

Jeremiah 9:23-24
“To Delight in Justice”
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Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 18, 2022

The Reading:

Jeremiah 9:23-24

²³ Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; ²⁴ but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord.

The bible tells us that God chose Abraham so that he would keep the ways of God, doing righteousness and justice (Gen. 18:19). God gave the Law to the Hebrew people that they would pursue justice (Deut. 16:20). It pleased God that Solomon asked for the ability to discern and understand justice (I Kings 3:11).

The Psalmist declares, as well, that we should do justice for the afflicted and destitute (Ps 82:3). Proverbs points out that the righteous care about justice for the poor but the wicked have no such concern (Prov.29:7).

The prophets lift up their voices, too. Isaiah: “Preserve justice and do righteousness” (Is. 56:1). Amos: Let justice roll down like waters” (Amos 5:24). Micah: “Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8).

Jesus joined the same chorus. He criticized the religious folks that tithed while neglecting the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt. 23:23). He also said that nations will be judged by how they treat the poor, the sick, the stranger, and “the least of these” (Matt. 25:31-46).

You probably know, then, from all this biblical evidence, that God wants *us* to do justice. Justice is a faith word. It is integral to God’s character and to our collective well-being.

Jeremiah reiterates this same truth in chapter 9, verses 23-24. Here, speaking for God, the prophet addresses the people of Judah during a difficult time. Josiah is king and trying to do what is just; he is making reforms that put morality front and center. At the same time, the larger nations around him are vying for power and putting political and military pressure on his country. The nation is breaking down, “because nothing can be counted upon.”¹ Jeremiah tells them to learn and understand who God is and what God wants – to steer a courageous course by practicing God’s steadfast love (hesed), justice (mishpat), and righteousness (tsedaqah).

Jeremiah sees these three divine virtues as interdependent. Justice needs faithful love – love of God and neighbor. As Cornel West has written: “Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” Justice also needs righteousness, meaning right and

¹Patrick D. Miller, “The Book of Jeremiah,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. VI* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 657.

²Mary C. Curtis, “There Is Not Some Separation Between Jesus and Justice: How Rev. William J. Barber II

ethical relationships between people. If you will, justice is like the body of a bird, and love and righteousness, its wings. In order for human community to flourish and fly, it needs all three working together.

In these verses, Jeremiah also warns the leaders and the people that boasting about three other things: intellect, riches, and power actually shows that they are weak and makes them susceptible to social collapse. He perceives that in the near future the Babylonians will overrun Judah.

To repeat: God wants us to do justice. Justice is a *faith* word, not just a secular or political term. Don't let a few loud voices today persuade you that the separation of church and state means that churches should not speak up and show up for social justice! We *do* separate ourselves as church from partisan politics; this is true. But, as preacher William Barber puts it: "There is no separation between Jesus and justice; to be Christian is to be concerned with what's going on in the world."²

Therefore, one of the things that I know about God is that God wants us to do justice, but I don't think I knew what verse 24 tells us: that God *delights* in justice.

To delight is to take pleasure in something or someone; it is to be brought into the light and lifted up. It's feeling good all over. The joy. The well-being. There is a difference, for instance, between doing exercise because you should and delighting in it!

God takes pleasure in steadfast love, justice, and righteousness, and it pleases God when people live together in this manner. So doing justice is not just a command, but an invitation. It is not only trying to be right and pointing out what is wrong; delighting in justice is living into what gives God pleasure and feeling this pleasure yourself! Delighting and doing.

I wonder what difference looking at justice in this manner might make for this congregation? Were RCC to *delight* in justice, what would this look like?

Two quick responses to my own question:

First of all, I think that it would mean that **we would delight when justice is done in the world**; we would cheer it on, support, and celebrate it.

This weekend, we heard the incredible news story about Florida's governor charting a plane to fly immigrants from Texas to Martha's Vineyard, without any communication with authorities here! Now, for sure, immigration is a complicated and controversial justice issue, as are the injustices in Venezuela in this case. There are different viewpoints, but I think that God's people can agree that human beings ought always be treated with dignity and respect, not as political chess pieces!

So I, for one, delighted in the reports that the islanders and our state rallied to help and respond compassionately to these refugees even when others did not! While our national immigration system continues under review, you and I can certainly delight when justice *is* done.

Secondly, I think learning about God's delight means that **it can delight us to do justice.**

²Mary C. Curtis, "There Is Not Some Separation Between Jesus and Justice: How Rev. William J. Barber II Uses His Faith to Fight For the Poor," *Time Magazine*, 21 February 2020.

Some people might get overwhelmed learning about racial injustice and mass incarceration, but what has impressed me about our Social Justice team here is that it is delighting in the opportunity to sponsor a film series on the topic in the fall. **Like God, let us delight in doing justice.**