

Sermon Lenten Midweek 5 2008
Text: 2 Cor. 5:17-21
Theme: Justice and Mercy

2 Cor. 5:17-21 (ESV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. [18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Justice is an important concept to us but it is also difficult because we equate justice with legality. We are often concerned with what we are legally owed whether that be money, respect or privilege. If you threw out all the disputes in civil court over what someone thinks that someone else owes them, a whole bunch of lawyers and judges would be in the unemployment line. Our courts are eaten up with people trying to get what they feel is legally owed them.

But God has a different view of justice. For us, justice becomes legality when it is rooted in legal codes and human moral ideals. That's the reason for all the court activity, human

codes and ideals are always up for interpretation. For God, however, justice is rooted in mercy. Whatever he says, whatever he decides whether or not it seems reasonable to us is justice because it is merciful. There is no interpretation, just God's Word as he declares it. That can be frightening to us because we are so used to our system of being able to argue and have appeals.

I have noticed that many parents spend a great deal of time arguing with their kids. They argue and argue and then get frustrated and angry when the kid wears them down and wins. Duh. They are faster than us! They move faster and they think faster and if kids can get parents to buy in to the argument model, the legal system full of loopholes and exceptions, they win. If however, the parents understand that justice is not arguable or appealable, things go much smoother.

Parents mirror God in their parenting. Now, there is no doubt that we live in a sinful world and some parents do better at this than others. Some parents are better reflections of God and others are poorer reflections of God but all parenting is some kind

of reflection of God. So, if a parent is a better reflection of God, he understands that his job is to hand down justice and justice is not an amalgamation of compromises so that everyone gets something he wants. Justice is what is best for the child. Justice may be uncomfortable. Justice may be difficult but justice is always right.

Justice is right because justice flows from mercy. Mercy is the foundational element in our relationship with God. Because of God's mercy he sent Jesus, who had no sin, to be sin for us. Sin had to be paid off and only the life and soul of God was enough to pay for all the sin of the world. That which seems unjust to our reason became justice because of God's mercy.

Similarly, in our lives with our children, our families, our friends and our co-workers, mercy defines justice. Our first thought is what is best for this person? We do not live according to the old maxim, an eye for an eye. We do not seek to hurt you as bad as you hurt me. Nor do we seek to make you pay for hurting me. We seek, according to mercy, what will be best for

our brother or sister. That does not mean that justice is painless because sometimes suffering consequences for our choices helps us to grow. For instance, if someone steals, justice would not be to ignore the offense. That would be cruel to allow our brother to live in such sin. The just thing to do would be to try to find the consequence that would best help him to learn that it is harmful to steal. It would be patently unjust to do otherwise because justice is always driven by mercy...or it's not justice.

God defines justice by mercy and nothing else is justice. Sadly, we don't have a justice system in this country. We have a legal system that occasionally acts justly, almost by accident. Don't let the legal system confuse you in your life. It is not "an eye for an eye." It is not "punish someone with pain for doing anything that causes you pain." It is not "get even." It is be merciful...as merciful as God has been to you...and allow that mercy to empower you to act justly. AMEN.