

Today we continue with this series of sermons on our core Presbyterian values. Please read aloud from your bulletin and on screen the first five of these great ends or purposes of the church. (Read it.)

The Great Ends of the Church are:

The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind.

The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God.

The maintenance of divine worship.

The preservation of the truth.

The promotion of social righteousness.¹

Next week we'll cover: The exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world.

The prophet Amos gives us the words of our calling: "... let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Our God who is a God of justice and righteousness seeks that we, too, desire justice and righteousness. God desires that we let justice and righteousness flow, to flow like water. Water has a force, doesn't it. If you don't believe me, let's go down to the South Platte River after worship, and try to dam up the water. It's not a big river, but even a modest amount of water has a big force.

Ours is a faith that is personal but not private. And what I mean is that the faith you and I hold in the interior is meant to be lived on the exterior. The inward yearnings and strivings of the soul will find outward expression.

We Presbyterian Christians have a long history of activity in society working for justice and righteousness to take shape in the here and now. We have planted hospitals to raise the level of health in communities. We have planted schools, with the belief that if a person can read she can also read the Bible and come to know Jesus. One of the very first colleges in this nation was Presbyterian, known then as Log College, better known today as Princeton. In the 19th century, Presbyterians took a stand against slavery. Presbyterians were among those advocating early for women's rights in voting and women's ordination in church life. The late Mary Waddell was the first woman elder here, ordained in 1966. Someone had to pave the way, and Mary did it. More recently, Presbyterians have taken a stand on the full participation in church life of gay and lesbian members, though not every Presbyterian believes the same way on that issue, of course.

¹ From Book of Order, F-1.0304

Here in Brighton, in the early 1970's, the mission committee of this church saw a need for senior residential housing. There comes a time later in life, so often, when it isn't good for a person to be in their own home. Health and safety can become issues. Thus, Inglenook was born: a place where seniors can reside, where their health and safety aren't primary issues: affordable, accessible housing. Also around the same time, the mission committee of this church saw a need to provide emergency help in the community. They formed a group called FISH to be a benevolent presence in Brighton. It was the vision of the late Penny Pennock that the families of the community be served not only through a Children's Center but also a Ministry of Care, which is now called the Pennock Center for Counseling. Significant endowments were provided to establish these ministries for the good of the community, which to this day serve the whole community, including many who are low-income.

*But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Ten years ago I studied in San Francisco, at San Anselmo, where our own Jenna Meyers is now studying. Some of us were talking about social righteousness, and someone said "In a rising tide all boats rise." Then an African American pastor from Oakland said, "That's assuming that everybody has a boat, and that no boats have holes."

In the prophecy of Amos, certain overtly religious acts were criticized if not backed up with more. The words of God through Amos:

*"I hate, I despise your **festivals**,
and I take no delight in your **solemn assemblies**.
Even though you offer me your **burnt-offerings** and **grain-offerings**,
I will not accept them;
and the **offerings** of well-being of your **fatted animals**
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your **songs** ..."*

Religious festivals, assemblies, offerings and songs ring hollow if the needs of society go lacking and God's people remain unconcerned. The application for today seems to be that we need to be careful believing our coming to church one hour a week satisfies all God's requirements for us. It doesn't. Faith isn't about: "Jesus has saved me. I receive the gift of salvation. I'm going to heaven. That's all I needed to worry about." The truth is the God of Amos is the same God who

calls us to go out from this place of worship equipped with faith to serve the community.

As you know, I'm from Arizona now. Down along the U.S. and Mexican border, near Douglas and other places, there's a group placing fresh water stations at locations frequented by border crossers. How are we supposed to feel about that? I ask: Is it a crime to give someone who is thirsty a drink? Isn't that what Jesus teaches us to do, literally? On the other hand, is placing a fresh water station along the border for use by desert crossers just enabling illegal behavior? Isn't it wrong to promote or encourage illegal behavior?

Justice and righteousness issues are not always easy to discuss and unravel. But historically, as Presbyterians, our involvement in these issues runs deep.

Our church forefather John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland saw a real link between faith and action.² Back in the 16th century, he advocated for cooking stoves in the home and a sanitary sewer system in the city. He spoke out against unfair business practices and encouraged public education. There was a time when there was no public education as we think of it. How a person received an education was spotty. For John Calvin, to believe necessitated taking action on that belief in such a way that the world somehow, measurably, became a better place.

This is not so far from us as may appear. Here in the United States, our Pledge of Allegiance ends in this way, 'One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty **and justice for all.**' Justice for all.

*But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Ours is a faith that is personal but not private. You may be able to say with me that "Jesus Christ is my personal savior." But it doesn't stop there, does it? It's good to state your faith, but a faith that is personal and not private seeks to make a difference, first, in our own residence and our own family and our own church. And then outward.

² Joseph Small, in a piece about the Great Ends of the Church, writes that² "the church in Geneva (at the heart of the Protestant reformation of the church in 16th century Europe) ...provided refugee relief and resettlement; sought jobs for the unemployed; encouraged public education; worked to provide health care for all. ... Calvin spoke out vigorously against unfair business practices and public policies that ignored the needs of the poor." In Geneva, Calvin advocated for economical cooking stoves for the poor (and) a sanitary sewer system throughout the city."

A faith that is personal but not private will lift the eyes beyond the self and look out onto the world with the eyes of faith, and seek to make a difference.

A faith that is personal but not private will somehow see with Christ's own vision, and by God's grace, see what's really out there, and respond in love and compassion.

A faith that is personal but not private will somehow work for the good, not so much as we see the good, but as God has declared the good of all, for the well-being of all, with the characteristics of justice and righteousness held in prominence.

Let us fulfill this call, as God enables us. Let us live out this kind of faith, as God empowers us, for the good of all, and for the glory of God.