

Romans
The Exchange
Sunday March 3, 2019
Courage Church

scriptures: Romans 1:28-32, 2:1-5, Romans 1:18, Isaiah 61:1-4, Luke 4:18-22, Deuteronomy 6:4, Genesis 1

So, again this morning, I want to read for us the first part of Romans 1:18, and then in a few minutes we will move down to verse 28 and focus there.

Romans 1:18 says "the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness..."

that is how this whole section starts, and so when we introduced this section, we focused there, on the first of these three paragraphs, and we learned that nothing starts with sin... it doesn't start with action.

IT ALWAYS BEGINS WITH UNGODLINESS. Finding another way to live your life dependent on something that is different than God.

The world looks a lot different than the way it did back then... it is packaged in a TOTALLY different way, but at the end of the day, ungodliness is just as present in our world, reeking just as much destruction as it did in theirs.

We talked through the process a couple of weeks ago, as to how a person gives up truth for a lie.

and how what begins with your eye, makes its way to your mind, and then lodges in your heart... the problem with that, is according to the prophet Jeremiah, the heart is deceitful above all else... so if we give in to the notion that we should "follow our heart" - the odds are, we will be following a lie.

So if we focus on sin, and even on the individual sins that are mentioned in the passage that follows in verses 26-27, we will ultimately just be feeding the same lie in a different package. The root has to be worked out before you can go after the fruit of it.

The root of ALL sin is ungodliness. Sin is merely a result of our attempts to do life without God.

The last three weeks, one statement that really seems to sum up what is going on would be something we said three weeks ago:

Our worlds collapse when we REMOVE GOD FROM THEM.

That is ungodliness... it is living a life that is void of God... it is allowing parts of our lives to be void of God.

But the reason that I keep reading Romans 1:18 every week, even though we expound on it in different ways with the later things that Paul says, is because Paul summarizes the problem using two words... ungodliness, and unrighteousness.

I think we have spent plenty of time on ungodliness by now, but today really deals with that second word... unrighteousness. A better translation for this word would be: injustice. The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against injustice. It is the word: *adikia* (odd-a-key-a) - and the word actually means "the injustice of a judge"

Its when a case is clear and yet the judge is so corrupt that he rules on the side of the wicked. When there is a way in which he can make things right... he still doesn't.

Applied to our world... when we have the ability... the opportunity to bring Jesus to a situation... to practically step in and make a difference, and yet we do not do it.

When we look at the Bible, particularly the words of Jesus (which we will take some time to look at next week) - when it comes to issues of judgment, some of the harshest punishments seems to be reserved for the people who actively practice injustice in our world.

People who contribute directly to it, and people who contribute INDIRECTLY to it by their silence.

By the times that they walk past a need that is well within their ability to meet and yet they do nothing... which of course we all have been guilty of...

and I am a grace person.

I believe that the blood of Jesus covers all of this... but I also believe that we must not make a habit of doing nothing. We must not make a habit of living idle lives in the midst of a broken world that is depending on us.

The Gospel exists to not only rescue us, but to transform us INTO RESCUERS.

But what Paul directly speaks to here in these last verses of chapter 1 is injustice. You will notice that the first thing he says is that "they were filled with ALL MANNER OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS - again... ALL MANNER OF INJUSTICE.

Lets look at this. We will begin in verse 28 and read to the end of chapter 1, then we will read the first five verses of chapter 2, so we will go one verse farther than we went last week. And I will show you why in a little while.

But this is the LAST time in this series that we will focus on chapter one. We will be fully in chapter two next week, and this thing will start to move quite a bit faster.

Romans 1:28-32, 2:1-5

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve

to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

God's Righteous Judgment

2 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

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I am a bit of a mystic. Dawn is the same way, it is just who we are...

And the concept that I am going to share with you today is certainly shaped by the way that I view the world...

When we look at creation, we see God. When we look to the stars, we see God.

When I look at a garden, or even a fire... I see God. When I watch the sunrise bringing us a new day, it reminds me of the Gospel, and the glory that is new creation... God making all things new in our world... the patterns that hold life together.

I remember the day after Hurricane Sandy... when it hit our family lived in Rockaway Beach, two houses from the Ocean and the entire town was built on a Peninsula and the whole thing was destroyed by this storm.

And I remember walking down to the boardwalk that had been totally ripped apart the day after the storm, and looking out at the destruction, yet seeing the sun rising over the ruins, and I saw God.

Dawn took this picture.

And to me, every part of this thing screams HOPE. It is an image not of what has happened, but what will happen... not of what yesterday destroyed, but of what tomorrow will bring.

I don't always see through that lens... but I want to. I want to always see God in the broken places... When I see the ashes, I want my eye to hook to the beautiful thing that God is going to do out of this.

I want to see how He is working even when it seems like the world IS NOT WORKING.

And to explain to you the way that I view this passage and the reason for it, we need to look a little further into the Hebrew concept of *echad*. We introduced it last week and we will dive into it much more today. The word means "unity in the midst of diversity" or "compounded unity" - but its translated as "one." - Not "one" as in the first number, but one as in "plural - multiple things coming together"

It is used to describe God in the SHEMA... hear oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE. The Lord is echad. He is one... but He is more than one... He is several diverse things that have come together, and that is what makes Him God, and that is one of the things that makes Him a being that is beyond our comprehension.

But one image that we get that we CAN comprehend (at least to a degree), in which that same principle, the principle of *echad* is used, is marriage. Now, Paul calls it a mystery, so even marriage we can only comprehend to a degree...

but we talked about that last week, how when a man and a woman come together, their distinct differences coming together create a reflection of God that the world is void of without marriage.

So it matters a great deal that we have people who embrace marriage and seek to allow it to be an image of something that points people to Jesus.

But there is another image that we get of *echad* besides just marriage, and that is the church. The body of Christ, in which all of us distinct people bring something to the table that nobody else can bring, and when we come together, we create something that only works because of all the people who are a part of it.

Jesus, in John 17 gives us what is known as "the High Priestly Prayer" - and in it He says that His prayer for the people of God... the church, is that they would be one, just like He and the Father are one. So when people look at the church, and they see us getting along, and working together and loving each other and from there going out and loving the world, that will be a powerful enough testimony that they would say "I want what they have... if it is Jesus, then give me Jesus."

And the way this is described in Hebrew is *echad*. Its the only way to describe God being multiple yet one...

And according to the rabbis, "echad" is more than just a unity...

In Jane Owens commentary on Genesis (Torah Simply Spoken) she describes "echad" as "one as adhering together like glue without showing any evidence of joining" (page 21) - you don't see it, but it's holding everything together.

in fact, some rabbi's have taken that further to describe *echad* as the glue that holds EVERYTHING together. Now, that may sound extreme, and you may say "NO!! It is God who holds the world together" - absolutely, but what is the method by which He does it? *echad*.

In the beginning, God creates heaven and earth.

He created two great lights... (Genesis 1:16) - one to rule the day, and one to rule the night.

morning and evening.

Every day we wake up to the sun, and later the sun goes down yet we still have a light from the moon. And every morning that sun rises again. Day and night are two opposite things that work together to create life, and they hold the entire world together... take away the sun, and we all have about 8 minutes to live. Take away the moon, and all the balance of the earth, the tide, everything changes... we don't know for sure what would happen but we all know it wouldn't be good.

Cheryl sent me a picture this week of a tree, and with it was the explanation: we breathe in what the trees breathe out, and the trees breathe in what we breathe out.

Life works together to keep life going. Different things that are all needed to give us the things that we all need. Most of you are familiar with the Dr. Seuss book the Lorax - In one of the traveling messages we do sometimes I talk about this book and mention the house on Trumbull that themed their entire house around this story.

In "the Lorax" - when the once-ler cuts down all the trees to make his kneeds, that was his crime... he was the villain, because for his own monetary gain he robbed the community of the very thing that gave it life and the affect was catastrophic... and in hindsight he realizes "what it cost the community was not worth what I gained for a moment."

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Earth and sea... Why do you think that people are so concerned with pollution? with what we dump into the Ocean? Because its the source of life, and we only get one earth... its a force that you and I know in the core of who we are that "we can't go against that and expect everything to just be ok"

In the same way, in your life... it is God who created you... it is Jesus who rescued you... it is the Holy Spirit who empowers you. If you take away the Spirit, you have a life that, sure, you were rescued, but you won't live a life of value... you won't do any rescuing... you won't make any impact.

If you take away Jesus, then expect the Holy Spirit to empower you... empower you to what? The mission goes away the moment you take Jesus out.

The whole idea is that IT IS the differences that work together to make the whole thing work.

That is what makes marriage so significant... Paul says that it is an image, a reflection of the relationship that Christ is pursuing with His church.

That is what makes the church so significant... it is the joining together of diverse people who each, in their own way, help bring Jesus to the places that need Him the most, in the variety of ways that they need Him.

it is a joining together like a glue, and you can't see whats holding it, but it's there.

SO WHEN you work to break it... you are doing more than hurting a person, or profiting off the backs of the marginalized...

or having an affair...

or whispering something about someone else to someone, when they aren't their to defend themselves...

you are going against the force that holds the entire world together.

if we truly believe that the church is "echad" - that the world is held together by our complimentary differences... then when we destroy someone or something, we are actually disrupting the entire thing.

what happens to *one* of us, affects all of us - and anything you do to harm someone else, you are doing against someone who you are supposed to have ONENESS with as a member of the body of Christ.

But that can also be flipped on its head... which is why it is so important to understand the Kingdom of Heaven... that it is not just some place that you will go to when you die... but it is here and it is now and you have a role to play in it, *now*... because when you start to view other people through a lens that says "they are my world" - suddenly, you value them and take care of them differently.

So, for instance, when Hurricane Sandy hit... we were overwhelmed with the work to be done, but the first thing that we saw was that image of hope, of peace that comes from just knowing "God, I know you are going to show up here"... and the very next thing that we saw was *echad*. God showing up, through people.

People coming together, and working to get the water out of their *neighbor's* house... working to remove debri, working to RESTORE - remember that word... RESTORE the community back to the way that it was before disaster struck.

It is, in every way, the glue that holds the universe together, and destroying it truly is the only way to pull the universe apart.

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Now, let's look again at that transition piece between Romans 1 and Romans 2.

last week we looked at the second half of verse 32 very closely, but this time, lets focus on the FIRST HALF OF IT.

The first part of verse 32 says - Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die -

This seems very upfront and incredibly scary. And of course we know that everyone deserves to die... but Jesus died for us. But this is saying something a bit bigger than just the fact that everyone deserves to die.

The word "deserve" is the Greek word "axios" - this will fascinate you if you ever do this word study, especially considering all the stuff we have been learning about GLORY and the way humans have EXCHANGED the glory of God for something else... "axios" - means "weighing or having weight" - it is often translated as "worthy" - it is where you put your worth - if someone does a job and it is of value to you... you show them how much you value them by compensating them appropriately.

and most scholars believe it comes from the word " $ag\bar{o}$ " which means "to lead by laying hold of" -

which, if that is true, gives us a bit of a different way to look at this...

it is like this: "if this is where you put your worth... your value... if INJUSTICE is what you let win in your life... you will be leading the world toward *thanatos* which is translated as both "death" and "deadly" - it is leading toward something deadly.

This is going toward destruction rather than glory...

or you could say it this way:

"the life we are living amounts to this" - this is what we contribute to the world... we contribute death.

because THIS ENTIRE LIST is full of things that are leading the world into to a deadly place...

a place in which it can not go on if this is what it becomes.

For example: It says they are filled with envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.

Verse 31 says:

foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

That is the entire verse. If someone were to ask you to quote a verse in the Bible, and you chose Romans 1:31, that is what you would say:

foolish.

faithless.

heartless.

ruthless.

In Greek (look how similar these words are):

ἀσύνετος asynetos

ἀσύνθετος asynthetos ἄστοργος astorgos

ἀνελεήμων aneleēmōn

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The literal here is: unintelligent, uncompounded, unloving, unmerciful.

asynetos (unintelligent)
asynthetos (uncompounded)
astorgos (unloving)
aneleēmōn (unmerciful)

it is a bit of a summary of just what can become of the person who has become so callous that the love of God no longer gets through to them. All the things that they are supposed to be... they become the opposite.

That is what verse 32 really is ultimately saying... God created us to be loving... merciful... wise and faithful... but we went the other way.

It is an exchange that will lead the world down a path that if it doesn't figure out, it will ultimately cease to exist.

when we take away love. when we take away mercy. when we take away faithfulness. when we take away wisdom.

How can the world continue if everything is bent on destroying it?

Now, this is why *echad* matters, and why understanding it matters.

Because if you view your neighbor as someone who is disposable... someone who doesn't matter... it becomes a lot easier to do harm to him.

But when you realize that if harm is done to your neighbor, it actually affects you... you think twice.

Murder is on this list, and it seems to be one of the worst things on the list... again... go to the sermon on the mount... what does Jesus say about murder? he takes it to anger, and he says "if you hate your brother - you are just as guilty" why? Because hate is the first step toward the destruction of another human being.

It finds a way to devalue life.

It is impossible to murder someone who you believe is worth as much as you are. It can't be done. You have to first find something in them that allows you to elevate in your mind your own status to be HIGHER THAN THIERS... and that has to compound until you can convince yourself in your mind THAT YOU DESERVE TO LIVE, and they deserve to die. It is the only way you can convince a country to go to war... you deserve something... be it oil... be it produce, be it life... you deserve to keep going, and they don't.

it is always built on a lie that says human beings determine the value of each other.

Listen... a person's worth is not determined by what you can get from them, or by what they have done to you. Every person who ever lived was worth the price that Jesus paid for them, and if they weren't, He would not have done it.

We have got to stop pretending like we determine the value of others.

That is why I framed the first exchange... in the Garden the way I did for you. Because what happened when we ate that fruit is we started seeing the world not for what is good about it, but for what WE VIEW TO BE wrong with it... and when you see things that are wrong, the natural bend is to try and do something to solve it... which is a feeling that can be directed toward fighting injustice or toward creating it.

unfortunately, many choose the latter.

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now, of course it is easy to point out murder, because we all see its affects... if someone was trying to murder someone else, most likely if we are even remotely decent human beings, we would not stand by and do nothing, say nothing, etc.

but the majority of the time that someone gossips about another person, we either go right along with it, or we sit silently and allow it to happen.

but did you know that the rabbi's actually considered gossip to be in the same category as murder, because it was destroying something that can not be undone. It is character assassination, and the moment it happens, a death takes place that.

Paul lists both gossip and slander, two forms of the same thing... one is from a megaphone, the other is a whisper... and the whisper was always considered to be a bigger deal because there is no way to defend against that which you do not know is said. At least if someone speaks publicly against you, you know what they said.

But seriously: if you want to kill a community... get the rumor mill moving..

in fact, Jesus' little brother James talks about the tongue the same way that we talked about a marriage without God last week... he says THE TONGUE is a fire. If you can't control it, it gets out of control much faster than you ever imagined. One slip of your tongue could set ablaze a fire that is unstoppable.

But if you can grasp the fact that you are part of something bigger than yourself, and everything has value...

you realize that you are marching to your own destruction when you cause destruction to someone else's world.

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And we could go through every single one of the things that Paul lists here and explain all the ways that each of them destroy a community... but lets for the sake of time sum it up with injustice.

I view injustice as being... when the scales are tipped incredibly lopsided against someone... when they don't get a fair go at life or in a circumstance.

and the church needs to FIGHT THIS... we need to stand on behalf of those who are oppressed... we must never find ourselves on the side that is causing it... we need to work as hard as we can to do everything we can to solve it... but we also need to understand that God Himself WILL NOT TOLERATE IT FOREVER.

One last time, I want us to look at the first half of Romans 1:18.

"the **wrath** of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and *injustice*"

we have looked at this for weeks, but the last word I want us to look at a bit more closely is the word WRATH.

It is the Greek word: "orge" - when you read on to Romans 2:5 you see the word come up a couple of times -

"because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up **wrath** for yourself on the day of **wrath** when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."

obviously, this is a big deal.

A word study will bring back: wrath, anger, indignation, temper and character.

Just for a moment... read this as "character"... it actually doesn't change anything theologically but it changed a lot for me as to the perspective which I have on this passage.

"the character of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and injustice."

This is what I am trying to do here... I am NOT trying to tell you that there won't be a judgment... there will be a judgment.

What I am trying to tell you is that THERE HAS TO BE A JUDGMENT.

Because God's character can not co-exist with injustice. And his character will be revealed in the way that he puts a swift ending to the ways that the world is so terribly off balance.

There will come a day in which God is going to bring the world back to right standing... he promised us from the beginning of time... from the moment that Adam and Eve fell and perfection was knocked off course... but God promised "I will RESTORE it back to what it once was"

In the same way that nobody living in Rockaway Beach was willing to just let the Peninsula stay destroyed, and instead they did the work of restoring it... God won't leave it broken.

But this should not terrify you this should excite you because God is GOOD. He is so good.

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Look at the way that the prophet Isaiah points to Jesus, the coming suffering servant, and then ultimately to the time when God restores the world to the way that it was created to be:

This is Isaiah 61:1-4

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has 'anointed me to bring good news to the poor;¹ he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and "the opening of the prison to those who are bound;²

- vto proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, wand the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;
- to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
 *to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
 *the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
 the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
 *that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
 the planting of the Lord, athat he may be glorified.3
- bThey shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations."

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see, we have been lead to believe that opposite to wrath is mercy, and what it has caused many to believe about God is that He is licking His lips in anticipation of a day when He can destroy us... and so, in our human minds we counter that by saying "why doesn't God just be merciful... and not do the whole judging thing.

But if God was to not judge, we would not be left with mercy, we would be left with NEUTRALITY. (Stott, the message of Romans, page 72, citing Neill, p.10)

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I hope that I can articulate this properly for you... once it clicked for me, it really changed a lot...

In a world that is not as it should be, God can either put it back to the way He created it, HE CAN RESTORE IT... or he can leave it as it is. He can stay neutral forever.

but neutrality leaves ashes.

neutrality leaves mourning.

neutrality leaves our spirits faint. neutrality leaves our city in ruins. neutrality leaves generations devastated.

God can not remain neutral forever while the entire world falls apart. All the mercy in the world is not going to solve the problem of injustice and eventually it has got to be solved which means eventually it has to go away.

There will come a day when God will look at injustice, and He will crush it.

The image we get of wrath is that the sky falling... heaven is opening up and fire is falling from it and consuming us and burning us to shreds for the awful things that we have done. And again, what that mindset has done is it has lead to people for hundreds of years into giving their lives to Jesus out of FEAR for what would happen to them IF THEY DON'T.

and it misses the point of why we exist in the first place.

We exist to RESTORE. To fill the earth with glory. And the more we can bring Heaven to earth now, and the more that we can help bring justice to the world now, the easier it will be for God to do it later.

That is part of why I don't believe in scaring people into Jesus... because once they accept Him, they are no good for Him. They don't change anything for anybody else... they don't care about justice, they just care about Heaven and the judgment that they avoided by submitting their lives to Him.

Let me introduce you to Jesus, the way that He introduced Himself in Luke chapter 4. He had just come down from the mountain where He fasted 40 days and 40 nights... the first thing Matthew's Gospel records after that is the sermon on the mount, but Luke records this little bit about Jesus going into Nazareth and doing something very peculiar.

He goes into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and the attendant brings Him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. And Jesus begins reading from what we now know as Isaiah 61, we read it a moment ago. now, let's read Luke 4:18-22 - Jesus begins reading the scroll saying:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

Notice what it says... they marveled at His words... THEIR EYES WERE FIXED ON HIM... they connected with His words... His words meant something.

But all He was doing was reading someone else's words... right? So why did this moment have such an impact on all who were there to hear it?

Because Jesus read a passage from the prophet Isaiah, rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and proclaimed I AM FULFILLING THIS PASSAGE... TODAY.

But here is what makes this so amazing... everyone who was there in the synagogue that day would have been familiar with that scripture... we read it earlier... and anyone who was there that day would have known that Jesus stopped reading in the middle of a verse.

If you look back at Isaiah, Isaiah 61:2 says "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;"

But Jesus stopped reading after "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor... He closed the book, and He sat down, proclaiming "THIS IS THE SCRIPTURE THAT I HAVE FULFILLED, TODAY.

this part... all of this... the part I read before I stopped reading.

Because today... It is the year of the Lord's favor... it is the AGE OF GRACE... IT IS NOT THE DAY OF WRATH... is that coming someday? yes... but it is not today - The message of Jesus is not that the sky is falling... The message of Jesus is that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand... it has arrived... and you and I are a part of it, not so that we can be a part of some country club where we all come together, lock the doors and sing kumbaya - while the world burns...

no... we are called to be the change that the world needs to see... we are called to NOT BE NEUTRAL today about the things that matter... about the injustices of our world... we are called to bring as much Heaven to earth as we can in advance of God bringing the whole thing here.

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Now, as we wrap this up, look at the last two verses in our passage in Romans: (2:4-5)

do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

This is not the day of vengeance - this is not the day of wrath... Jesus has come and He has come riding a wave of hope for the world... and you and I know that we are saved from the people that we once were, on account of who He is...

and we lean into who He is because we know that we aren't strong enough... but Paul warns us here, the fact that Jesus came, and ushered in the year of grace, and delayed the day of vengeance - that should lead us to repentance...

we should not linger in this place where we know that God was gracious to us, and patient with us... and just keep living believing that He will continue to be patient with us...

as true as that may be, we were called to live lives that impact the world... that fuel it, that keep it going... that lead it back to Jesus... to help piece together the parts that are broken.

Injustice is rampant in our world...

Let's do our part to make sure that it does not exist IN Christ's church.

And let's shape our lives around modeling what a changed community looks like.