

August 23, 2026

Paul Purdue preaching

Fill in the blank, “God is _____”. How do you describe God? Did you fill in the blank with First John 4:16 “*God is love*”?

You might have written: God is awesome, God is holy, God is transcendent, mysterious, mighty, merciful, forgiving, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, forgiving, creating, renewing, healing or “God is just”.

This morning we promised Penelope and each other that “*we will resist injustice, evil and oppression*”, strive to build “*a community of love and forgiveness*”, and “*serve as Christ’s representatives in the world*”. Our baptismal vows call us into the work of justice.

Justice may be the organizing principle of the Hebrew Bible. At times the Gospels describe the entire Hebrew Bible with one name: “Moses!” (Mark 10) From leading the people from slavery to giving us the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, Moses’ life revolves around justice.

Exodus’s liberation story begins with two Hebrew midwives, Shiprah and Puah, resisting evil, injustice and oppression- not only refusing to uphold Pharaoh’s unjust laws but lying when questioned by the king. Moses’ family resisted Pharaoh’s oppression, concealing a newborn Moses from Pharaoh’s genocide. When they could no longer hide the beautiful child, they made a Moses Basket, a tiny little boat, and floated Moses right into Pharaoh’s daughter’s heart: a clever desperate kind of resistance. As a young man with dual identities, child of the oppressed and child of the oppressor, Moses’ violent defense of a Hebrew slave leads him to flee Egypt.

After a long sojourn in Midian, God calls Moses from the Burning Bush... “*I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them... Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.*” *(Exodus 3) Moses returns to face Pharaoh and a power struggle begins. Moses and God shut down Egypt with plagues that so disrupt Egyptian commerce that Pharaoh begs Moses to leave Egypt. They take reparations for stolen wages, indeed “*they plunder*” their Egyptian oppressors on the way out. (Exodus 12)

If we wrote a script we might describe the work of Justice as complete when the people pass through the Red Sea into freedom. Surely we could roll the credit and celebrate that the work of Justice was done when Moses gave us the 10 Commandments? But we know, the work of justice fills the Bible, even when David is on the throne. The work of justice continues today.

Deuteronomy 10 describes God's character like this "*The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*" Feel that personalization... you were strangers... remember to be just.

Our Jewish siblings organize their year around the Exodus story. In the festival of Pesach (Passover) the people relive the Exodus story. They eat bitter herbs at the Seder meal to remember the bitterness of slavery even as they celebrate freedom. Even when you live in sweetness, never forget the bitter taste of oppression. Never become oppressors. Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks, celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The people dwell in little outdoor huts during Sukkot: The Feast of Tabernacles, a week-long harvest festival remembering farm workers living in the fields and how the nation lived in tents as they wandered around the wilderness for 40 years without a homeland.

As Christians, I wonder how we might look at strangers, neighbors and enemies if during Advent we sleep in barns like the Holy Family? Would we be more open and work harder for affordable housing if during December we felt the coldness of "*no room in the inn*"? What if we packed up all our possessions in mid-January and sought refuge in "Egypt" in solidarity with Mary, Joseph and a two year old Jesus who became refugees due to an evil king in Jerusalem? Would we see refugees with greater compassion?

After we wave our palm branches singing Hosanna beginning Holy Week, what if we flipped over the tables of the money changers every year? What if we wept over our Capitals each year? What if after communion we joined Jesus praying in a garden confessing "*my soul is overwhelmed to the point of death, keep watch with me*". What if our Holy Thursday prayers were disrupted by soldiers arriving with torches and spears? What if we remembered Jesus' midnight trial, the judicial misconduct, the false witnesses, the judge washing his hands of justice, the crowds shouting "crucify him", the police brutality, and the state-sponsored killing? What if we understood that

God endured our human injustice, oppression and evil? Would Easter become more powerful, life-giving and healing?

Yolanda Pierce weaves the hymn "*Were You There When They Crucified My Lord*" into places of injustice. "*Oh, oh, oh o --sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble-- tremble*" . *I wonder whether we have lost our ability to tremble to be deeply affected in the face of injustice. I wonder whether we no longer tremble in the presence of a holy God, who requires us to do the work of Justice. In our comfort and ease, we no longer tremble at the pain, passion and sacrifice of Calvary.*" (In the Grandmother's House)
What if we saw injustice in the world through the eyes of our Crucified Lord, who somehow spoke forgiveness from the cross?

In Christmas and Holy Week Jesus endures injustice, evil and oppression, but what about his life. Jesus' mission, the way of the Kin-dom, is about taking care of people: ending injustice, oppression and evil and bringing justice, human rights, and goodness .

Matthew 4 tells us *Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.* Jesus lived a life that embraced and lifted people up,

In Luke 4, Jesus describes our work of justice like this

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because God has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*
Then Jesus began to say to them, "Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your presence."

The work of Justice is systemic, big and broad, flipping over tables outside Herod's palace or confronting Pharaoh with emails every week until he "lets my people go!" However, the work of justice is also restorative, personal, healing and often transmitted by one act of justice, healing, or inclusion at a time. *"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."* (Matthew 25)

Years after her grandson got out of jail, a grandmother told me how she was not sure she would have made it, if I had not been sitting next to her when her grandson came into the court room in leg irons and an orange jump suit. I said nothing, we wept together and her grandson did not walk out a free person that day. Yet, somehow someone being present felt it changed everything. *"You visited me"*.

A dear friend shared how in the depth of their depression, they read the back of a T-shirt in the grocery checkout line, *"The World is a better place because of You"* and they found hope to hang on. *"You welcomed me"* is an act of restorative justice. Yolanda Peirce tells us we stand up for justice, when we are present, we say *"we were there, when they crucified our Lord"* and we learned something from being there. *"To be present is to be wherever there is need. To be present is to be where people are suffering. To be present is to sit with those who grieve; it is to offer no cliques of comfort but simply the presence of your love"* What if we viewed suffering through the eyes of our Crucified Lord?

Do not underestimate how powerful your loving presence is in bringing about justice, liberation, healing and goodness. Jesus went about healing people with his presence, he ate with people, listened, welcomed and healed. That healing presence is a work of justice as much as leading the Palm Sunday protest. Let us bring healing into the world by showing up with love, marching, writing, taking part in Room in The Inn, the Hero Closest, working at Ebenezer, Brighter Days, teaching Sunday school, and other little acts of justice and compassion. Indeed, Jesus tells us we will encounter the Holy as we feed someone, welcome someone, clothe someone, comfort someone, visit someone, and march with someone. Indeed, we may even find Jesus is present with us as we do the work of justice, healing and love. amen