

**A Heavenly Justice for a Profane World**  
**based on Romans 1:14-23, David Jahnke, 5/7/17**

So Paul starts today with an astonishing claim and great news that all human beings have known God. One thing he meant was that everybody must know there is a Creator since there is a creation. When I was young, this seemed obvious to me. Things do not just happen. Things have a cause and there must have been a first cause; in other words God.

I am not sure this argument works very well for many people these days. When I said the above argument to an agnostic friend in college, he responded by saying that I am just pushing chance back to God; because either creation just happened and exists or else God just happened and exists. I did not think about it at the time but the response to that is that God did not have a beginning whereas the universe did.

That brings us to a question I asked my professor, “What was God doing before He created everything?” The professor responded with a smile on his face that this was a very old question answered by a theologian in the middle ages like this, “You had better hope that God was not busy making Hell for people who ask questions like that!”

He said this tongue-in-cheek. And, of course, there is nothing wrong with these, or any other theological questions. They are rooted in and lead to wondering and deeper understanding about really important things.

I have been wondering about something for more than a year and not just privately so you have had to bear with this in my preaching...; and I thank you for that! I keep wondering where our sense of right and wrong and good and bad and truth and falsehood and love and peace come from, if not from God?

This is the second and I think even more compelling part of Paul’s argument. He says that God’s invisible nature is known by all. God’s Law of love is written on human hearts; God’s truth is written upon our minds; his goodness and justice are written upon our souls. God has imprinted himself upon all human beings and that is such good news. We have all these points of connection and salvation that cross all cultures and worldviews.

But because we all know God through these invisible, intangible, wonderful things that surround and call to us every day, we have no excuse when it comes to ignoring them. But that is so easy because our fallen world drives these realities from our consciousness. We get broken down by sin and weighed down by suffering and death. So far too many gradually give up on God and his heavenly powers and principalities.

Paul says we replace the glory of God's Kingdom with the stuff of this world. We make idols of men and animals and worship them which represents giving ourselves over to profane animal instincts. We believe that resources are scarce and fight to get as much as possible. We pursue greed and promiscuity after making idols of the powerful alpha male and glamorous omega female, both of which are a profound distortion of humanity. And others around us-- especially those who are not a part of our "tribe"-- which might be our nation, race, religion, class or some combination of these-- our animal self sees these others as a threat rather than a gift and we doubt and accuse and curse them instead of trusting, receiving and blessing them.

Now I want to tell you about something disturbing that happened at a recent youth baseball game. At the first game of the year, three of the players, all of them new to the team, sat on the bench for three or four innings while many players did not sit out at all. I was really mad about this; and I think this anger came from God. Because Paul said that God's anger is revealed against all injustice and wickedness. And God gives strong warnings about hurting his little ones, which is exactly what this coach did. And when we told the coach that this was discouraging and unfair to the kids and just plain wrong, maybe we did not reveal enough anger. Because he just shrugged us off.

Now I really hope, however, that we planted some seeds of justice in him which God's Spirit can water in his conscience and blossom in repentance and fruit-bearing. Because this guy has tremendous gifts for coaching! And the purpose of God's anger and justice bearing down on us and working through us is not to condemn or hurt others but to keep them from hurting themselves and others; speaking hard truths is about turning people back to paths of righteousness.

From a somewhat minor thing that happened over the last week to a rather major one. In the last year, young people who did not want or need insurance and did not care for penalties-- and middle-class folks hurt by rising premiums rose up and expressed their anger which led to change. But now millions of poor will likely be hurt by \$880 billion dollars in cuts to Medicaid. That just does not sit right with me. And I will let my senator know that God cares for all and wants health for all and will judge smart powerful leaders according to their deeds. Now God also wants us all to contribute to our own and others' health through our work, our production and consumption and giving. There has got to be a way forward.

I was listening on Friday night to a conservative congressman talk about carbon emission reductions through market-based carbon credits. And this guy was so bright and well-spoken and caring. And, in general, that is the case for our national politicians, believe it or not! They are no more or less self-serving than anyone else. So why can't we figure these big things out?

I don't have the answers. But I think I know the root of them. The problem is not an intellectual one. It is a spiritual one. We have exchanged the glory of God for a profane world. And that's no surprise because glory only comes by way of the cross. The glory of Jesus' resurrection could only come by way of crucifixion and new life only comes to the world by way of sacrifice which is really hard for everyone.

Even Paul struggled with this. He confessed in Romans 7 that he often times does not do what he should and does what he should not. And at these times, he clung to the saving sacrifice of Christ who had and would rescue him and the world.

So keep your eyes on Jesus. Remember that His power to redeem is much greater than our power to mess up. Remember that he is with you and pay attention to his invisible nature and call. Rejoice daily in his presence that wants to fill you with peace, truth, love, beauty and mercy. And keep pressing forward in the Way of the cross, even though sacrifice is so hard. Do it for the sake of growing yourself and the world around you in the salvation of God.