

Date: August 10, 2025 (Pentecost 9)

1. Texts: Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Ps. 50:1-8, 23-24; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40.
2. Subject: living faithfully.
3. Topic: justice and compassion as necessary.
4. Aim: correct and clarify.
5. Proposition: "The person who rejects justice and compassion has rejected God."

LIVING FAITHFULLY

The pressure being exerted by Christian nationalists on the United States is beginning to make itself felt in Canada. Christian nationalism is a heretical combination of right-wing, conservative theology and right-wing, conservative political ideology. Christian nationalism asserts that Christian theology and ethics should control the political processes and governmental statements. Christian nationalism tends to be misogynistic and racist, favouring Caucasian, middle class males. Christian nationalism asserts that Christians have the obligation to purify public life by excluding those who are not Christian and who are not of the correct nationality.

We see parallel pressures in the state of Israel, but exercised within a Jewish context.

But listen to what God says through the prophet Isaiah.

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.¹

God's demands that his people live ethical lives follow statements of his disgust at the empty rituals of the Jewish leadership.

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom!

Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

¹¹ What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?

says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams

¹ Isaiah 1:16-17.

and the fat of fed beasts;
 I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats.
¹² When you come to appear before me, who asked this from
 your hand? Trample my courts no more!
¹³ Bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me.
 New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation—
 I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.
¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates;
 they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.
¹⁵ When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from
 you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen;
 your hands are full of blood.²

God's meaning is clear: his people are to live in justice and compassion. Worship without justice and compassion as its foundation is meaningless and unacceptable to God. In fact, those who live without justice and compassion are nearly excluded from fellowship with God. Those who live without justice and compassion are very close to rejecting God.

These realities are to be applied to all people who consider themselves Jews or Christians. Since Muslims have a subsequent divine revelation through the Quran, they are only required to take this divine demand under advisement and compare it with the demands made in the Quran.

But all Jews and all Christians are required to demonstrate their faith through lives of justice and compassion. Thus, the Christian nationalists who demand the expulsion of immigrants and the public display of the Ten Commandments are excluding themselves from the fellowship with God. God himself will have to judge how close they are to rejecting him.

It will prove helpful if we can explore justice and compassion.

In Canada we tend to view justice as a legal issue, closely related to punishing criminals. "Justice" is often interpreted as revenge and retribution, as

² Isaiah 1:10-15.

delivering the penalty for a crime. That's not really what is meant when the Bible speaks about justice.

In the Bible "justice" is much more about the fair and equitable treatment of people, especially the poor and disadvantaged. It's not about treating everyone the same, because everyone's circumstances are not the same. Justice is about treating people with dignity so that they might experience the same level of grace that other people enjoy. In the Bible, justice is not about the victim getting revenge. Justice is about the people in power treating all people fairly and justly, equal to the treatment the privileged receive.

Imagine three boys, looking over a fence at a baseball game, for which they can't afford tickets. One boy is tall and can easily see over the fence. One is a little shorter and he can almost see everything if he stands on his toes. The third is so short, that he can't even reach the top of the fence. To treat them equally, would be to give the same size box to stand on. To treat them justly, would be to give the first no box, the second a smaller box and the third a taller box so that their eyes are all at the same level.

God expects his people to live in justice.

But he also expects us to live with compassion.

Compassion is necessarily linked with justice. Justice requires that we treat others with fairness, considering their circumstances. Equal treatment is not just treatment, for it measures everyone by one unjust standard. Justice demands that we know the full story behind someone's life. Compassion demands that we feel empathy and put God's love into action. Compassion is identifying with someone else's circumstances so that we might be better able to serve them without patronizing them. Compassion preserves dignity in the face of need. Compassion is love in action as one person comprehends the depth of need in the other and seeks to address it in ways that improve that person's existence.

Imagine someone struggling with depression to the extent that they aren't really caring for themselves very well. Compassion is putting your phone

number into their contact list and marking it as a “favourite” so that they only have to tap twice to reach you. Then you ask them if they would appreciate a bit of support with cooking and cleaning.

Compassion is appearing unexpectedly to take an elderly person out for coffee because they no longer have the ability to choose to interact with others.

Compassion is listening without judgment when someone is struggling with revealing something about themselves.

God expects his people to live with compassion. God expects his people to live in justice. God is unequivocal in these expectations. Those people who reject justice and compassion are rejecting God’s divine command. God himself will determine how deeply such rejection goes.

It is, I think, a matter of salvation.

The Christian nationalists, armed with their arrogance and prejudice and protected by the political climate in the U.S., do not realize this.

We Canadian Christians must realize the impact of justice and compassion in our Churches and on our politics. We cannot impose our values on society, but we each can live them out in the public sphere. We can and should mark ourselves as different, by proclaiming justice and compassion for all. To be faithful to God, to live faithfully, is to live in justice and with compassion for all—especially for the disadvantaged, the poor and the refugee. It is then that we will be as Christ to our world and so prove ourselves to be his disciples.

AMEN.