

Justice in the Burbs
"Overcoming Our Excuses"
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Acts 2:1-21

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck. They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?"

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites;
Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene;
Immigrants from Rome, both Jews and proselytes;
Even Cretans and Arabs!

"They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!"

Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?"

Others joked, "They're drunk on cheap wine."

That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: "Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk—it's only nine o'clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

"In the Last Days," God says,
"I will pour out my Spirit
on every kind of people:
Your sons will prophesy,
also your daughters;
Your young men will see visions,
your old men dream dreams.
When the time comes,
I'll pour out my Spirit

On those who serve me, men and women both,
and they'll prophesy.
I'll set wonders in the sky above
and signs on the earth below,
Blood and fire and billowing smoke,
the sun turning black and the moon blood-red,
Before the Day of the Lord arrives,
the Day tremendous and marvelous;
And whoever calls out for help
to me, God, will be saved."

The last couple of weeks we have talked about what is Justice and why should I care.

Today we begin getting at the crux of the matter.
We will look at all the built in responses that many of us have built right into our lives — many of them we do not even realize that they exist.

As I have thought about this sermon the last few weeks the image that keeps coming to me is one of a building surrounded by an number of fences.

I think that we have learned to create all kinds of fences around our lives to protect us from things — sometimes it protects us from things that want to harm us — but other times it protects us from things that want to make our lives better and more in sync with God.

My hunch is that most of us have several layers of fences
The reason for that is simple — if something should penetrate the first level, we still have other fences that can protect us.

So let's take a look at the fences that we have erected to protect us.

The first fence, which maybe is kind of like a picket fence — not too substantial but there nevertheless. This first fence says: It's somebody else's job.

You know how that works, you see the opportunity to feed people at the State Street Center and you don't give it a second thought, because you figure somebody else will take care of it.

It is amazing, that this little low fence is so effective in keeping us from doing God's justice.

But if somehow the notion of Justice does get through the picket fence — waiting just a few steps in is another very effective fence. This one I see as more like a chain link fence. It has doors, and it can be climbed, but it does a good job of keeping the things we want out, out.

And of course that second level is the one that we probably most often use, it is the excuse that we are too busy.

And I know — we are all busy! Take a look at my calendar if you are unsure.

But the truth is — busyness is a choice.

We choose where we will spend our time.

I have said repeatedly that I would like to learn Hebrew — but the simple truth is, it is not enough of a priority that I am willing to invest the time in it.

Going to the State Street Center takes time — you have to cook the meal, you have to drive their, then you have to help feed them. It is an investment of half a day at least — and you have to decide — is it worth it?

Am I willing to invest those 4 or 5 hours, or do I have other things that I am investing that time in?

This is a strong fence — because we ARE so busy.
And we let our schedule dictate our lives.

The only way we can open the gate to this fence is to look honestly at our schedules and recognize that we really do get to choose most of what gets on there.

The third fence is more insidious.

It is a fence that is almost invisible to most of us. It is more like a laser fence than a barbed wire fence — but it is one of the most difficult to penetrate.

This is the fence of prejudice.

Prejudice is not necessarily a race issue.

The word prejudice refers to PRE JUDGEMENT.

It is when we make a decision before we really know the facts.

Homeless people are lazy

Poor people should just get a better job
black people are evil

Those are all statements that come out of prejudice.

AND WE ALL DO IT!

The key is to become aware of our prejudices and then we can begin to seek out the facts so that those pre judgements do not rule the day.

The final fence — which is more like a barrier wall — is the reality that if we begin to engage in acts of God's Justice — we are going to have to change our lives.

No longer can we just take things for granted
where something was made
that the workers were paid a fair wage

Once justice gets inside that last wall — we want to know — and we want to do what is right.

Because when we don't — WE KNOW IT!

So our lives — our attitudes — our lifestyle have to change.

With two runners on base and a strike against her, Sara Tucholsky of Western Oregon University uncorked her best swing and did something she had never done, in high school or college. Her first home run cleared the center-field fence.

Unfortunately, in her excitement, she missed first base — as she went back to touch it, she slipped and torn a ligament in her knee.

She managed to crawl to 1st base — because the coach knew that if he touched her she would be called out. Or, the umpire explained, a pinch runner could come in for her, but it would just be a single.

Can you imagine how she felt?

Her coach conferred with the umpire who said that her team mates could not help her round the bases.

Then something miraculous happened.

Members of the Central Washington University softball team stunned

spectators by carrying Tucholsky around the bases Saturday so the three-run homer would count -- an act that contributed to their own elimination from the playoffs.

Central Washington first baseman Mallory Holtman, the career home run leader in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference, asked the umpire if she and her teammates could help Tucholsky.

They proceeded to pick her up and carry her around the bases.

That is what happens when Justice is at the center of our lives.

So what happens if I do nothing?

Great question, and a fair one.

But we have to remember that choosing to do nothing is still choosing.

And I am convinced that the choices/decisions that we make today have huge cultural ramifications.

Those choices not only effect the type of world that we live in today
But they also affect the type of world that our children or grandchildren
will inherit.

When I was in High School, I was involved in Debate and the topic one of the years had to do with finding alternative energy sources to deal with our dependance on middle east oil and the reality of depleting oil reserves.

That was over 30 years ago.

We, as a nation, have really done nothing until now when we are being forced to, and are dealing with the consequences of those choices which include — still being dependant on a very dirty energy source and facing the reality of Global Warming and also \$4.00 a gallon for that gasoline.

We can continue to hid behind our fences — and pay the piper down the road.
But the bill always comes due.

Or we can begin to open up some of those walls, we can begin to look for new and creative ways of living justly.

This weekend was World Fair Trade Day.

The point of this event is to help make us aware of the inequity — the lack of justice in the coffee market and other markets.

We use coffee at Ridge Church that has been certified as Fair Trade — the interesting thing is that the coffee really doesn't cost any more than non-fair traded coffee — the difference is in who is getting a fair share of the profits.

I don't know if you realize it, but you can buy certain fair traded products at many supermarkets and superstores. We get ours from two sources, one is Costco or, starting today, we will have Fair Trade coffee available here at Ridge for sale. We are not making a profit off of the coffee, we are simply providing a service to you. I bought some fair traded coffee a couple of weeks ago at Jewel, so I know that it is available locally.

If you want to find out more about the Equal Exchange, go to the table that has the fair trade coffee (and chocolate) available and pick up a brochure.

Next week Jeff is going to conclude this series with more suggestions on how you can get involved in bringing God's justice to the world.

But you can get started today, opening up that first fence and being to look at the inequities that exist all around us.