the judge judged that this was just boys being boys and it was a lucky punch and so there was no need to find the guy guilty. (If he had, it would have been the guy's third assault conviction and would have landed him in juvenile detention.) Well, in the further pursuit of justice we sued him in civil court for court and medical expenses and compensation for my suffering. The judge held him responsible for the expenses, but apparently what I suffered did not matter because boys will be boys.

Well, poor me, I did not think that the outcome of either decision was just. When we think of justice we tend to think of people getting what they deserve both in that offenders are rightly punished with a punishment that is commensurate to the crime and victims rightly compensated for loss and suffering. In my case the offender got off easy and apparently the judge thought I had somehow given the guy enough provocation for him to give me, the victim, what I deserved and unfortunately my jaw was broken in the process. So much for justice, but then again, we do not live in a just world.

We really do not live in a just world. Everyone in one way or another is a victim and an offender. Moreover, when we seek justice, in the end justice is not what is meted out. In our justice system, the punishment is never commensurate to the crime and the retribution if there is any is never commensurate to the loss. In response to this, we people of faith look to God to be the one to grant justice. We expect God to hold people to account and to render justice for us when we

are wronged and we hope he doesn't get us when we wrong others. We realize we have to be patient for God to avenge us because those who wrong others may not "get it" in this life time and so we hope God will get them in the next.

In Western Christianity we have created an elaborate post-life belief system for justice in which after death everyone will come before God the Judge and the alternatives are either Heaven or Hell. I know plenty of Christians who say, "I can't wait for that lousy b*%\$#^d to die so that he can burn in Hell," when speaking about someone who has wronged them. On a larger scale, the men who hijacked the jetliners on 9/11, they think they went to glory, but your typical Christian will say they went to Hell. It gets a bit tougher when, the offender is a little closer to home. I don't want the guy who broke my jaw to burn in Hell for breaking my jaw. After all, we really were just boys being boys and it was a lucky punch. Moreover, if we are to take a look at our own lives we find we're not as good as we think we are and if we had the big picture that God has of who we are and all that we've done and the people we've hurt knowingly and unknowingly...well, who could stand before the righteous judgment of the only righteous Judge. So, as Jesus tells us we don't go judging others as worthy of Hell because we are all sitting around log-eyed.

Well, many in Western Christianity have dismissed this idea of a final judgment all together. They call it a religious myth and say that it is out of accord with a God who is love. Yet, it does say in the Bible that we will have to come before the Judge and give account for our lives (Rom. 2:5-16). In the first three chapters of Romans Paul makes this perfectly clear as well as the fact that no one is righteous. All have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God. No one has a leg to stand on come Judgment Day. Jesus himself said in the Gospel of John that at the resurrection believers will be raised to life and everyone else will be raised to judgment. The way the story typically goes from there is that if a person didn't believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour they're going to Hell as if salvation were by a decision of one's own free will rather than by grace. These past few weeks I have been painting a picture of what the Bible really says. It Bible indisputably presents the picture that it is God the Father who calls forth believers in Jesus Christ, God the Son, by the revealing work of the Holy Spirit who creates saving faith in us. The problem here is that Calvinists have deduced by logic that this means that God, by some eternal decree has decided to save some and damn the rest. The Bible never says such a thing. What it does say is that those whom God has chosen now to be believers are the proof that he is righteous and will in turn judge in accordance with righteousness (cf. Rom. 3:21-26 in any translation other than the NIV and KJV. This is one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament to translate and unfortunately these widely read translations didn't do so well in being faithful to what Paul is actually saying.) But, be warned, that righteous judgment isn't what we're expecting for we need to consider who the Judge is and that all have fallen.

The Judge is Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate. The Judge is the one who took upon himself the sin of humanity and himself bore the just penalty of death that is upon us all because we have by nature and by choice chosen some other purpose for ourselves than being God's image-bearers in his creation who bring forth and voice it's worship and who keep and order it. Instead, we have exploited it and made it groan ourselves included. Jesus took humanity's "Go to Hell" sentence for everyone. On the cross Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Our Judge is the one who forgives because he realizes that we cannot save ourselves because apart from the work of the Holy spirit in us we are not aware that we sin.

Those who are believers in Jesus Christ know this righteous judgment because they have already experienced the transforming power of God's loving judgment upon them. The first things that happen when we found ourselves confronted with the All-loving Triune God of grace is conviction of sin and a desire to be faithful, a desire to do as God would have me to do. This comes about because the Holy Spirit, God as we experience God, is at work in us transforming us making us able to respond faithfully to the Father's drawing us to Jesus the Son (Jn. 6:44). God then renders the verdict this one is in the right – righteous – justified is the proper term. To carry this one step further, the fact

that there are forgiven/justified believers in Jesus Christ at work in the world now building for the kingdom of God coming is the foreshadowing of what the Triune God of grace is going to do in the future when Jesus returns to set the world to right. God's righteous judgment is the right-setting of God's creation by God's own transforming of it. God's judgment upon the wicked will be to transform them just as he has done for us. I am not preaching universal salvation because that would be an infringement upon God's freedom to annihilate those who in this life have so dehumanized others and themselves that at the resurrection to judgment they still want nothing to do with God's love.

I've spoken a lot about judgment because it is out of God's righteous judgment that justice arises in this world. God's righteous judgment is not based on commensurate punishment and commensurate retribution. It's rather upside down in comparison. The wicked don't get what they deserve because they are unable to do otherwise just as there is no vindication for the righteous because there is no one righteous. Justice begins with the proclamation that Jesus is Lord. This means that that no political party or individual leader no matter their ideology is able to bring about a just world. It means that no legal system is able to execute justice. Paul says at Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Justice is one of those works. Therefore, justice begins with us, the justified believers, who have been enabled by the Holy Spirit to do works in accordance with God's righteousness. Justice begins when we start putting aside judgmentalism and start building real relationships with people in which the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the power of God's reconciling love, is its foundation. Justice begins when we lift up the offended in God's love and when we confront the offender in love and when we in love try to bring the two together in reconciliation so that we all prayerfully work together to put things to right.

This is why I like the North-South Partnership for Children. It is a vehicle by which we, the justified believers, may truly work for justice. If we left it up to our government to deal justly with the First Nations all we will see is a continuance of injustice, things like in the face of a flu epidemic the government withholding hand sanitizer because they presume First Nations people will try to drink them for the alcohol and as just happened this past week sending boy bags which in the eyes of the First Nations was the government of Canada cursing them with a death-wish. North-South provides a vehicle for us to help restore trust which is at the heart of justice by letting us listen to the First Nations and in the name of Jesus come alongside them to help them in meeting their true needs.

Anytime we are working for forgiveness, working for reconciliation we are working for justice. The justice that we establish now though imperfect it is will in the end be perfected when Jesus comes to put the world to right with the fullness of God's on the day when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Is. 11:9). Amen.

Next week, I'll be a bit more practical in talking about acts of love and how they fit into justice.