

Editorial: Is a guilty verdict justice, a miscarriage or something else?

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Derek Chauvin was convicted of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in the death—the killing—of George Floyd. Was justice served? Was it a miscarriage of justice? Or was it something else?

I watched the conclusion of Chauvin’s murder trial Tuesday afternoon with a mixture of thoughts and feelings. That’s the luxury of being a spectator.

But justice isn’t a spectator sport. Thus the gravity we have sensed in the months leading up to what took mere seconds to read.

The above questions are sweeping and assume categorical answers—yes or no. If the verdicts were just, they were just for everyone. If they were unjust, they were unjust for everyone. There’s no mixture of outcomes.

We might also assume categorical answers elicit categorical responses. Justice ought to be met with rejoicing, shouldn’t it? Injustice ought to be met with grief and anger, shouldn’t it? But I didn’t experience a categorical response, and I wasn’t alone.

What ‘something else’ might be

Shortly after I watched the verdicts read and Chauvin remanded into the custody of Hennepin County, I received a text from a friend. We ended up talking by phone for a while. He is a pastor with particular interest in Chauvin’s trial. He has been profiled and knows many others with the same

experience.

As we talked about trying to absorb the guilty verdicts, he said something that put words to my thoughts and feelings. He described justice as making mud with drops of water. Every drop matters, and every drop is needed, but many will evaporate before the work is finished.

He saw justice, but he wasn't rejoicing, exactly.

Be the Bridge described the verdict in a Twitter post: "[This is accountability](#). This is not complete justice but it is a necessary part of the pathway that leads us there."

It would be hard to describe Be the Bridge's statement as rejoicing, even though the organization sees at least a measure of justice in the verdicts.

U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Dallas) communicated a similar conclusion, [tweeting](#): "This verdict is not justice—it's accountability."

Accountability

Accountability very often seems like a drop of water when you're trying to make mud. With accountability, the sun keeps shining, the wind keeps blowing, the plants and animals go about their business as if nothing happened—just like it all did Tuesday afternoon, as if the natural world couldn't care less about human affairs.

Our longing for justice envisions re-creation, redemption, new heavens and a new earth. The world, not just the people, is supposed to take notice and join in the celebration of justice with a cacophony of creation.

Maybe a bird nodded its head Tuesday afternoon.

Accountability is a component of justice. Individuals can and need to be

held accountable. Chauvin's [willingness to plead guilty](#) to third-degree murder before his trial signals his own understanding of accountability.

But accountability is not the totality of justice, which leaves us wondering: Was justice served? Was it a miscarriage of justice? Or was it something else?

Scope of justice

Justice requires more than a determination of guilt or innocence. The problem is too deep for justice to be served with a single verdict, or even a set of three verdicts.

In the immediate context, Chauvin and Floyd's encounter on a Minneapolis street May 25, 2020, was preceded by a long history of injustice, including racism. While that history is personal and individual to each man, it's not only personal and individual. It is familial, collegial, communal, national.

Not only was history involved, but that history has continued to play out in the months following Floyd's death, as others—[Daunte Wright](#) and [Caron Nazario](#) among them—have suffered its consequences, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

The scope of injustice preceding George Floyd's death under Derek Chauvin's knee involves all of us. We may not be individually responsible for the specific actions outside Cup Foods on May 25, 2020, but we are individually responsible for the ways we each have formed other people through our words and actions.

All of this is the analytical luxury of a spectator. Justice is not a spectator sport, and accountability is not only for other people. We all will be held accountable for the things we have done. This is a repeated promise of Scripture that makes our blood run cold.

Whatever the verdict is—justice, miscarriage or something else—we must do more than analyze it.

God's requirement

God's requirement of us is not to *analyze* justice; it is to *do* justice ([Micah 6:8](#)). And in our doing justice, we are to walk humbly with our God.

To do justice and to walk humbly with God reminds me of my friend's description of justice being like making mud with drops of water.

There is a measure of justice in Chauvin's conviction; he is being held accountable, not only for what he did, but also for what he failed to do to protect Floyd's life. In this way, there is some relief for Floyd's family and loved ones.

There also is a miscarriage of justice in that no outcome of that trial could or will restore Floyd's life. Nor will it make right all past injustice or prevent all future injustice. The verdicts are, after all, drops of water and not themselves the sea.

Yes, there is some justice, and there is a lack of justice. And there is something else.

There is God calling us to get our hands dirty in the humble mud of justice.

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