

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Accountability and Justice"  
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Proper 28/Restorative Justice

Have you ever had difficulty cleaning your glasses? When your glasses are dirty, the world looks dirty, in fact, worse than that. What is only a minute speck on your glasses becomes a huge smear across the face of your vision. Something you could barely see up close becomes a barrier to your general perception.

Becoming aware of our perceptions is a first step toward become more in touch with objective reality. This is true when we talk about prayer. It is also true when we begin to talk about justice, or almost any subject or representation of reality. The perceiver influences the perception. But lest we get too bogged down in the science of interpretation called hermeneutics, let me put a few practical exercises before you.

How many people enjoy going into hospitals to visit? How many people enjoy going into prisons to visit? How many people enjoy visiting the hospice or palliative care or even extended care facilities?

Each of these places challenges us in areas that are uncomfortable for most human beings. Going to the hospital causes us to confront our own pain and suffering and that of those around us. Going to the prison causes us to confront our own dark side, whether violent, criminal, aggressive, deceptive, manipulative or controlling. Going to the hospice makes us confront our own mortality, and sometimes the same thing happens at the funeral home. We don't like to think about our personal endings, our severe limitations, our inabilities. But they exist nonetheless.

Similarly, when we go to the Waterford or the psychiatric unit, we are confronted the fragility of our own sanity, as we see others on the boundaries of their own. And when we come to the Scriptures, God's goodness and justice bumps into our own.

And we are confronted with a choice to admit what we see, something like admitting that our glasses are dirty, or to not admit it. We've all been given talents and abilities. None of us are without gifts and abilities. But we all have fallen short of what God intends for us in terms of our sense of justice,

our relationship to God and our relationship to others. This is in part why we regularly have a quiet confession of sins. We acknowledge on a weekly basis that we need God's transforming grace and forgiveness to become the people He calls us to be.

This is also why Christians should be very slow in pointing fingers at those who have committed crimes, or who have done regrettable and terrible things. Because we, of all people, should know that we too have done things which are regrettable and terrible. This is why Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount, tells us that holding hatred in our hearts toward others is akin to murder, and sustaining lustful fantasies about others is akin to adultery.

We should know our badness, and the goodness of the Lord in changing us and changing us in an ongoing way as we get to know God better. As we know our badness, we should not be afraid of others' badness. Rather, we look to establish ways to introduce others to the transformative power of the One who knows our badness, yet still loves us, and changes us to the good.

This is restorative justice week, and we have a chance to learn and reflect a bit more on how we might help our neighbours who have committed crimes to be restored to the community. It is also a time to reflect on how we might deal with our own issues to the point where we might identify what's going on inside us as we hear of violent crimes and other abuses of justice on the radio and television and other media. As we identify what is going on inside us, then we can perhaps come to a better place to identify what will help those who have chosen a criminal path, either consciously or unconsciously. It will also allow us to reflect more on the many causes and influences that lead individuals to such choices. Addictions, e.g. substance abuse, often lead to violence and crime.

These in turn cause us to wonder why some people seem to be so easily addicted while others seem to be able to control their urges and behaviours. There are no easy answers here. All human beings have a tendency toward addiction, some addictions being more socially acceptable than others, food addictions, for example.

So as we reflect on the nature, causes and practical interventions necessary to help those who have committed crimes, we also need to reflect on our own human, sinful nature which is also in need of restoration to community with the Holy Trinity.

We too need to be restored to the original intention of friendship and fellowship with our Creator. Once we are sure we have such a relationship with God, living, active, growing, then we can be challenged once again by the Lord to use our gifts, talents and abilities.

Now when the Bible talks about our talents, as Jesus did in Matthew 25, it was not specifically about our gifts and abilities, it was a specific sum of money. In the Classics department at Memorial University this last week, one professor stated that the Roman talent was approximately equal to 6,000 days wages. The talent was not a coin, but a unit of monetary reckoning. It was of a significant value, as you can tell, if you want to think in terms of sixteen years wages.

Whether you think of the talent as a million dollars or something less, you still see the magnitude of what the owner was giving over to the managers. The point of the story is not that they exactly doubled what was given those who received the five million and the two million. It was that they risked what they received and used it to further the owner's purposes. And so we in the church, as stewards of this place and property are encouraged to risk our finances for our ministry. This place is here for ministry. It took faith to buy this field fifty years ago. It took faith to build on the Hall at a time when the first debt I'm sure had not already been retired.

It takes courage for us to give and to increase givings to continue the ministry here. It takes courage to follow the Lord and to risk our lives in God's direction, with creativity, passion and the purpose of the Gospel on our lips and in our lives. What are you doing this season to risk for the Gospel? We've challenged you to give more money here. But more than this, we challenge you to risk learning more about your faith, more about your relationship with Christ, more about what you can do in the community to make a difference, based on this relationship.

The manager who received the million and buried it was scolded and judged. He wasn't scolded for not caring. He was scolded for being so scared and fearful of the owner, that he didn't act sensibly or correctly. He was so worried about the owner's reaction that he chose to act irresponsibly, even irrationally.

So the judgment against the fellow with the one talent, wasn't the fact that he only had a million, rather than two or five. It was mainly about his lack of relationship and misunderstanding of the owner.

It certainly also had something to do with the fact that he chose not to risk in any way the resources given to him. But he chose the deadly option of burying the money. God wants us to choose the lively option of risking our money on ministering to the poor, the needy, the outcast and the addicted. What we give away we will keep. We will not out give the Creator, the Owner (with a capital O). We will not go without, as long as God's people continue to value generosity and ministry.

The key is first being in right relationship with the Owner. Then as we grow in right relationship, we can risk the resources He gives us to multiple God's ways and will in our communities. For this we will be held accountable as Christians. God will ask us: "What did you do to practically make sure the kingdom of God advanced in your community?" Such advancement includes money, but most of all, our hearts and attitudes toward God Himself. From such relationship, come the miracles and advancements which God wants to see our lives. To that end we pray.

Let us pray.