

March 14, 2018
Lent 4 Midweek
John 17:1-3, Micah 6:6-8

Where is justice? That's the question we ask of Pilate and the leaders of the Jews in tonight's Passion reading. These are the keepers of the Law. These are supposed to be the dispensers of justice. But they do the greatest injustice of all time in persecuting and condemning Christ. Where is justice?

We ask that question all too often in our own lives. Just last week some thieves busted my sister's car window at a local park, stole her purse, and use her credit card to purchase gift cards at the local Walmart. They have pictures of them. In calls and texts since then what do I keep asking her? "Did they catch them?" That means, "Where is justice? I want justice."

Unless you're extremely lucky or extremely young, you've probably been the victim of some similar theft or fraud. It makes us indignant. Where is justice? It doesn't even have to be something real serious. Bad service at a restaurant? I'll get justice—no tip! Someone in our work or social circles badmouths us? Find justice in making sure everyone knows how two-faced that person is. Someone is snippy or rude or insensitive, we might not even realize we're seeking justice by ignoring them and putting them on our "folks not worth the trouble" list. The fact is, we often find it frustrating if there isn't some type of retribution for bad behavior because, well, "Where is justice?"

In the horizontal realm of our dealings with the world around us under God there is most certainly a place and a need for justice. We sometime pray in church for our government, that it would punish evildoers. We rightly love our neighbor by seeking justice that protects life, liberty and possessions. Just punishment also can be loving discipline to the offender, causing them to mend their ways and lead a more fruitful life.

However, when an offense is perpetrated against us, well, we're sinners, so our desire for justice goes beyond right horizontal justice and into vertical justice; the realm of our place before God as His Creation and redeemed children. When our thoughts turn to anger, retribution, vengeance, hatred or even good 'ole self-righteous indignation, "Where is justice???!!" becomes a real issue—a First Commandment issue! We very quickly jump to God's seat of judgment—making ourselves the just judge and righteous dispenser of justice. We know what the offender deserves, and we want to give it to them! And our nature in such things tends to be a lot less merciful than Almighty God's.

But if our passion reading tonight tells us anything, it should remind us that human justice is often a very flawed, emotion driven thing that does not please God; that often is even opposed to God.

Where is justice? Jesus gives us a clue. *"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."*

Jesus prays this about His march to do justice in God's glorious fashion. He prays this Thursday night in the home stretch heading to the beatings, flogging, mocking, suffering and dying on the cross that is God's justice being done. God's punishment for every sin of every person of every time will reign down on the innocent Christ made guilty of all offenses by the mercy of God. Where is justice? The cross is justice! God's justice being done, and each one of us being spared it.

Pilate's cowardice, the Jews' lies and slanders, Judas' betrayal, the soldiers beatings—justice is done for all of it in and on Christ Jesus.

Your sins of action, or talk, of thought, that thing that you are so ashamed of that you hesitate to even bring it before God in silent prayer—God’s justice has been done for it. It has been punished already in Christ.

And now the truth that should silence your rage and vengeance: That person who hurt you so much, physically or emotionally. The person who lied to you, or about you and slandered you. The person who stole from or defrauded you. The pervert who molested or raped you. The family member who wounded you in that way that only family can. Those awful, despicable offenses somebody did against you. Punishment for all of that was done to Christ, in Christ, by Christ on the cross. Justice has been done.

I don’t really want to hear this when I’m angry, and I’m really not thrilled to preach this truth because I know it’s tough to hear. But God’s Word is quite clear, we who have been forgiven much must forgive. Why? Because sin has been paid for in Christ. And if we look at those who sin against us with anger and vengeance in our hearts, what are we saying about the satisfaction that Jesus made on the cross? That it was flawed? That it wasn’t enough? That we want more justice done? No.

“He has told you, O man, 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?”

These words of the prophet Micah sum up how we must react. We do justice in the manner of God, by forgiving, bearing that cross and returning love and kindness, knowing that God is God and we are not, humbly trusting His salvation as we are afflicted by the failings of a fallen world. If we seek restoration or even retributions for an offense, we do it out of love for our neighbors who need us to act.

We don't demand, "Where is justice?" because we know exactly where justice was done, where all wrong met righteous wrath and punishment—the cross of Christ.

Knowing that Christ's cross has paid for all sins and that risen from the dead He sends healing in the washing of baptism, the Supper of salvation, the Word of forgiveness, we do not bear malice, hatred and vengeance in our hearts because we know justice has been done. And even our sins of malice, hatred and vengeance have been paid for in Christ.

Amen.