

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Isaiah 42:1-9
Sunday, January 8, 2017

The Servant will bring justice

1. The want of justice is probably one of the strongest desires we have as humans. We don't all agree on what exactly is just, but most people want things to be just. We want to see criminals pay, those who hurt animals and children suffer, and those who take advantage of the poor to find themselves falling on hard times. We want justice.
2. This central desire for justice is what drives the love that our culture has for superheroes. Whether it is Superman and Captain America with their "God and country" morally upright brand of justice; or Batman and his vigilante, take no prisoners justice, there is something satisfying about seeing the bad guys pay. And there is something extremely dissatisfying with the thought that the bad guys get away with their crimes.
3. In recent years we have heard much of social justice. I don't like to get political from the pulpit so I am not going to spend time going through the ins and outs of the social justice movement. However, there are many within the Church who have tried to make Jesus into some sort of social justice warrior. By appealing to the love of Jesus, his miracles and teachings about the poor, and the talk of justice in the bible, it seems easy to co-opt Jesus as being all about social justice.
4. In the OT, there are numerous prophecies about the coming Messiah, which we know was Jesus. One of the key concepts of what the Messiah would do is bring justice. The heading for Isaiah 42:1-9 is "The Lord's Chosen Servant." In the first four verses, it is mentioned three times that the Messiah, the Lord's Chosen Servant, will bring justice. He will bring justice to the nations, he will bring forth justice, and he will bring justice to the earth. Clearly justice is a concern for God and his Chosen Servant.
5. The question is, what does this justice look like? Is it about income equality? Is it about income redistribution? Is it about gender issues?
6. The justice of God is about moral uprightness. It is about obedience to the commands of God. As the ESV Study Bible commentary says, "Biblical justice creates the perfect human society." A just society is one where the people deal with one another in godly ways, and where the people serve the one and only true God.
7. Two important aspects of justice are viewing God properly, and viewing others properly. To be people of justice, we need to understand that God is the perfect creator of the universe and his commands are imperatives for us. To love and serve him is to obey his commands.
8. Second, we need to see others as being made in the image of God. When we take the time to see others as being made in God's image, we assign them dignity. Would we let God starve? Would we abuse God? Would we steal from God?
 - a. Remember when Jesus said that feeding the hungry is feeding him. Clothing the naked is clothing him. Visiting the prisoners is visiting him.

The Servant takes God's just wrath

1. Here's the thing about justice: humans have failed at being just since we were created. We are not inherently just people. We lie, cheat, and steal. We hurt one another. We feel justified in taking from others to provide for ourselves. We do this on the individual and national levels.

- a. Whether it is stealing from faceless corporations and cheating on our taxes, or whether it is a country invading another country for their land or resources, we tend to deal more justly for ourselves than we do for others.
2. So what does it mean that God's Chosen Servant will bring justice to the nations and to the earth? It means that he will come and reorganize our thoughts, hearts, and spirits so that we seek justice for others. This is something that happens in stages.
3. The first stage was the Incarnation and ministry of Jesus. This is where he modeled true justice- a true attitude of living rightly with and before God, and in relationship to God's people. We can look to Jesus' life and teachings to see what living justly looks like.
4. The second stage was in the crucifixion and resurrection. It is here that Jesus paid the cost for our sins, answering God's call of justice on sinners. God's justice demands adequate punishment for sin. Without an atoning sacrifice, God's justice would require us to pay for our own sins, and we would be without hope. But God's Chosen Servant came and satisfied his claims of justice by dying in our place.
 - a. Being a Christian isn't about getting away with sin. It is about God pouring his justice out on one who stood in our place. Because of this, we are cleansed by Jesus and reborn through the waters of baptism as new creations filled with the Holy Spirit and enabled to begin to live according to God's justice.
5. The final stage will be when God's Chosen Servant returns and establishes the new heavens and the new earth. This is about so much more than a political kind of social justice. This is about God establishing his final and eternal kingdom where we finally live as the kind of people he has always desired us to be. We will live as his loving sons and daughters. In that day, we will go from being people on a path towards justice to living in a kingdom of justice and peace where we will delight in obeying God and in treating one another with the dignity befitting those created in God's image.