

Isaiah 42 (NIV)

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will bring **justice** to the nations.

<sup>2</sup>He will not shout or cry out,  
or raise his voice in the streets.

<sup>3</sup>A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In **faithfulness** he will bring forth **justice**;

<sup>4</sup>he will not falter or be discouraged  
till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

<sup>5</sup>This is what God the LORD says—

the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out,  
who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it,  
who gives breath to its people,  
and life to those who walk on it:

<sup>6</sup>“I, the LORD, have called you in **righteousness**;

I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,

<sup>7</sup>to open eyes that are blind,

to free captives from prison

and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Zechariah 7:8-10

<sup>8</sup>And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: <sup>9</sup>“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. <sup>10</sup>Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’

Luke 4:16-20

<sup>16</sup>He/Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll

of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

<sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

<sup>20</sup>Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup>He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

## PRAY

Where do we get our understanding of justice? Perhaps from Perry Mason and Judge Judy. There are lots of television shows that depict legal battles played out in court. Perhaps you have had a personal experience with our judicial system. Perhaps you have been involved as a juror serving on jury duty or, as a witness? Maybe you have been involved otherwise with the judicial system. I think we can agree that while our judicial system is far from perfect, it is better than many.

Last week Pastor Amy preached from the prophet, Micah, chapter 6:6-8. Her message was a perfect segue or introduction to this series on Biblical Justice and why it matters.

In Hebrew there are three words which are essential to our understanding of biblical justice. None of them translate easily into English, but they are worth the time it requires of us to “un-pack” their meaning. They are integrally related, and I like to think of them as reflecting facets of a beautiful diamond. Each one is related to the other, and our understanding of these three contributes to our understanding of the whole.

One of them has been a thread that has run through the messages of this summer: “**hesed**”. This word is variously translated as “loving-kindness” “mercy”, “compassion”. This is a word that describes the very heart of God for us and for all God’s creation.

Lamentations 3:22-23RSV

<sup>22</sup>The ***steadfast love*** of the LORD never ceases,

his mercies never come to an end;  
<sup>23</sup>they are new every morning;  
great is thy faithfulness.

Psalms 136 has as its refrain: "God's **steadfast love** endures forever."

This word **hesed** occurs 177 times in the OT. (It is used 1 time in Isaiah 42).

The second word that is essential to our understanding of biblical justice is "**mishpat**".

In Micah 6:8 (NIV) it is translated this way:

<sup>8</sup>He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To *act justly* (or "to do justice"/**mishpat**) and to love mercy (**hesed!**)

and to walk humbly with your God.

The word "**mishpat**" occurs in its various forms more than 200 times in the OT, three times in Isaiah 42. There are various nuances of meaning.

In Micah 6:8 the emphasis of **mishpat** is an action - to act justly. When paired with **hesed**, the emphasis of "just action" which is motivated by "loving mercy"/**hesed!**

In Leviticus (24:22) it is stated that "You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the LORD your God." In this context **mishpat** means that the same "rule of law" is applied equally to all. The *emphasis is on equity*; acquitting or punishing persons based on the merits of the case, regardless of race or social status. Its basic meaning? **Mishpat is justice that treats all people equitably.**

But justice/**mishpat** means more than the just punishment of wrongdoing. **It also means giving people their rights.** For instance, Deuteronomy 18 describes how priests of the tabernacle should be supported by a certain percentage of the people's income. This support is described as "the priests' **mishpat**". In other words, this support was considered their due or their right.<sup>1</sup>

This same meaning is reflected in Proverbs (31:9) where we read, "Defend the rights of the poor and needy." *Thus, giving people their due - be that punishment, protection, or care - is the meaning of "mishpat" or justice.*

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<sup>1</sup> (p. 5, Generous Justice by Timothy Keller)

So, justice involves action, motivated by compassion/mercy/love - giving others their due/their rights, and by applying justice equitably without regard to social, racial, or other differences.

One more essential aspect of **“mishpat”** or biblical justice: it repeatedly is linked specifically to the plight of the widow, the orphans, immigrants or refugees, the homeless. In our current situation many seniors on fixed incomes, veterans, and others live from paycheck to paycheck. Many are widowed or divorced, often becoming single parents.

Now due to Covid19 and the loss of jobs, many more will become homeless. Today as well as in ancient times, these are and were vulnerable and often without protection, power, or influence. We have also seen how the impact of CoVid19 has highlighted other inequities in our own communities, such as access to affordable health care, and many students lacking access to technology/internet for remote learning.

Zechariah 7:9-10

<sup>8</sup>And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: <sup>9</sup>“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. <sup>10</sup>Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’

Psalms 146:7-9

<sup>7</sup>The LORD upholds the cause of the oppressed  
and gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets prisoners free,

<sup>8</sup>the LORD gives sight to the blind,

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,

The LORD loves the righteous.

<sup>9</sup>The LORD watches over the foreigner  
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,  
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked

Deuteronomy 10:17-18 <sup>18</sup>Yahweh defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow,  
and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. <sup>19</sup>And you  
are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

Biblically, how a society - how you and I - care for these, the most vulnerable among us - is a reflection of justice/“**mishpat**”.

One further facet of this diamond of biblical justice is the Hebrew word for, **righteousness, "tzadeqah"**. Biblically, righteousness is not merely about our personal standing before God. It is that, but *it is far more*. It refers to how we conduct our day to day relationships - in our families and in our society - with fairness, generosity, and equity. So, you can see that righteousness and justice, **mishpat and tzadequah** are often closely linked together. And the third aspect which motivates the desire to honor right relationships, is **hesed**/mercy/love/compassion of God.

By now I hope you are beginning to see how these three Hebrew concepts are interrelated. **Hesed, mishpat, tzadequah** - compassion-mercy-steadfast love, are wed to with justice and righteousness.

Biblical justice is not primarily carried out in a courtroom by lawyers arguing a case before jurors. Rather, these characteristics are integral to the heart and character of Yahweh/God. And that, sisters and brothers, is why biblical justice matters.

All of us are created in the image of God. None of us chose our parents. Not all God's children in this world are treated with equity and justice. This is due in part to the fact that we are sinners in a fallen world.

While God loves us all, and Christ died for us all, God's heart is especially tender toward the plight of the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized: the widowed, the orphan, the poor, the homeless, the immigrant and refugee. This truth is emphasized over and over in scripture. (I have said before that where there is repetition, we need to pay attention!)

God's heart is with these vulnerable persons. I do not know about you, but I want my heart to beat with the same pulse that moves God's own heart. But it is not enough to have our hearts beat and break with God's heart. **We must act.**

*How do we know love unless it is demonstrated and lived out among us?*

*How shall we know biblical justice unless we ourselves, empowered by God's own Spirit, demonstrate it in right relationships, equity, and practical, loving care?*

How we grapple with these concepts, how we listen for God's guidance and act will be critical for us today and in the days ahead.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of meeting Robert Gelinas. Robert is a husband, father of six and a pastor of a church in Colorado. While studying the Epistle of James

they became aware of an alarming number of children in Colorado's foster care system. They began to pray and wrestle with this verse:

James 1:27 (NIV) "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...."

The outcome? Robert and his church members were instrumental in starting a non-profit organization called Project 1:27.org.

In December 2004 there were 875 children legally available for adoption in the Colorado foster care system with no identified adoptive family. Today that number has declined to less than 200 because of the collaboration of people of faith and state government working together. Hundreds of children have been served by Project 1.27's Christian foster and adoptive families. Some children have successfully been reunited with their families of origin; over 400 children have been adopted. Robert and his wife fostered and adopted three children themselves.

Today, the urgent need for well-trained, well-equipped foster families in Colorado and across the country provides an opportunity for Christians to offer love, hope and healing to children and parents impacted by generational trauma, substance abuse, broken relationships, and isolation. Project 1.27 offers more than a decade of experience and learning to churches through their National Network; to inspire, recruit and resource churches and families to successfully fulfill the biblical mandate of James 1:27.

This is just one example of how a church responded creatively to what is certainly a desperate need not only in their own backyard, but across our own nation.

Covid19 keeps us physically apart, but it cannot keep us from praying these scriptures and wrestling with the biblical mandate to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God."

Yes, Calvary is already engaged and will continue to be, supporting the homeless and hungry through the Blessing Box, Full Bellies and our support of the backpack meal programs through RFWF, and both local food banks, and winter shelter. Prior to March, CPC had hosted several Community Conversations on Affordable Housing. That was a beginning.

In addition to the challenges and economic impact of Covid 19, we are faced with a more complicated national reckoning with regard to systemic racism and injustice

which has been longstanding, and which came into sharp focus through the death of George Floyd.

On Wednesday nights our Christian Education Ministry Team has been hosting book discussions and is starting a new one this week. I encourage you to participate, call the church office and you will be sent the links.

As serious disciples (which means “learners”) I want to challenge us all to lay aside what we thought we knew, as we consider what God is saying to us today through the Word of God. *How might God be leading us to take action on behalf of the vulnerable in Enumclaw?*

Why?? Because Biblical justice is not about “just us”. Biblical justice flows from the very heart of God: That is why it matters!

**Righteousness/ tzadequah** is concerned with action - how we conduct our day to day relationships - in our families and in our society - with fairness, generosity and equity. **Justice/mishpat** and **righteousness/tzadequah** are wed together. And the motivation or desire to honor right relationships, is **hesed/mercy/love/compassion of God**.

May our hearts beat with the heart of God, taking thoughtful action with loving compassion, equity for all, and working for right relationships especially among the most vulnerable.

May it be so!

PRAY