

HOMILY FOR JULY 1ST, 2026 / ISAIAH 32 1 – 5, 16 – 18; PSALM 85: 7 – 13; JOHN 15: 12 – 17

The key words of our readings this evening from Isaiah, the Psalms, and John are righteousness, justice and love. They are three words that are often misunderstood and frequently misused. In our time righteousness is rarely uncoupled from self-righteousness to describe an insufferable egomaniac; justice is almost exclusively focused on guilty or not guilty; while love can be simply a hyperbolic expression of something as little as a minor preference – *I love cardamon ice cream or I love dill pickles*. So what do these three words really mean in a biblical context.

Righteousness is a question of a moral compass. Are our hearts and minds aligned with what is right – without regard to convenience, reward, or ego. It is a question of character. It is a question of ensuring as much as one can that one is in right relationship with God and neighbour. Do we acknowledge and live out our dependence on God's grace together with our obligation of love of neighbour? Do we recognize that our neighbours, near and far, are as much children of God as we are, and that we are bound together in mutual dependence on that grace. God may work through us to bring that grace to our neighbours; and God may work through our neighbours to bring that grace of God to us.

Justice does, indeed, have a role in the criminal courts but it is so very much more. Justice is righteousness put into action. It is about correcting unrighteousness in all the forms it can come. Yes, if some one has stolen or murdered, justice needs to restore right relationship. But we have many forms of injustice that do not involve the Criminal Code. If I use resources in such way that others are deprived, if I use power to ensure my advantage at the expense of others; if I show little or no care for the needs of my neighbours, I am an unjust person who lacks righteousness. Most importantly I am unequipped to be an instrument of God's grace. Justice will be served if I can return to right relationship with God and neighbour.

Our reading from Isaiah prophesies a king who will reign in righteousness, while princes will rule in justice. In other words, righteousness will be the ethos of the country while those who govern the country will express that righteousness in just laws, just actions, and in building just relationships. The country will mirror the Kingdom of God for God continually reigns in righteousness. The last verse in our reading says it all *The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness quietness and trust forever*. If you think of all the tensions in our lives individually and collectively, I think you will discover they arise out of misalignment of relationships at one level or another.

I said there were three words that need to be understood in a biblical context. Love is that third word. It is the most problematic of the three because it is the word used over the vastest range of human experience from the most trivial to the most profound. The love that Jesus is asking of us in our Gospel reading this evening is the love that will make sure justice will be done in the world. *No one has greater love than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends*. For most of us past 60, that

line has been inextricably connected to Remembrance Day services and sacrifice of life in war. But the laying down of one's life does not necessarily mean dying. It ultimately means true self-giving to others. But it is not self-giving to the point of emptiness or eradication it is self-giving to fulfillment as a disciple of Christ and to being as fully human as it is possible to be. *...I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.* It is a love with divine qualities that lead us towards being a disciple of Christ, approaching the discipleship that Christ himself had with the father. If we can achieve genuine self-giving, it equips us to recognize and share and affirm the self-giving of others. A network of people who are self-giving is how the Kingdom of God will be built on this earth. That is why Jesus becomes ready to call us friends.

So what does righteousness, justice, and love mean on the 159th anniversary of the confederation that created the Dominion of Canada. In section 91 of the British North America Act, now known as the Constitution Act (1867), in describing the powers of Parliament the following is said: *It shall be lawful for the Queen, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate and House of Commons, to make Laws for the Peace, Order, and Good Government of Canada....* Over the last 159 years the terms Peace, Order, and Good Government, often abbreviated to POGG, have come to be used as one method of distinguishing Canada from other countries most notably the United States with its founding ethos of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” and France with its ethos of “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*”. Yes, POGG can seem rather unromantic, bureaucratic, and soulless. But we should not lose sight of the great difference between ours and theirs. Theirs is about the individual; ours is about the collective. Remember the line from Isaiah, *the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.* POGG is a sober way of saying Parliament will ensure right relationship in Canada and, therefore, justice can be possible. Peace, quietness, and trust have played a role in much of Canadian history. Have they always been paramount, absolutely not. We are human; we are not perfect. We are entirely susceptible to forgetting important values from our history. But why do we have unemployment insurance, social welfare, Medicare, Old Age Security, the Canada Pension plan? Because we have never entirely lost sight of the fact that we were created to be neighbours and our country is the neighbourhood.

Countries do not last without serious commitment and hard work. We live in a world where democracy is under threat in so many ways and so many places. Authoritarians are emerging in ways we haven't seen since the 1930's. Democracy is still quite healthy in Canada, but we are buffeted in by what is happening elsewhere. We know that justice is a long way from being perfectly realized in Canada, for the young, for indigenous people, people of colour, the poor, but we have a solid foundation on which to build and rebuild and rebuild again, if we will commit ourselves to the task. On this the 159th anniversary of the creation of Canada, let us dedicate ourselves to perfecting our country ever mindful that God's grace will support us if we love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. Amen