

Message: PUT ON JUSTICE

May God's Grace and peace be with you this day!

Advent is a time of reflection, repentance, preparation, and waiting for the coming of Christ. It is no accident that in a season of increasing darkness, we progressively add light to mark the Advent journey, drawing closer to the celebration of when the Word of life and the light came for all people, putting on flesh, and made his home among us. Each Sunday of Advent we have a core word upon which to reflect and embody (put on). Last week we started with Peace. In the coming weeks we will consider Fearlessness and Faithfulness. Today, let us 'put on Justice'.

Thinking on the word, JUSTICE, for just a moment, I remember the third of my brothers (fourth child overall) always saying something like, 'It's not fair! They get to do xxx, but I can't!'

Justice has come to mean fairness; it also gets used a lot when seeking consequences for breaking a law or offending someone.

A quick check of a dictionary resource will yield 5 or 6 meanings similar to: quality of fairness; a principle of moral rightness, equity; upholding fair treatment and due reward in accordance with honor, standards or law; a judge. The root of the word, just <Latin: iustus; iustia>, also anchors word variants like justify and justification.

When you hear the word justice, what image comes to mind? Perhaps it is an image of scales in balance, perhaps a judge or a gavel.

Our scriptures today provide striking language and imagery signaling change and ultimately hope in God's promise, purpose and will.

A stump sprouting... new life rising out of ruin & death... a powerful image for the people to whom Isaiah speaks... something out of nothing. There will be one who comes and will be full of the spirit... anointed, and will bring JUSTICE for the people... fairness, righteousness, and equity for those in need and who suffer. And the world will be very different... a new order will be established... a place where all are able to be at peace, restored, and reconciled, so that even ancient foes can co-habitate... wolf-lamb, calf-lion, perhaps even republicans & democrats?

In last week's vision, Isaiah spoke of God serving God's people, settling disputes among the nations, and transforms their ways from war to plentitude, ('swords into plows & spears into pruning tools' v4). God's people will learn the ways of God... and we will walk in God's paths. Today we hear that one will come to lead... a little child.

In the gospel text, Matthew establishes that John is the prophet fulfilling the Isaiah 40 prophecy, a forerunner of the promised one, called to prepare the way. John confronts the leaders of his day and challenges the privileged positions they hide behind. John urges the Pharisees & Sadducees to examine their hearts, stating that God can raise up children of Abraham from ordinary stones ... that is from you and me.

For example... consider Saul, chief persecutor of Jesus followers, on the road to Damascus... confronted by The Voice... what justice did he deserve? What did he get... a new mission, a new life... There is a song to share, A Place at the Table, by Shirley Erena Murray, #3149 in Worship & Song.

So in reflection, the question we must ask are this: Where do people not have a place at the table? Clean water or bread? Shelter, safe space, a fair system?

There are many of us in this sanctuary today who have benefitted from acts of justice, changes that were hard, but necessary... for example, I was one who had to practice at 6 am because the gym was not available to the girls teams after school.

Where do people not have a place at the table? In God's kin-dom, all are welcome. Let us put on eyes for injustice and commit to 'do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, at all the times we can, to all the people we can, as long as ever we can' (as my bff, John Wesley, would say to us).

Let us prepare and cultivate a heart for God. Let us put on Peace. Let us be a source for justice and joy. May it be so! Amen. Amen.