

Social Justice

May 12, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled social justice. Thank you to Geoff, Paul, Carl, Heather and Don for being involved in the service. The scripture reading is Amos 9 11 to 15. Happy birthday this week to Dianne and to Paul. Happy anniversary to Jenny and Stephen.

Welcome, Prayer, Announcements

I'd like to welcome everybody to the service this morning of the Beamsville Church of Christ. April is living up to its names and it's a rainy day. But our intent is to worship our God and His Son who is always with us. My name is Geoff and looking around I see a few people I don't know. Lots of students today. Today Don has chosen to speak on the idea of justice and equity. I'd like to read a verse from the book of Exodus to set the stage for today's lessons. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear for I am compassionate. So says our God. Let's go to Him in prayer.

Father we thank you so much for the opportunity to be here. The opportunities that our country affords us. We pray Father for peace in so many places that there is unrest. In Palestine and Israel, Father we ask that the bloodshed might come to an end. In Sudan where so many people are once again on the verge of catastrophic starvation because of ongoing conflict. Father we know that more than anything else you want an equitable world in which people recognize in others a part of you. Father may this group be a group that shows their love to everyone.

We have a couple of people in our congregation we especially want to pray about. We pray for Pam. Her situation is certainly a lot better where she is. But her health is continuing to mean that she's going to need help for the rest of her life. We pray that you will find a good place for her and you will find people who can help her work back to the most that her body will allow her to live out an enjoyable and a productive and a happy life. And Father we pray for Valerie. For Valerie and Jim and the family we ask that you help work miracles in her healing. Father we pray for those of our number who can't be here because of their situation. We pray for Connie and John for example. We ask that you be with them. Father comfort them. And Father put it on our hearts to spend time to visit with them. We ask Father that you be with us that you accept our worship this morning as a pleasing aroma. We pray through the name of your son and the spirit who walks with us. Amen.

Alright I have some announcements and I can't wait to see if Joanne S. has a birthday. She's hiding out there? No I don't think so. Donna is not here this morning but there's lots of Great Lakes students who are. I didn't understand what she had to do with the Great Lakes students but those are two separate awards that the town of Lincoln offered on Friday. Donna was recognized for her work with literacy and the students of Great Lakes for all the things that they do for the town. So give them all, well give the students a round of applause right now. [applause] And the next time you see Donna give her your congratulations as well. If you have some adaptive devices for medical purposes please talk to Barbara S. and her daughter can make use of them. Alright

financial statements are available. You can go to Adam if you'd like a hard copy. I think I have any more announcements that have come through to me except please do keep Valerie and Pam in your prayers.

Communion

Here is a list of bee facts that illustrates that the world is full of confusing things that may or may not be true.

- If you stood all the bees on the earth on their shoulders, they would stretch all the way to the sun and back if the sun was a whole lot closer.
- According to research, bees are quite bad at spelling. There are three types of bees, honey bees, which live in colonies, bumble bees, which live alone, and leaf cutter bees, which come to you in times of trouble. Although some scientists say that it's a type of beetle.
- The most important bee in the hive is the queen. If the queen dies, then the worker bees have to get the pawn to the other side of the board and swap it.
- Because of their crucial role in pollination, if bees don't exist, then they would eliminate 90% of our food production. But that includes celery.
- Although bees are well known for their yellow and black colors, they're less known for their away kit, orange and blue with speckles.
- Bees buzz not as is commonly thought of because of their fast wings movement, but rather because they're the insect world's Civic drivers who've modified their mufflers.
- Bees rarely eat honey because they get sick of it from work.

Facts, truth, or what is perceived as such is often a moving target today or in our society. Bees are perhaps not the thing most contested on this front, but rather opening other such cans of worms. They illustrate the moving truth of our society, whether it's politics, economics, the weather itself, health. There's no arena of life that isn't contested about what is really true.

In fact, this week I just heard a news report about whether it was really true or not, that the bee population of North America was at either historic lows or historic highs. So perhaps we do have doubts about those bees after all. The most fundamental truth of our universe, as contested with all of that, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. For me, the Lord's Supper is a touch point, a reference point to return to, a place to anchor that truth when perhaps everything else is in question.

While this is not a passage that's often perhaps used at Lord's Supper, I think of it often at this time. Ephesians 1 starting at verse 11.

"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. In order that we who were first to be put our hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory. And you were also included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. You were chosen within the plan of God, of his redemption of humankind, as we put our hope in Christ, that is the gospel of truth."

I hope at the Lord's table you feel, see, and experience that gospel of truth of Christ. Both in terms of what Christ has done for us, his death, burial, and resurrection, but also in terms of what our lives can look like because we've accepted that gospel of truth, come into contact with it.

Continuing on in Ephesians 1.

"For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love of all of God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a spirit of wisdom, revelation, that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule on authority and domination and dominion and every name that is invoked not only in the present age but also the one that is to come."

The Apostle Paul describes three things here that the Ephesians can now have that they've experienced the gospel of truth. They can know God better via wisdom and revelation. They can know the hope that they've been called to by the enlightening of the eyes of their heart. And they can know the great power that is available for everyone who believes, the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him beside God in heaven.

We come to the Lord's table to remember the gospel of truth, the truth that really matters and is always true. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised, and now sits at the right hand of God. But we also come to the Lord's table to remind ourselves that that gospel of truth can be an anchor in our lives and affect us as we go forward.

We can have that gospel of truth that helps us to know God better, knowing the hope better, and having access to the same power that resurrected Christ from the dead in our lives. Today I invite us all to the Lord's table to remember the gospel of truth and what it means for us or what it could mean for us. Let's go to God in prayer.

Dear Lord, thank you for all you've given us and all you've blessed us with. Thank you for this time. Lord, as we partake of these two emblems that remind us of your son's sacrifice, the blood that he shed and the body that was broken, help us to remember that truth of the gospel and help us to live like a people who have remembered that truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture Reading

Amos 9:11-15

The scripture reading is Amos 9, 11 to 15.

"They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. "They will plant vineyards and drink their wine. "They will make gardens and eat their fruit. "I will plant

Israel in their own land, "never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God.

Sermon

Social Justice

Good morning everyone. Thank you for being with us today. The word justice is a powerful word. In the books of Psalms, justice is mentioned many, many times. I'll give you a couple of examples. Chapter 7 and verse 6, "Arise, O Lord, in your anger, rise up against the rage of my enemies, awake, my God, decree justice." Chapter 9 and verse 16, "The Lord is known by his justice. The wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands."

Again in Psalms, Chapter 11 and verse 7, "The Lord is righteous, and the Lord loves justice." 33 and 5, "The Lord loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of his unfailing love." 106 and verse 3, "Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right." Psalm 112 and 5, "Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his work with justice." And then Psalm 140 and verse 12, "I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. Surely righteousness will praise your name, and the upright will live before you." A man by the name of Abdul advocated justice. Here's what he said, "O friends of God, be living examples of justice, so that by the mercy of God, the world may see in your actions that you manifest the attributes of justice and mercy and friendship." And faith, and most of all, love. Justice is not limited. It is a universal quality. It must be carried out by all from the lowest to the highest. Justice must be sacred. We must respect the rights of all those who daily demonstrate justice. Being just, impartial, and fair. Especially treating one another the way Jesus treats us.

The word justice is used many, many times in scripture, meaning fairness and equity. I want to go way back. In the book of Exodus chapter 23, "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong, and do not pervert justice." And then in 1 Samuel, "They turned aside and perverted justice." 2 Chronicles. "Maintain justice and righteousness." Psalm 9 and 8, "The Lord will govern the people with justice." Ecclesiastes 3 and 16, "In the place of justice, wickedness was there." Psalm 33, "The Lord loves righteousness and justice." Isaiah 117, "Seek justice and encourage the oppressed." Micah 3, "You leaders of Israel should not know, yes you should know justice." Zechariah 7 and 9, "Administer true justice, show mercy, and have compassion on one another." I think we get it. God loves justice. There's an interesting book that we don't read very often. It's called the book of Amos. And it's powerful.

How many of us remember these powerful words spoken by Martin Luther King, Jr. That all people are created equal. "Now is the time," he says, "to make real the promises of democracy." "Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice." "Now is the time to make justice a reality for all God's children." No, we are not satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. I can still remember when I was a lot younger then, this speech, standing at Washington Square. 100,000 people listening to this man talk about justice, equality. But he spoke mostly about love and friendship and loving your neighbor and doing well. That we're equal in the eyes of God and that we need to be equal in the eyes of one another.

So maybe you will echo some of these words that you will remember as he said this. "Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy." "Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice." "Now is the time to make justice a reality for all God's children." No, we are not satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. We must not allow ourselves to wallow in the valley of despair. I have a dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all people are created equal. And I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. And with this faith we will be able to work together. And with this faith we will be able to pray together. And with this faith we are able to stand up for freedom together knowing that we will be free. And when we let freedom ring we will be able to join hands and sing these words. "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

You see the dominant theme in the book of Amos is social justice. The wealthy were oppressing the poor. Many were living in extravagant indulgence, sometimes built on the corruption and oppressing the poor. Israel had become politically secure and spiritually smug. Prosperity increased and yet their moral corruption increased along with it. God's patience was coming to an end and that's never a good thing. Israel became so paganized that they lived a view that was beyond God. God was placed in the background. And many who were wealthy were mistreating the poor. They were cheating, perverting justice, they were crushing the weak and the poor. As a result God would uproot his chosen people by the hands of a pagan and godless nation. God reminds them that the Lord is the great God and that he will not abandon them. He rules the universe. So Israel needed to remember their faith and trust in the Lord as he is the Lord of all and yet that's very true even to this day. The book of Amos reminds the prophets, the preachers, not to preach, not to prophesy, especially if they're not living up to what they preach and what they say. It's important back then, it's just as important today. So Amos listens to God's teaching and Israel has fallen short of God's commands.

So in Amos chapter 4 these are pretty strong words. Here's what it says. "Hear this word, you cows." "You women who oppress the needy." "You men who do the same." "And they say to us, bring us more wine." "But the time will surely come when you'll be taken away with hooks and the last of you with fish hooks." If Amos was trying to get his sermon to really hit home, I think he did it. He said, "You have not returned to me," says the Lord. And God repeats this over and over again in chapter 4 and verse 6, "You have not returned to me." And then in verse 8 he said, "You have not returned to me." And then in verse 9 he says, "You have not returned to me." And then in verse 10, guess what he says, "You have not returned to me." Verse 12, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." And with these warnings, God continually offers the opportunity for people to return to him, to be faithful to him, to somehow love him as much as he loves us, if that's even possible. And with these warnings, God continually gives them these opportunities.

In chapter 5, God says these words, and it's still true to this day, "Seek me and live, you who return justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground." Amos says, "Now that he has their attention, seek good. Run from evil that you may live. Then the Lord Almighty will be with you." And just as you say he is, these words, "Hate evil, love good, maintain justice in the courts." Perhaps the Lord Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Israel. God's people, if you will.

And then these words that we've spoken several times, and I remember it as a young boy listening to Martin Luther King Jr. at that Washington beautiful, beautiful pond, more than a pond, probably a mile back, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people. And these words, powerful words, "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream."

Do not allow complacency to take over. Chapter 6, "Woe to you who are complacent in Israel, and you who feel secure, you who lie on beds, inlaid with ivory, and you lounge on your couches, you dine on choice lambs and fattened calves, you drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Israel. Therefore, the Lord God Almighty declares, "I will stir up a nation against you that will oppress you all the way to the valley of Arabah." And because of their lack of faith and little appreciation for God caring for them, Amos writes these words, "The days are coming," declares the sovereign Lord, "Well, I will send a famine through the land." Not a famine of food, not a famine of thirst, but a famine of not listening to the word of the Lord, a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. But then God does what he always does. He promises us because of our forgiveness. God promises a restoration of faith.

Listen to these words that were spoken so long ago. He says this, "In that day, I will restore David's fallen nation. I will repair its broken places. I will restore its ruins and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant and all the nations that bear my name," declares the Lord. And then, in conclusion to this brief message, they're the wonderful words by the Lord to Amos. And I'd like to suggest these words for us, too. "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people. They will rebuild cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and they will drink their wine. They will be made gardens and eat the precious fruit that God has given us. I will plant Israel on their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord, your God.

In conclusion, sometimes justice seems like a long, long way. But as Amos and Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us, free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Thank you, Don, for reminding us God's call to justice. Let's go to God in prayer as we close.

Father, you are so great and so awesome in power, and yet you grieve for us when we turn from you. We see the lesson in Israel that God had to turn your back on them. Father, may we not get to that point, may we continue to be with you, may we return to the grace that your son brought us each and every day, that we may find a way as a people as a people that the influence that we can have would change things in the world, that we would have a more equitable world. Father, that there would be reconciliation. Places like the Ukraine, where there's still fighting going on people being hurt. Places like Korea, where a whole people are separated, and even Father here in Canada, our relationship with First Nations. Father, help us. Give us open hearts and we might risk rejection in making amends, in writing your world. Give us strength, Father, to be faithful to our calling, because you sent your son, you gave him up, you risked everything for him to be here for us that we might celebrate his death, but even more his resurrection in your power today. We thank you for that opportunity, Father. It draws us together.

Father, we humbly ask that you will send your comforter to come and to teach us. We trust that you hear our prayers. Father, help us to wait for your answers with patience. And Father, help us this week to be part of your healing salve for the world. We know that, Father, you have given us the opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder and not of our own doing, but because of the gift of your son. We thank you for redemption and reconciliation with you. Help us to make earth just a little more like heaven. In Christ we pray through the spirit, amen.

Contact & Copyright

Thanks for watching or listening. The Beamsville Church of Christ meets at 4900 John Street, Beamsville, Ontario. Scripture quotations marked NIV taken from the Holy Bible New International Version. NIV. Copyright 2011 by Biblica Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. You can find out more about the congregation on our Facebook page or at www.beamsvillechurchofchrist.ca