

THE MESSAGE for Nov 7, 2010

Micah 6:8 & 2 Corinthians 8:7-9

All Saints Sunday

Do Justice

The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller

Question: “What is God’s will for my life?” Have you ever asked that question? “What is God’s will for my life?” I have many times. And I know many of you have too. I’ve discussed that question with many of you.

Usually, that question means people have something specific they are considering – a tough decision, a new opportunity, or challenge that’s knocking down their door. This decision may not be so much between right and wrong as it is that people want to honor God and tap into a source of wisdom far beyond their own.

I enjoy helping people discern God’s will for their lives. Sometimes the answer is crystal clear – other times, not so clear. Since we are human we probably all struggle to discern God’s will for our lives. I’m convinced that God put us here for a reason at this time in this place. What *is* God’s will for our lives?

Today we’re starting a new worship series entitled “thy will be done,” but we won’t be talking about how to discern God’s specific will for our lives. We’ll be learning and applying God’s will that has already been revealed and given to all of us in the Bible.

Listen to these words from Saint Paul in Romans 12:

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not be conformed to the ways of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. So that you may discern the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).

Discerning God’s will is an ongoing thing according to Paul. And the Bible can help us in that discernment process. There are a lot of places in the Bible where God’s will is clearly spelled out for all of us, together. Here are a few of them:

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 16:18).

Or this one...

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among people: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by God to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people (1 Peter 2:13-16).

Or this one...

This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day (John 6:40).

Or this one...

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34).

These Bible verses and many, many others reveal God's will for us and all people. In this series we are going to focus on a verse from Micah in the Old Testament which reads (*on the screen*):

God 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).

There it is. That's God's will for our lives and it incorporates all the other Bible verses that talk about God's will for our lives. Listen to it again:

God 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).

When we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "thy will be done," we are talking about doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. So today we begin with justice. What does it mean for us, as disciples of Jesus, to do justice?

From a worldly point of view the idea of justice tends to mean "that people get what they deserve," right? Especially when something bad happens, the guilty party is identified and appropriately punished. "Yeah! Justice served!"

That's what our criminal justice system is based on. But it really doesn't seek justice. It seeks who can make the best argument to win their case. That's what we see in the movies and on TV.

We tend to like the kind of justice where people get what they deserve. It's been driven into our psyche for so long. And, as we've been taught, if the criminal justice system doesn't punish the guilty party then somebody else has to. This type of justice is called "retribution." Now I'm not here to argue whether it's right or wrong. I am here to tell you, that it is not the kind of justice God is calling us to participate in.

God's definition of justice is not "that people get what they deserve." God's definition of justice is people getting what they need to be whole in body, mind, and spirit. God does not turn a blind eye to sin, but God is more interested in restoration than retribution.

When God requires that we “do justice,” God is calling us to advocate and provide for the powerless, the voiceless, the impoverished, and the oppressed in the world. It’s about our relationship with others. The Bible reveals this theme of restoration over and over again and again.

Jesus is our model. When Jesus began his public ministry, he described his calling by quoted these words from Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me and sent me to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of despair (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Jesus came to bring God’s justice of restoration. He did not come to give people what they deserve, but to provide people what they need – wholeness. Those of us who claim to follow Jesus are called to live by that kind of justice.

When I think of justice according to Jesus, it’s really strange because it looks like this:

Jesus said, ‘You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:38-45a).

For Jesus it’s all about restoration and our relationships with each other -- living lives of wholeness and holiness.

Sadly, we live in a world of broken relationships, a world filled with injustice and inequity, a world crying out for God’s justice of restoration and wholeness. It doesn’t take much to see that we live in a world of disparities, socially and economically.

Consider these sobering statistics: 17% of the world’s population consumes 80% of the world’s resources, leaving almost 5 billion people to live on the remaining 20% of the world’s resources. As a result, billions of people in the world right now are living without the basic necessities of life - food, water, housing, and sanitation.

Consider this: 20% of the world population (1.2 billion people) lives on less than \$1 a day, another 30% (1.8 billion people) lives on less than \$2 a day. Combined that means half of the population is living on less than \$2 a day

800 million people will go to bed hungry tonight. And 30,000 people will die today from hunger or a preventable disease. WOW!

I am not telling you these things to make you feel guilty. That is not my intent. I am telling you these things to point out the reality of the world in which we live right now.

On the flip side, we have increasing accumulation of wealth and power going on, where the world's 500 or so billionaires have assets of 1.9 trillion dollars, a sum greater than the income of the poorest 170 countries in the world. WOW!

(From www.worldcentric.org/conscious-living/social-and-economic-injusticearely)

I don't know about you but I can barely comprehend these staggering statistics and they make me very uncomfortable. Here are a few more to consider, these are the annual global spending priorities:

- Cosmetics in the U.S. – \$8 billion
- Ice cream in Europe – \$11 billion
- Pet foods in the U.S. and Europe – \$17 billion
- Business entertainment in Japan – \$35 billion
- Military spending throughout the world – \$780 billion

God's call for justice continues and that call goes out to you and to me, as disciples of Jesus. Thankfully our Lutheran Church takes God's call for justice very seriously. Here's how justice is defined on the ELCA website:

“Justice is not the same as charity, or financial or material gifts which seek to respond immediately to human need. Justice seeks to change unfair systems and structures in the world so that acts of charity are no longer necessary. Our faith gives us hope that another world is possible. We are called to build the Kingdom of God on earth and speak out against systems that trap people in poverty. Working for justice is the only way to make poverty history.”

That is the kind of church I want to support and be part of, a church that takes seriously God's call to manifest the Kingdom of God right here, right now, working for justice. That's the kind of church the Bible calls us to support and be a part of too.

Our reading from 2 Corinthians is ultimately a call to do justice by sharing with others to change the world. Paul calls upon the wealthy Christians in Corinth to share generously. Listen to our reading (*Read text 2 Corinthians 8:7-9*).

Paul is teaching the Christians in Corinth to exercise wise stewardship of their resources as servant of God who work for justice, motivated by genuine love, to be a blessing to others. That's true of our stewardship today. We are called to exercise our

faith working for justice, being good stewards of the resources God has given us, motivated by genuine love to be a blessing to others.

How might we use what God has given us to further not our agenda but God's agenda of justice in the world?

That's a question I invite you to consider as we enter into the holiday season. How might we express thanks to God by giving to others?

We are certainly blessed by God – look around. How might we be a blessing to others? How might we celebrate the birth of Jesus this year – seeing him as the one to bring God's justice of restoration into the world?

Which brings us back to our original question - What is God's will for our lives?

According to the Bible, it's to live in such a way that God's justice of restoration prevails, that all people get not what they deserve, but what they need to be whole in body, mind, and spirit.

What is God's will for your life? You already know it. Let's go live it! Amen.