



# DOING JUSTICE, LOVING MERCY

Radix Plenary

Saint Mark's Cathedral

January 23, 2022

# OUR TIME TOGETHER THIS EVENING

- Land acknowledgement and opening prayer
- Brief history of Radix Project
- Theological Reflection:  
What is Justice?
- Theological Reflection:  
What is Mercy?
- Breakout & Plenary Conversations
- What do biblical stories of justice and mercy have to say to us?
- Logistics, next steps



# RADIX PROJECT—SMALL GROUPS/DEEP ROOTS



- Modeled by Jesus who met with others in small, intimate groups
- Modeled by the early Church in homes where they gathered, prayed, and cared for one another
- A way to know one another, and to be known
- A way to situate our stories in the context of God's story
  - We believe God is up to something here and now
- Small groups serve as substrate for spiritual transformation
- Especially important in this time
- This is the 7<sup>th</sup> iteration of Radix—more than 300 have participated thus far!



# THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: WHAT IS JUSTICE?

- “Justice is the maintenance of social relationships that keep life viable and human.”
  - Influenced by two talks from Professor Walter Brueggemann from the Fuller Institute.

# IMAGES OF JUSTICE

- Unfavorable contrast with justice and mercy
- Tendency to view justice as exacting, merciless, legalistic
- Somewhat confusing portrayals of justice
- “Two competing visions of justice” in Old Testament



# JUSTICE FROM ABOVE



- God as ruler, king.
- Judgment, righteousness, the imposition of order, but non-specific.
- 1 Samuel 8:11
- Justice seen as a method for preserving the status quo.
- Fundamental inequality is normalized.

# JUSTICE FROM BELOW

- Contrasting narrative
- The suffering people cry out.
- God hears, intervenes, calls (often an “unlikely” person).
- Negotiations with the principalities and powers.
- The people go “into the wilderness” and emerge, transformed.



# JUSTICE AS TRANSFORMATIVE

- What happens, after people emerge from the wilderness?
- Isaiah 56 – 66
- Remember the orphan and widow, proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, welcome the stranger and the immigrant....
- Massively inclusive vision; view others as neighbor, based on Golden Rule.
- Justice is the same for all.



# COMPETING VISIONS OF JUSTICE

- Stories of the conflict between the predatory justice of Pharaoh and the restorative justice of God.
- Chronicled in the Psalter and in words of the prophets
- Struggle continues throughout history to today.

**\*\*The work of the church is to proclaim the Gospel and provide a place where people can gather to envision and build narratives around God's justice.\*\***



# BREAKOUT GROUPS

- How have you traditionally thought of “justice?”
- How have you traditionally thought of “God’s justice” as described in the Bible?
- Are those different? Related? Similar?



# PLENARY CONVERSATION





# MERCY (A LA SHAKESPEARE)

*The quality of mercy is not strained.  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown.  
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty,  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.  
But mercy is above this sceptered sway;  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings;  
It is an attribute of God himself;  
And earthly power doth then show like God's  
When mercy seasons justice.*

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OF VENICE

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# THE VIRTUE OF MERCY



- Directed primarily at the guilty:
  - the innocent do not need mercy
  - the guilty have no hope except to be treated mercifully.
- The need for mercy assumes the fact of guilt and justifiable punishment—justice prompts the punishment
- Forgiveness and mercy go together:
  - forgiveness repairs the past by letting go of it
  - *mercy* makes possible a better future by not seeking the consequences of applying strict justice.
- Mercy has a “superabundant” quality about it, and is an expression of the soul’s largess and the heart’s magnanimity—shows up when least expected
- Mercy goes against the grain of human nature itself: pleasure in seeing the guilty punished, the wrongdoer paying for his actions, the liar, the thief, the murderer getting their just desserts.
- Ego sees mercy as foolish, weak...or distorts the virtue into a self-satisfying superiority or condescension

# MERCY AS BALM FOR BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

- “Practicing” mercy is the means by which we come to experience the reality that we are not isolated or individual but are intimately connected to everything and everyone.
- Who is being merciful to whom when we practice mercy?



# MERCY SEASONING LIFE

- “mercy” and “womb” have the same Hebrew root—just different vowel inflections.
- Giving oneself over to the needs and reality and concerns of the other—the capacity of connectedness
- God is steadfastly just and merciful, and invites us into that realm of lifegiving reality.

Mercy and truth have met together; \*  
righteousness and peace have kissed  
each other. (Ps. 85:10)



## BREAKOUT GROUPS

- Describe an experience in which you offered (or received) mercy when it wasn't expected.
- How did it feel in the moment?
- Did it change the nature of the relationship?
- Do you think God is calling us to be just and merciful, and is that possible?





PLENARY

# DOING JUSTICE, LOVING MERCY

- The Scriptures have much to say about both and their connections.
- One way to think of this: look for the poetic writings as markers for mercy (retributive justice will come as prose; the grace and gift of mercy will touch our souls).
- God shows up in the midst of suffering, brokenness, sin, and pain.
- There is a crisis (moment of truth) which demands consequences (justice), but then the plot twist happens (covenantal—connection).
- Pervasive threads to be found in Old and New Testaments (not incongruent or supercessionist).
- We are invited to locate ourselves in the stories.



# LOGISTICS & NEXT STEPS

- Establish Group Norms
  - Confidentiality
  - Respect & mutuality
  - Logistics
  - Attendance
  - Preparation
  - A commitment to prayer
- Practice Zoom etiquette
- Format for small group meetings
- Questions?





QUESTIONS,  
CONVERSATION,  
CLOSING