

LEAD WITH LOVE

Justice and Generosity



It may seem odd to think about how justice and generosity are linked. Throughout the Bible, God links the concept of justice or righteousness with acts of mercy and charity. In Hebrew *hesed* is this idea of a communal kindness and mercy that has at its core a covenantal meaning. God calls us into *hesed* by commanding that we are generous with our resources that support God's justice/righteousness. Again, in Hebrew, *tzedek* is the word we read as righteous or righteousness but refers to God's concept of justice. Wrapped into the core of this concept is the idea of charity – giving, sharing.

For each day this week begin your devotional time with prayer:

Gracious and Holy God, I see you so plainly in creation. The majesty and powerfulness of nature and the cosmos. The awe in the immensity of it all. And like the psalmist says, who am I that you are mindful of me? I know in my mind that you are present every day and always working for the good and yet I often forget to stop and acknowledge that gift. Lord help me to realize that you are indeed Lord of my life. Help me to expand my heart, to become more generous, to realize that all I have is nothing without your loving presence in my life. In this new year continue to draw me nearer to the transformative power of your love and the courage to live that love out in all the ways you call me to. Amen.

Day 1

Scripture: [Micah 6:8](#)

He has told you, O mortal, 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? (NRSVUE)

Reflection:

The thought of a requirement is sometimes disconcerting. It makes us stop and consider whether we have completed the right sequence of actions, do we have the right papers for that license? We have daily requirements for a healthy body and mind. Today's scripture refers to God's desires for a God-filled life. That word – hesed instructs us that to live out God's righteousness we must be willing to give. To be generous in our kindness and to love the idea of hesed, not just the action. We may practice many forms of simple kindness and yet this kindness (hesed) is rooted in sharing communally. Giving of our resources so that others may be blessed. The requirements are not a choice but a prerequisite of what God wants from us. We know what God requires, how might God be calling you to be generous in helping to establish hesed?

Day 2

Scripture: [Isaiah 1:16-17](#)

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove your evil deeds
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil; learn to do good;
seek justice;
rescue the oppressed;
defend the orphan;
plead for the widow.

Reflection:

We may have read these verses many times. Certainly, the themes are not new. Do good not evil. Pay attention to the orphan, the widow and free the oppressed. Any one of these can be a tall order in daily living. God is not asking for a one and done but an ongoing generosity of looking after “the other.” This scripture is to all of us. As a community, together we are called to rescue those on the margins. The sheer magnitude of God’s desire for that alone can cause us to feel overwhelmed and not able to make a dent in all the needs. When we come together we make real impact that is not possible as individuals. Floris has demonstrated this repeatedly. Generosity has led to feeding starving children, reduction of life-threatening disease, improvement in economic viability of those on the margins and so much more. How much more might you be willing to give to impact the lives of so many?

Day 3

Scripture: [Deuteronomy 15:7-11](#)

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.’

Reflection:

Could you imagine having all your debts forgiven every seven years? No more mortgage, car loans, student loans, etc. What a different world we would live in. We don't live in that world of course, but we can learn what God had in mind. The year of "remission" allowed the community of Israelites to help stem the tide of entrenched poverty and promotion of economic equality. It is interesting that God points out not to withhold generosity even though the debt was about to be forgiven by the year of remission. It is easy to forget that what we have has been entrusted to us. We are called by God to do the right thing (Tzedek) to be giving and open handed and to do so ungrudgingly.

During Floris Feeds the World, there was a challenge to give up a specialty coffee (or whatever your treat is) for a day. About \$5 per week during the 5-week challenge. It may not seem like anything, but we had stories of people who joined the challenge and realized that their \$35 (that one coffee a week), fed X children for X time. It changed their hearts. They went on to continue to give knowing that they were having an impact. When God calls us to open our hand to our needy neighbor, what will you say?

Day 4

Scripture: [Luke 19:1-10](#)

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

So, he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

Reflection:

The story of Zacchaeus is well known. It has that element of surprise, repentance, extravagant forgiveness and even some humor about how Zacchaeus must climb a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus. What we do know about him was he was a rich tax collector. He was a Jew that excised taxes on behalf of the oppressor – the Roman Empire. Not only that, but he made his money by taking more than was required and Rome turned a blind eye. It was no wonder that the community felt betrayed by one of their own and treated them with contempt. BUT that is before Jesus enters the picture and surprises everyone by going to Zacchaeus’ house for dinner! Who would do such a thing – who would be that extravagantly generous? Well Jesus of course. And, because of this generosity of spirit and intent, Zacchaeus gives back and more the ill-gotten gains of his trade. The remarkable part of this story isn’t the repentance, although certainly important. The remarkable thing that happens is the transformation that occurs in Zacchaeus’ heart. The letting go of the stronghold wealth had on him and the freedom that being generous gave him. Jesus knows that when we are generous and realize that what we have isn’t ours, a transformation of our heart can occur and that idea of loving one’s neighbor becomes a reality. What and where are those things that cause you to cling to attachment? Could you trust that detaching from them could allow transformation?

Day 5

Scripture: [2 Corinthians 8:12-14](#)

For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. For I do not mean that there should be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may also supply your need, in order that there may be equality.

Reflection:

In Paul's letters we see repeatedly his primary concern for all the churches he helped build – that those who join in the life of the church would experience the gift of a life in Christ which transformed the heart and bound the community in love. Corinth was a wild city! The Las Vegas of its time – what happens in Corinth stays in Corinth. Faced with all manners of societal and cultural pressures, the early church in Corinth struggled to leave the cultural world behind and practice *hesed*, (in Greek, *eleos*,) the concept of generosity of mercy and loyalty above and beyond what duty calls for. Paul is helping the Corinthians understand how to order their priorities. Not starting from a place of scarcity but of abundance. This is the abundance of what you have, prioritizing how it is given out determines your generosity or covenantal obligation of *eleos*. Paul pushes back on the notion that others can give because they appear to have more. Paul says, it is possible for everyone to give what they can according to what they are given. It is hard to reorder priorities and commitments we make. Paul is encouraging us to consider like the Corinthians, are our commitments and generosity defined by our participation in the culture of today or to the community of Christ that we have joined?