Sermon – Justice
Sunday October 31, 2021

Have you ever noticed you don't need to teach kids about fairness? They just know when things are fair and not fair.

Just imagine - a girl has been waiting in line for an hour to get on a ride. She looks ahead and sees a boy cutting the line. Now even though that boy didn't have to wait, he's going to get on the ride before her.

What do you think that girl is thinking?

"That's not fair!"

- One kid starts the fight but the other kid gets punished. That's not fair!
- One kid does their homework but the whole class gets a reward. That's not fair!
- One kid always does their chores when their sibling gets away with doing nothing. That's not fair!
- One kid saves up their own money to buy things while other kids get things handed to them. That's not fair.

Have you noticed that we all have a sense of what's fair and not fair? A sense of justice comes with being human.

Last summer, I was biking with my two girls in our neighbourhood. They were riding ahead of me so that I could keep an eye on them. We were riding on the sidewalk when it got to where the road began. Both my girls stopped and looked both ways.

But all of a sudden, just as they were about to ride - a car comes flying down the street. It runs through the stop sign and makes a sudden right missing my girls by inches.

Did I mention that the driver was texting?

I was livid! My blood was boiling! I just saw my girls just narrowly avoid getting hit by a car!

So what did I do? I prayed for that driver and asked God to pour out his blessing on him.

Just kidding. I didn't do that. So what did I do?

Now I'm not saying that I did the right thing. Maybe I did. But whether it's right or wrong, I can only tell you what I did. Because in that moment after seeing my girls just miss getting hit by a dangerous driver, I decided I needed to have a talk with him. So I got on my bike and rode after him.

Thankfully, the light ahead had just turned red. So the car was stopped at the intersection. I rode up beside the car, knocked on his window and asked him to roll it down.

When he eventually opened it, I explained how he had run a stop sign and just missed hitting two girls.

Any guesses how he responded? You'd think maybe he would apologize, right? My bad, so sorry about that. You'd think maybe he'd ask if the girls were okay.

But do you know what he did? He gave me the finger. Then he swore at me! Then he ran the red light and avoided the oncoming car. Then he made a U-turn and started driving away from me!

So as a righteousness man of God and the pastor you all love and admire, what did I do? I rode after him! Someone has to tell him about God's love! I chased him for a few blocks, but he eventually got away.

What made it worse was that I was kicking myself afterwards. Because if I had taken a picture of his license plate, I could have reported him. There could have been some justice. But instead he got away.

Have you ever felt like justice got away from you?

- Maybe you were harassed because of the colour of your skin.
- Maybe you experienced discrimination because of your gender.
- Maybe you were bullied and abused.
- Maybe the person got away with it.
- Maybe the people who were supposed to protect you didn't do their job.
- Instead, the person got off and you were left dealing with the pain.

What are you thinking when these things happen to you?

That's not fair!

You and I have a deep longing for justice. We know that things just aren't right in the world.

So many things are wrong with it. Ways that we've been wronged. Ways that we've wronged others. And the thought constantly gnaws at us. The world just isn't right. Something needs to be done. But what?

What do we do about:

- Innocent people who get convicted.
- Bullies who bribe their way out of trouble.
- Perpetrators who hurt people and get away with it.
- Victims who don't get compensated and spend the rest of their lives dealing with the fallout.

What do we do about:

- Hunger and food insecurity
- Human trafficking
- Economic inequality
- Racial injustice like the horrors that took place in residential schools

Why is it that we can fix so many problems in the world but we can't fix injustice?

- We can make self-driving cars.
- We can cure polio.
- We can send William Shatner to space.

We can do all these things but we can't fix injustice - no matter how hard we try. In fact, sometimes we seem to create more problems.

Why is that? Will things ever be put right? Will we ever get justice? And if so how?

We're wrapping up our series called *Signposts of Hope in a Suffering World*.

In this series, we're looking at seven themes in the gospel of John that serve as signposts. Today, we're looking at the final signpost - Justice.

- This signpost points to our deepest longings for justice and for the wrongs in this world to be made right.
- This signpost points to the fact that so much injustice exists in our world. People are hurting, problems seem so big and it's just not fair.
- But this signpost also points to hope. Because God is at work in Jesus to establish justice and to set things right.

Because there is a God. And he cares so much about the world. He made us and the world for a purpose. And that purpose involves justice. Even though we experience injustice now, God is working to set everything right - including us.

Now when we think about God's attributes, what attribute do we tend to think of first? His love. After all, God is a God of love. The most famous verse in the Bible is probably John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

God's love draws so many people to him. Because even when you're lonely, disappointed and hurting, you can know that God loves you. Even when you've messed up and missed the mark, it doesn't change how God feels about you. God's love is unconditional and everlasting!

But sometimes we're so focused on this, we don't realize that right after John 3:16 is a passage about another one of God's attributes. His justice.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (John 3:19-21)

God is a God of love. But he's also a God of justice. His justice is a manifestation of his love because it's his love that establishes justice.

In the Bible, God is described as judge over the world. He created the world and established justice. He is the source of justice because justice is his very character.

The Bible often mentions justice as one of his core attributes.

For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. (Isaiah 61:8)

I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight… (Jeremiah 9:24)

The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad… righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. (Psalm 97:1-2)

God is a God of justice.

So what is justice? In the Bible, justice means to "make right." Jjustice is about relationships. It's when we're living in right relationship with God, with each another and with creation. Justice is about right relationships.

Justice is also a calling. Because God is a God of justice, you and I are called to do justice. One of the most well-known passages about this is found in the book of Micah.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

The gospel of John reveals a God who cares deeply about justice. Jesus was always on the side of the oppressed. He was always standing up against the religious institution. He was always protecting the poor, the marginalized and sinners.

In John's gospel we see a God who is passionate about the whole world being made right. A God who won't let injustice have the last word.

Next week, we're beginning an exciting new series on justice called *Justice in Jesus*. We'll be learning what justice is and how to live it out. We'll be exploring the question, What does it look like to see the world through a lens of justice?

- Bethany Nolson, who's our amazing Outreach Director will be kicking off this series.
- We're going to hear from a guest speaker
- And you'll learn about opportunities to get involved with justice both locally and globally.

It's going to be an amazing series!

But today, what I want to do is talk about justice in the gospel of John. We're going to look at:

1. The problem of injustice
2. God's plan to confront it
3. Jesus' invitation to be his "Justice-Bringers"

First, **The problem of injustice**.

In the 1960s, a writer by the name of Gene Roddenberry created a science fiction series that boldly went where no series had gone before. Anyone know the name of that series? Star Trek. I know there are a lot of Star Trek fans both here and online. I'm a big trekkie myself.

Roddenberry had a vision for the future. He believed that technological advancements would eradicate hunger, greed and ultimately injustice.

Sixty years later, we live in the most technologically advanced age in history. But when you look around, has technology fixed the problem of injustice? It's improved the standard of living for many people but it hasn't fixed injustice. In many ways it's created more of it.

Because when you look around, we have more technology, education and resources than in any other time in history. We can fix so many problems. So why can't we fix injustice?

To answer that, we need to go back to Genesis 1. God made a good world and everything was in right relationship with each other.

- We were designed to take care of the planet. And in turn, the planet would take care of us
- We were designed to serve and take care of each other. And in turn, we would live in loving community.
- We were designed to trust and obey God. And in turn, he would give us everything we need to thrive and live out our calling.

So what happened? The serpent in the garden tempted Adam and Eve. He convinced them that God couldn't be trusted. That if they wanted the good life, they would have to take matters into their own hands. And so they did. They disobeyed God and rebelled against him. There's a term for this. The Bible calls it sin.

You and I do the same thing whenever we want to be in charge. When we live our lives as if we're the centre. When we use people and the planet for our purpose and or pleasure with no concern for others.

The Bible calls this sin and it warps our relationship to everything on the planet to serve our needs. This is what creates injustice.

Pastor James Choung says:

"…we all lie, steal, cheat, spin, gossip and manipulate so we can have our own way. Some of us go further and hit, abuse, rape, punch, shoot or kill. My life naturally revolves around me, warping the way it's supposed to be – which is about loving others."

He goes on to say, "To maintain my lifestyle, I'm part of a system that drains the planet of her oil, clears her forests for large houses and reams of paper, fills her air will pollutants to commute and drenches her fields with chemicals so we can have choice produce. I don't like to think about it, but I benefit and contribute to these practices every time I flip on a light switch, drive my car, shop at my supermarket or have my trash picked up. I'm part of a system that damages the planet."

There are so many people who do good work to address the problems of injustice. They

- They take care of the poor
- Advocate for the oppressed
- Lobby for just laws

This work is deeply needed and we should take action.

But to ultimately fix the problems of injustice is impossible for us to do. Why? Because we're part of the problem. There are larger forces working in our lives, in our culture and in our institutions.

The problems of injustice are imbedded in:

- our attitudes
- our thinking
- our economic system
- our educational system
- our governments

In John chapter 12, Jesus says.

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. (John 12:31)

Jesus here is calling out the prince of this world. The prince of this world, Satan is the dark force that stands behind all the injustice and wickedness in the world. He works with his agents against creation and God's purposes.

How does he do that? He does it through sin. Through the sin in our hearts, our relationships and our systems and institutions.

Why can't we fix injustice? Because we're part of the problem. As long as there's sin, we'll bring it into whatever we do. That's why we often create more problems and injustice even though our intentions may be good.

Think about:

- The Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition
- The bombing of abortion clinics
- Revolutions where one self-serving leader is replaced with another one

These forces that stand behind injustice are too strong to overcome. So how do we defeat them? We can't. But in Jesus, we see **God's plan to confront injustice**.

Matthew and Luke's gospels begin with the birth of Jesus. Mark's gospel begins with his baptism. How does John's gospel begin?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

The book of John begins with the words: *in the beginning*. Does that remind you of anything? It should because it's an echo of Genesis 1.

John is bringing us back to the story of Creation. When a good God created a good world before sin damaged it.

John wants us to know that injustice doesn't have the last word. Because God has a plan to set things right.

The book of John is about God inaugurating a new creation.

So in John chapter 1, Jesus comes onto the scene. He's the living revelation of God and he declares that God's future is here. He will defeat the dark forces behind injustice and will once again sit on his throne.

How does he do that?

- Does he raise up a military force?
- Does he start a social media campaign?

No, he takes on God's judgment by dying on the cross. That's how he defeats injustice.

Jesus said, **And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (John 12:32)**

Because of the cross, the image of God is restored in us. The power of sin is broken. You and I are now free to love God and love each other. We can once again take care of the planet and be God's representatives in this world.

Justice is possible because Jesus experienced injustice himself. The only person who ever lived a sinless life died the most brutal and unfair death.

But John wants us to know that not only was his death unjust, his trial was the biggest miscarriage of justice. Why?

- Because it takes place in the middle of the night even though Jewish law states that trials could only occur during the day.
- The Sanhedrin was supposed to be an impartial council but instead was the one that brought charges against Jesus.
- The Sanhedrin could also carry out an execution sentence only if they had a unanimous vote. But they never voted because we know that some members of the Sanhedrin, like Nicodemus voiced their objections.
- The accounts of the witnesses were inconsistent.
- Jesus wasn't given an opportunity to bring his own witnesses.
- Pilate himself even declares Jesus' innocence twice.

So why does John go through all this effort to show us this? It's because he wants us to know that Jesus was the victim of the greatest injustice ever. Why is this significant?

Pastor J.D. Grear says, **"In his trial, Jesus was identifying with every one of us who has ever had to undergo injustice—everyone who has ever been betrayed, overlooked, abused, or mistreated. He didn't just want to die for us. He wanted to walk through the broken experience of injustice so he could say to us, "I know what you are going through, because I've been there."**

Tim Keller tells a story about an African American writer who was disillusioned by the injustice she had suffered as a black woman. She was taking a graduate course in Christianity when one day it hit her. She suddenly realized that Jesus didn't just suffer for us, he suffered with us. And in that moment, she realizes that Jesus had been lynched.

Because Jesus suffered injustice, we can know that he understands what it feels like to be a victim of injustice.

This can be a huge source of comfort for us.

- Maybe you're discouraged because of the discrimination you face.
- Maybe you're the victim of the inequity of a broken system.
- Maybe you're tired of seeing bullies get away with no consequences.
- Maybe you're angry over all the suffering and injustice in the world.

Whenever you feel that way, you can know that you're not alone. Jesus understands. Because he was the victim of the greatest injustice that ever happened. So he knows the agony. He knows the pain.

But he also knows that by taking on this injustice, he inaugurates God's new creation and sets in motion God's mission to put the world right.

How does this mission get carried out? Through us.

Jesus calls his people – you and me to be his "Justice-Bringers."

In John 16, Jesus tells his disciples that he will send his Holy Spirit to empower and equip them. His spirit will give them everything they need to do this work.

In John 20, Jesus commissions them into the world to be his agents of justice.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. (John 20:21)

- God sends us to witness his kingdom life in the world.
- God sends us to protect the world we're called to be stewards of.
- God send us to care for widows, orphans and the poor.
- God sends us to confront injustice wherever we see it.
- God sends us to give hope to the world by declaring through word and deed that:
    - love has conquered death,
    - good has conquered evil
    - and a new kind of justice is being born.

You and I - God's people, the church are God's agents of justice. We're on a mission to set the world right.

We're God's Justice-Bringers. Turn to your neighbour and say, Just Bring it! If you're watching online, type that into the chat.

Now Christians haven't been perfect. We've made a lot of mistakes.

But Jesus-followers have also been bringing it for two thousand years.

- The early Christians brought it when they saved abandoned infants from death and cared for the sick during the plagues.
- William Wilberforce brought it when he fought to abolish the slave trade in Great Britain.
- Martin Luther King Jr. brought it when he led the civil rights movement.
- The Women's Suffrage movement brought it when they advocated for equal rights for women, (including the right to vote).

- Bishop Desmond Tutu brought it when he encouraged non-violence and reconciliation and helped to end apartheid in South Africa.

When you look around and see all that's not right in the world, when you see the suffering, when you see the injustice, how will you bring it?

- Will you support our Cornerstone Food Pantry to provide food to families in need?
- Will you support our efforts to help victims of human trafficking?
- Will you support other community agencies that are doing great justice work?
- Will you pray and ask God what he wants you to do about a passion he's given you and a cause he wants you to fight for?

It's easy to get discouraged when the problems are so big. Maybe you're a victim of injustice yourself. Maybe you've been abused, violated or betrayed.

How can you find the strength to "bring it" even when you're discouraged?

You look to the cross.

Because the cross is where injustice did its very worst. It's where Jesus suffered the ultimate injustice. He who deserved vindication got condemnation. Why? So that you and I who deserve condemnation could get vindication.

But God raised Jesus to life. And when he did that, injustice was defeated and robbed of its power.

You and I are agents of God's justice. Jesus sends us into our neighbourhoods, our schools, our workplaces, our community and our world to set things right.

So in the words of theologian Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Just Bring it!