

2018 Spring Bible Study – Act Justly

Justice as a Calling (of Christ and Us)

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Welcome!

This spring we will spend seven weeks together studying *Justice*. Calvin’s mission statement states that, “Calvin College equips students to: think deeply, **act justly**, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ’s agents of renewal in the world.” It’s the “act justly” part of our mission statement that is the inspiration for this semester’s Bible study.

Here are the contributors who wrote the lessons for each week:

Lesson 1 – Rev. Dr. Michelle Loyd-Paige – Justice as a Calling (of Christ and Us)

Lesson 2 – Dr. Rebecca de Young – What is Justice?

Lesson 3 – Rev. Kyle Meynaard Schaap - Creation Care, Environmental Justice

Lesson 4 – Rev. Reggie Smith – Sanctity of Life

Lesson 5 – Dr. Roland Hoksbergen – Economic Justice

Lesson 6 – Rev. Shannon Jamal-Holleman – Treatment of Stranger, Caring for Poor

Lesson 7 – Rev. Kate Kooyman – Race Relations

What is Justice?

When people feel that they have been wronged, that an institution is not operating fairly, or that groups of people are living in jeopardy, there is often a desire for justice. A desire for justice is a passionate plea for wrongs to be made right, for wrongdoers to be held accountable, for the laws of the land to be equally applied to all, and for the vulnerable to be protected.

It is tempting to think that our desire for justice comes from within ourselves or that we only have to follow the laws in order to act justly. However, justice is not a human creation, justice is one of God’s characteristics:

“Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you For the LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long for Him.” (Isaiah 30: 18).

Justice is more than the defending of individual rights or the condemning of social evils; it is a longing for God.

Reading the Word

Read this passage out loud with your group. (Suggestion: Each person can take a verse.)

Isaiah 61: 1 -11

The Good News of Deliverance

61 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
⁵ Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;
⁶ but you shall be called priests of the Lord,
you shall be named ministers of our God;
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,
and in their riches you shall glory.
⁷ Because their^[a] shame was double,
and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot,
therefore they shall possess a double portion;
everlasting joy shall be theirs.
⁸ For I the Lord love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;^[b]
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.
¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

Responding to the Word

- What does justice look like in Isaiah 61:1-11?
- Which image of justice described in this passage resonates with you?
- Is anything surprising to you?
- What does this passage tell you about God and about the things that God cares about?
- If you were to write a contemporary version of Isaiah 61: 1-6, what would you include?

Read Luke 4:16-21 with your group.

¹⁶ When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Justice as a Calling

Jesus’s ministry was one of proclaiming justice and of acting justly. In fact, it is this passage from Isaiah that he reads as the reason for his ministry (see below, Luke 4:16-21). During his time on earth Jesus spoke out against the injustices of his day: the abuse of power by some religious leaders, the corruption of political leaders, and the mistreatment of the poor and marginalized. Jesus not only spoke about justice, he acted justly. Jesus healed the sick, comforted the grieving, ate with the outcasts, but more than all of these individual acts, he willingly went to the cross in our place to pay for our sins. Our sins were, and are, an affront to our Holy and righteous God. We, as

individuals, were unable to pay the debt of our sins. Jesus was born to die for our sins. His life and death covered our wrongs. His death was the ultimate act of justice on behalf of humankind.

As Christ-followers, we have been saved from sin. Our salvation is a gift, and it comes with responsibilities. Micah 6:8 reminds us that acting justly is required of Christ-followers. Acting justly is not optional. Acting justly is a calling that requires putting into action the commandment to love our neighbor.

Responding to the Word

- What is your understanding of being “anointed”? How are we anointed?
- Are there injustices that you speak out against? What has motivated you to do so? What does your speaking out look like?
- What justice issues do the people in your group care about? Identify national or local organizations that are working to address the justice issues that you care the most about. Identify one thing that you can do to support one of the organizations that you identified with your time, talent, or treasure.

A Closing Prayer

Righteous God, there is so much injustice in this world. It must break your heart. As we await the return of your Son, when all will be made right, show us what we can do to work for justice so needed in this world. Holy Spirit stir us to action. We no longer want to just talk about the need for justice, we want to answer the call to act justly. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray, Amen.