

Sermon: Luke 4:16-21
"BE Just!"

© Kate Heichler; Preached at Christ Church Wayside/La Plata
Pentecost 17, Year C; Sunday, October 2, 2022

Come, Holy Spirit – take these words and make them your Word, your word of life for your people. Amen.

Today we launch a worship series designed by our bishop, along with other dioceses and United Methodist Churches – the BE Campaign. In the five Sundays leading up to Election Day, we will focus on what it means to BE Just, Be Kind, Be Humble; to love our neighbors and to do all of this at the intersection of religion and politics.

Our bishop has written: *In our time of political polarization and rising societal anger, we long for another way to relate to one another. Out of that holy longing, we invite you to join a national movement called the BE Campaign to help make our communities a bit more like the Kingdom of God.*

We are dedicating these five weeks to the simple, yet profound teaching of the prophet Micah who, in a time not unlike our own in 700 BCE, asked the question: "What does the Lord require of us?" His answer: "Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God."

We believe that we can love our neighbors and recover and reclaim these three essential practices. In this series, members of our congregations will be invited to reflect on five spiritual themes and to share them with their communities.

So we start with BE Just. What does it mean to be just? To "do justice? It means caring about justice for all – for all – more than we care for ourselves. It means we think all the time of how our actions, or those of our culture, impact others. That requires retraining our brains, but we can become justice-focused. And often when we do that, we start to see injustice everywhere. That is painful – so often we turn those receptors down or off. I confess I do that – I see injustice, I wince or bristle, maybe fire off a post, mostly feel powerless, maybe guilty, and shut it down, going on with my many tasks. My many tasks are for the most part good and upbuilding of the church. I'm not sure I can say they put being just front and center.

Yet we are called to be active in God's mission, and God's mission always includes justice. That's not an add-on, a nice-to-have.

Being involved in the work of justice is stressful, painful, sometimes dangerous;
It certainly was dangerous for John the Baptist, for Jesus, for Gandhi,
for Martin Luther King, Jr. to name some obvious folks.
We go two steps forward and one step back. It often feels like an uphill battle.

Being active in God's mission is not meant to be frustrating.
If there's more fatigue and frustration than joy and energy, that may just be a sign
that we're trying to do it on our own steam, our own strength.
God's justice is just that: God's. We are to work for justice – but not alone.
We are to work with God for justice, and that means the outcome is already set. The
more we work, the sooner we get to see it, but God has declared
that the day of justice will come, and all that is wrong will be made right,
and all that has been taken will be restored,
and all who have been hurt and killed and stolen from will be made whole.
That outcome is already accomplished in God's sight;
we just help the world live into that future God has already achieved in Christ.

We work for justice with God, not for God, with the Spirit, not on our own.
John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit – from before birth.
John's commitment to justice ultimately got him killed,
but his energy to proclaim the coming of God's Messiah never flagged.
He pursued justice in the power of the Holy Spirit; so can we.

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit from before birth too, and that Spirit was
activated in him at his baptism. That Spirit was equipping him to do justice.
So he showed up back in his home town, went to the synagogue
and read these words from the prophet Isaiah:
*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'*

There are our marching orders: know you are filled with the Spirit and then
bring good news to the poor; proclaim release to those bound by anything –
poverty, disease, addiction, despair or actual captivity;
Proclaim healing to those who cannot see;
set free those who are oppressed by anything and anyone.
Whatever we do in those areas is participating with God in doing justice.

So...do we “do justice” or “be just?” I’m grateful for this word “Be.”
Micah said to do, love and walk, all action verbs, all “doing” words.
But we will not get very far “doing” justice if we don’t know how to Be.
We are human beings, not human doings – though lately I have felt like the latter.
When I keep muttering to myself, “You are not a machine,” I know I’m off track.

Doing justice with God starts from a place of being.
Who are we? More important, whose are we?
If our work for justice does not begin from our awareness of our status as beloved
children of the God who is love, we will soon grow frustrated and depleted.
When we are grounded in love, in those spiritual practices that keep us aware,
we know it’s not our work and that we cannot control the outcome.
We can only do the next thing, and the next thing, and the next thing,
and invite others to do the next thing with us, and lo and behold, we look up
and see we’ve moved a distance closer to justice. Or we’ve won it for one person.

So we invite the Spirit to fill us, and become aware of when we’re filled.
We cultivate those practices that keep us grounded in the love of God
and our belovedness – and that of everyone else, no matter how unlovable.
We do the next thing when confronted with injustice, joining with others.
And lastly, we tell the stories to build the faith of others, so they too may be just.

What stories of justice achieved draw you forward? Tell them!
Maybe you’ve marched for change, helped push for legislation to be passed.
Maybe you’ve started initiatives that made space for justice to be done.
I’ve often organized prayer vigils and events that got people together
to protest injustice or push for change; small effort but a catalyst.
What injustice do you wish you could set right?
Maybe there are others here who share that passion.
What stirrings of the Spirit are driving you these days?
Through us his justice is already breaking in. Are you ready? *Amen*

Luke 4:16-21

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’