



Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 Ramsey Road, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Pastor Neal Buckaloo
Sunday, September 19, 2010, the 17th Sunday after Pentecost
"Justice"

When you receive a driving ticket, the civil authorities are calling you to account to justify why the infraction you committed should not extract a fine. Typically, we feel angry, then perhaps, realize we have done the same many times without being caught. And so we reconcile ourselves to the justice of this citation.

In court two or more sides are represented by legal counsel. Those representing each side present the case of their client in the best possible light. Incriminating facts are left out and the integrity of the other side's claim is disputed. All of this is to influence the court and its decision in the matter. As often as not, pure justice is hard to come by. Those who have been wronged may not see the punishment given as adequate. Those held in judgment can often see themselves as victims and settle into resentment.

It seems clear that justice is not an easy matter. What is justice in regard to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico? Can there ever be justice in any complete sense? Human justice can be and often is problematic.

Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God were commanded to reflect God's justice to each other and to the nations. And so we hear such words as this regarding justice:

Deuteronomy 25:¹⁵ "You shall have a full and just weight; you shall have a full and just measure, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you." So the command here is tied to God's promise of a land in the covenant with Israel.

Deuteronomy 24:¹⁴ "You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, whether *he is* one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land. ¹⁵ "You shall give him his wages . . . before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you.

Deuteronomy 16:¹⁹ "You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe. . . ²⁰ "Justice, *and only* justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

So reads the law of the Old Testament. The prophets also lend their voices as we hear in the first lesson read and in Isaiah. Isaiah 1:¹⁷ Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.

Why is justice so important to God? It is important because it is integral to the very character of God. It is part of God's nature. God defines justice for us. Because God

elected Israel as God's people, God demanded that the people reflect God's character, that they be a people of justice.

Consequently, debts were forgiven every seventh year. Property was to be returned to the original owners in the Jubilee year, To do justice was to see to the rights of the widow, the orphan, the poor, the alien in the land. Godly justice required a special concern for the powerless.

In classic Lutheran understanding the law serves two purposes. First, the law provides for civil order. An orderly life is necessary for there to be justice. Secondly, the law serves a spiritual purpose. It convicts us of our sin. As we are convicted by the law, this drives us to the cross of Christ. There we listen as Jesus forgives those who placed him on the cross. There we seek that same forgiveness for our sins – against God, against our family, against our neighbor, against the widow, orphan, the poor and the alien.

In our daily to day lives, we participate and support both justice and injustice. When we participate in systems that create a more just society, we are "doing justice." When we participate in systems that create a less just society, we are "doing injustice." As an example, many of us have applied for and received a home loan. It has been amply illustrated that there is "white privilege." It is easier for Caucasians to receive home loans than African Americans or Native Americans. Historically it has been easier for males to receive home loans than females. The system created favors those who created it. We can call it human nature. But it is not godly nature.

The prophets Amos and Micah remind us of God's justice. "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," declares Amos on behalf of God (5:24). And Micah reminds us, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

Justice; God's justice is part of the very character of God. This profound justice of God reaches down to us in Jesus Christ, who not only forgives our sins but also redeems us, makes us new, gives us new standing before God. We are declared and made whole before God; the very state of righteousness. So in Jesus Christ It is by the forgiveness of sins that God establishes righteousness, and this is the supreme task of justice. Thus it is that God is at the same time "just, and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

So the Apostle Paul can proclaim, ² *Corinthians* 5: **17** Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he or she* is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. **18** Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

God's justice. We are recipients. God's justice. Our vision.