

The justice of God is coming.

But what does that mean, exactly?

Is that good news or bad news?

Should we be delighted or terrified?

...

Maybe both.

In some instances, God's judgment is terrifying.

We can think of the plagues of Egypt,

The fall of Samaria,

Or the destruction of Jerusalem

All of which came upon people

who ignored the warnings God gave in his Word
and kept on doing as they pleased.

Or the curses of John upon the Pharisees and Sadducees who were
resting on their laurels and getting rich on the backs of the poor.

As Mary sings in her song the Magnificat

– for the high and mighty,

God's justice is terrifying and humiliating
because it removes them from power

and renders them equal to everyone else.

But this terrifying justice is not the only kind God brings.

As we know even from TV courtrooms,

when the judge renders a verdict,

it is against one party and *for* the other.

Does the man whose wife kicked him out because he was cheating on her deserve to get his money back for the expensive dress he bought her?

Or does the wife get to keep the dress?

The judge will decide for one of them and against the other.

**The justice of God that brings down the high and mighty
also lifts up the poor and lowly.**

**From standpoint of those who are lifted up,
God's justice is something to delight in,
to give thanks for,
to welcome.**

They are like the people of Israel when they were delivered from the oppressive Egyptians at the Passover.

Or Lazarus, miserable in life but embraced in the bosom of Abraham in eternity.

It is God's justice *for* them – for their life and deliverance from evil.

There are plenty of cries for justice in our world –

--McDonald's employees crying for a raise in minimum wage.

--the poor crying out for affordable health care

--the bullied crying out for an end to their suffering

--the starving crying out for food

But in this world, justice is often a matter of money, connections, and persuasion. It is vulnerable to corruption.

Just ask Jesus.

God's justice is pure righteousness.

- It is incorruptible.
- It cannot be bought.
- It is not persuaded by who someone is
- or eloquent closing arguments.

No amount of legal wrangling or crafty loopholes can thwart it.

God does not judge by appearances or hearsay,

but with righteousness he will judge.

God's justice is rendered according to the truth.

By his just verdict, the wicked shall be destroyed and the poor and meek receive life.

By God's justice, all creation will be restored to harmony so that

- the wolf is no longer at the lamb's throat
- and the leopard no longer preys upon the young goats.

- The cow and bear shall share the field
- And the lions will become vegetarian
- Even an infant playing at the hole of a deadly snake will not be harmed by it.
- Disease will no longer ravage the body and
- Demons will no longer hold the mind captive
- War will cease between people and nations
- **And all will know the Lord God Almighty –who was, who is, and who is to come**

The Lord does all this,

he brings justice -- **by himself suffering injustice and rendering it powerless to keep him dead.**

...

The judgment of God

who is girded with righteousness and faithfulness
and who stands as a signal to the nations,

Is Jesus crucified and risen from the dead!

When we gaze upon him hanging on the cross

and crying out for your forgiveness and mine,

we see God's justice being done

terrifying for Jesus and good news for us to delight in.

To the extent that God's judgment is against us for our sin,

we see it executed with terrifying cruelty upon Jesus.

To the extent that judgment is *for* us in our spiritual poverty and need,
it is granted to us in the wonderful resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

It is Jesus who takes upon himself – in his own body
– the judgment of God upon the world
and who rises from death and hell
to share the life of righteousness
with all who believe in him.

This is why the cross is the central shape of the Christian life.

- Looking at it,
- fingering it,
- making it as a sign on our foreheads and bodies,
- wearing it around our necks,
- having it tattooed on our body,

We are reminded of **who Jesus is** as the Justice of God in our world.

He stands high and lifted up for all to see
and to seek from him the wisdom of the ages.

It is his Word and life that call believers to act for justice and peace in the world, as we promise when we are confirmed.

But such action is not a matter of our political preference, nor is it a question of being a doormat and doing what anybody asks of us.

When we strive for justice and peace in our daily lives, it is God's justice and God's shalom that we seek to embody.

It is the justice of the crucified and risen Jesus that we uphold,
calling the wicked to repentance
and advocating for those faithful who have no voice.

But before we can discern how to embody God's justice in our world, we must receive it.

We wade into the water confessing our sins
so that we might hear God's judgment against our sin
and *for* our life – when the word of forgiveness is spoken.

...

God's justice is coming.

Those who do not know Jesus or who rebel against him in unbelief must be terrified.

But those who know the Crucified and Risen One have nothing to fear and everything to look forward to.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen