

## Accusing and Excusing

There is a lot of talk about righteous, in church and in Scripture. Paul used the word often as both a descriptor of God and a call to those coming to God through Jesus. This was a familiar word to Paul as throughout the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, often called the Old and New Testaments, the word righteous is used in the same manner as Paul in his letters to the newly forming Christian communities.

Righteous sounds like a simple word and concept. "Right" – we know what that means, right? Even if we can't agree on what's right or who's right we know what right means. Our elementary school teachers taught us what adding "ous" does to a word – right? The adding of "ous" means what is described possesses; is full of; or characterized by the base word. So a righteous person either possesses "right", is full of "right" or and perhaps most near to the Christian meaning "is characterized by "right". "Right?"

The Greek word that is translated as *righteous* is *dike* (pronounced, dee kay). And while the ancient Greek meaning was *tendency*, most scholars agree that the use of this word in the Bible implies *justice* and *conformance to established standards*. When using this word as a descriptor of a person it implies that a person's actions are justified, and can have the connotation that the person has been "judged" or "reckoned" as leading a life that is pleasing to God.

Justified in action – as I have pondered for this day I have been struck that to be righteous incorporates both thinking and acting. There are three oft quoted Scriptural examples of righteous anger: God flooding the earth (begins in Genesis, Chapter 6), Moses breaking the tablets of the law (Exodus 32:19-20) and Jesus overturning the tables of the moneylenders (John 2:13-15). In each example, actions which on the face seem destructive, illegal and even "ungodly" flow not out of selfish desires but out of a desire so strong for God's will to become reality that radical action seems a better course of action than letting things be as they were.

Yet can we or any of humanity possess such a clear understanding of "right" and deep awareness of the ways in which our own "selves" cloud all we know and encounter, that we can rest assured that we indeed possess "right"? I think not, and I think that in the holy and horrible church one of our reoccurring sins is in the thinking and then acting as if we can be the possessors of all that is "right". So how do we call for and talk about righteous, as we prepare the table and proclaim the truth of God as we know it?

Let us, for a moment, continue this pondering with replacing "God" for the word "right" -- So that to be righteous would mean those who are possessed by, or full of, or characterized by God. To be righteous would be when our actions looked like ways in which God might act. To be righteous would be known in actions and positive results of a sound relationship with God, seen both in individual lives and in the life of the community of faith. To be righteous means that the conditions under which we live are acceptable to God. We might call for each to make the choice that we will be on God's side.

Yet even in the moment of making such a promise, we know that we will, in varying ways and for vastly differencing reasons, fail. Talking righteous as something which we can bring into being is much like the "white paint" illustration -- Imagine you have a can of pure white paint. Then you put just a small amount of black paint in it. It is then forever grey. No matter how much you add more and more white, it will still have a grey tint." So no matter how greatly we strive or often we succeed in being God's -- there will be some gray. We may live and act righteously much of the time yet we are not "righteous" or able to achieve a state of constant and complete Godliness.

Hence, why the term righteous is often and rightly applied to God, we have a righteous God who desires to be in relationship with us. No matter what we've done or said, God wants each of us on God's side. It is because God's righteous, God ability to be fully and completely be God, that we can stand beside, stand with and reflect God and God's love. The ability and choice to live righteously is ours as gift and possible only through God's grace. We know the power and truth of this life through God's mighty actions in and through the life of Jesus. We know that standing on our own, we come no where near the measure of goodness and Godliness exemplified in the earthly life of Jesus. We know that through accepting our humaneness, our sinfulness, we can also accept that God has provided the way for us to be made white as snow, or as paint. In our believing in God's mighty acts through Jesus Christ, we believe that God is able and that God has and will go through great lengths to restore us to all that is necessary to life in God's love and be seen as righteous in our reflecting of life as Jesus lived.

So what are the marks of righteous? When we think we can obtain righteous through our own efforts we will quickly find ourselves excusing our behaviors and accusing others. We, in most cases, will look at ourselves and our motives as "good", even when it takes a lot to convince even ourselves, and then look at the motives of others as selfish or evil, directed at us, even when the results of their actions seem to be blessed by God and their attitudes show no desire to harm us, and perhaps even little awareness of us. As we accept the righteous of God as gift in our lives than we can accept that at times we are less, less than God invites us to be, and live with apologetic grace rather than excusing and accusing. One mark of such living is those moments when we find ourselves so caught up in what we're doing that we are able to totally be our self, comfortable in our worth and acceptability in God's eyes.

The ways in which we know and understand righteous impacts our relationship with others and with God as well as the ability for us to become and experience all God desires in creating and redeeming us. If we are to be the body of Jesus The Christ, doing the work and living in the will and way of God, then we must give up acting as if we are right -- to give up acting as if we have achieved what others haven't, give up thinking it is all about us, and truly feast on the grace and goodness of God.