

Voices: ‘Justice looks like ...’: A special series on justice

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Justice is simultaneously universal and personal. Ask 100 people what justice looks like, and you will receive 100 unique yet overlapping answers.

“Justice looks like ...”—a special series in the Voices column of the *Baptist Standard*—is an opportunity for followers of Jesus to examine the overlaps and the differences in our views of justice.

Justice is universal

Justice is central to God’s character and God’s interaction with creation. Being stitched into creation, justice will not be ignored or go unmet. Scripture makes that clear numerous times.

As one example, the messianic promise of Isaiah 42 reads: “[My chosen one] will bring justice to the nations. ... In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth” (Isaiah 42:1, 3-4). When creation is unjust, the Creator will make sure justice is accomplished.

As if to prove the point, justice seems to be on everyone’s mind and lips these days. Scroll through your social media feed or the headlines, and you will see appeals for justice everywhere.

Protests, economic concerns, health disparities, racial reconciliation, foreign relations, law enforcement, gender, politics, money, power, health care, education, voting—matters of justice are involved in all of these headline makers. Justice—matters of right and wrong and setting things

right—is of concern to us all.

Justice is personal

Despite our common concern for justice, universal justice is so difficult for us to achieve, in part, because we each have a differing view of it. We come to blows over justice, because we aren't sure what's right for one won't result in what's wrong for us. Even that last sentence can start a fight.

If we are to work toward justice, we must find some common ground. A starting place might be simply to listen to one another—to hear each other out. In “Justice looks like ... ” we will do just that. We will hear from people not like us. We will listen to people from numerous backgrounds and perspectives.

The only parameters given to writers for this series is that they provide their perspective on justice from their unique vantage point, understanding that the undergirding intent of the series is to give voice to numerous perspectives on justice, how justice is involved in many—if not all—areas of life, and how Christians can engage one another and our world in enacting God's justice.

Though the Voices column to this point has featured writers from churches, institutions and organizations affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, “Justice looks like ...” will include some who are not so directly connected to the BGCT.

One article in the series will be published each week to allow readers to give more focused attention to each perspective. In these perspectives, we will hear pain, anger, grief and hope. We need to listen to all of it.

Justice is rooted in God's character and word

One thing writers for this series hold in common is Jesus Christ—who is the physical embodiment of God's perfect justice and the fulfilment of God's law. In seeking to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, these writers ground their understanding of justice in God's character and word.

Timothy Pierce, an associate professor of Christian studies at East Texas Baptist University, surveys the Old Testament conception of justice. He describes Hebrew words related to justice found throughout the Old Testament—from the books of the law, to the wisdom books, to the prophets.

"All discussions of justice and how humanity treats humanity begin, continue and end with the central concept of humanity being created in the 'image of God,'" Pierce writes. "The fact that everyone—male and female—is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) is the basis for ethics and morality throughout the entirety of Scripture."

Pierce's full article will launch the series during the first week of August.

Stephen Reid, a professor of Christian Scriptures at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary, examines justice in the New Testament, seeing in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) a paradigmatic description of God's justice.

"The most compelling metric for justice remains how we have treated the least of these," Reid writes. Our position on a host of issues looks different if we picture Jesus as the one involved in and affected by those issues. "Jesus does not soften the blow for those who miss this metric," he adds.

Reid's full article will appear during the second week of August.

Our common task

We may get nervous about talk of justice. We may feel suspicious, guarded, defensive, overwhelmed.

Understanding that, “Justice looks like ...” will challenge us at times and in ways we don’t want to be challenged.

We can hold that discomfort in common, too, because the more important tie that binds us is Jesus Christ.

And so, I leave you with Paul’s words about our common bond and what it means for us who follow Jesus:

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:2-6, 11-13).

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