

Psalm 1:6 for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 119:40 See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

Gen 6:9: Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation

Matt 1:19: Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss [Mary] quietly.

Luke 1:6: Both of them (Zecharia and Elizabeth) were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.

Matt: 5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Righteousness

- × Today's Psalm closes with the phrase, "in your righteousness, give me life."
- × "Righteousness" seems to me to be a vague and ill-defined term that we see repeated again and again throughout the Bible.
 - To most of us, the word "righteousness would seem to refer to private morality,
 - ▲ So at first blush, when I hear the very first mention of righteousness in Genesis,
 - "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. "Gen 6:9, or
 - ♦ I have the Cecil B. DeMille version of Genesis in my head, with Noah, the holy man, surrounded by the what goes on in the Playboy Mansion.
- × But we have been hearing the words "righteous" and "righteousness" in the majority of the readings throughout Epiphany,
 - Culminating with the statement made by Jesus in his long Sermon on the Mount (which has for us, been going on for several weeks)
 - ▲ During which time we hear Jesus saying, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,"
- × what does Jesus mean by righteousness?

- What does the Bible, and the Jews and Jesus mean when they use the word “righteous”: and “righteousness”?

 Tzadeqah

The Hebrew word for the phrase “being righteous” is the word Tzadeqah.

- × Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, chief Rabbi of Great Britain (1991-2013) has written that the word Tzadeqah, is really untranslatable.
 - Untranslatable words are what make different cultures different from each other.
 - ▲ If we seek to understand how different peoples understand reality, you only have to look at the words we use that are untranslatable.

× -----Gezellig-----

- As a footnote, I certainly found this to be true in the way the Dutch understand the word “Gezellig”
- Guests to the house: very gezellig...for which there is no English word.
 - ▲ is often translated as “homey” or “comfortable.”
 - ▲ Also describes a person; a time spent with loved ones, or seeing someone after a long absence
 - ▲ Places can be “gezellig” or “ongezellig” According to my Dutch friends:
 - A small shop be gezellig; the Cat’s Meow is gezellig; Costco is not.
 - ◆ The Brown Lantern is gezellig; the Jack in the Box is ongezellig
 - People can be gezellig
 - ◆ Oprah Winfrey is gezellig. President Putin is ongezellig.
- This search for being gezellig explains a lot about what the Dutch seek
 - ▲ in their government (which generally is by consensus),

- ▲ in social relationships (which are generally very egalitarian and in which no one lords themselves over another)
- ▲ in the size of their buildings (which generally more human scaled),
- ▲ in their gathering places in villages and town; coffee shops and cafes on the sidewalk

 Charity and Justice

- × In the same way, Rabbi Sacks notes that the untranslatable word, Tzadeqah, is one that defines the culture of the Jews.
 - Tzadeqah_Rabbi Sacks writes, cannot be translated because it joins together two concepts that in other languages are opposites: “charity” and “justice.”
 - Suppose I give someone a McDonald’s gift card....
 - ▲ In the English language, I can call it an act of charity or an act of justice
 - Either that person is entitled to it; I owe him that gift card; and therefore giving him that card is an act of justice
 - Or he is not entitled to it; then giving him the card is an act of charity.
 - In English, a gesture of charity cannot be justice,
 - ▲ nor can an act of justice be described as charity.
 - Perhaps we derived this from our roots in Roman law, which also has two words for these concepts: “Justicia” and “Caritas”

 Possession and Ownership and Trustees

- × Tzadeqah means both
 - And that arises from the theology of Judaism, and their understanding of the Land and their role as caretakers of that land, and the Jewish understanding of the land which sees possession and ownership as two different things

- ✘ In the city of Anacortes, I often hear property owners using this sentence “that’s my land, and you can’t tell me what to do with it.”
 - In Judaism, you may possess the land, but you don’t own it
 - ▲ [I possess this hymnal right for the moment; it’s in my hands, but I don’t own it.]
 - ▲ That’s because all things are owned by God, and we are the temporary caretakers of what God has given us in trust.
 - ▲ Leviticus (25:23): *The land must not be permanently sold because the land is mine. You are just immigrants and foreign guests of mine* (CEB)
 - Here’s the difference: in our culture, ownership is enforceable by law, charity is not (it’s just arises out of the promptings of charity or benevolence).
 - ▲ In Judaism, one is not the owner of the property; one is merely the guardian on God’s behalf,
 - And we are bound by the conditions of that trusteeship,
 - ◆ And one of the conditions of that trusteeship is that we share part of what we have with others in need.
 - ◆ And, what would be regarded by us as charity is in Judaism a strict requirement of the law and can be enforced by the courts

 Conditions of Trusteeship

- ✘ Those conditions of trusteeship have been given to us in detail in the Sunday readings that began with those that surrounded the Sermon on the Mount.
 - 5th Sunday of Epiphany:
 - ▲ Isaiah 58:6-7 Is not this the fast that I choose: ... to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

- Today's readings from Leviticus:
 - ▲ CEB) "When you harvest your land's produce, you must not harvest all the way to the edge of your field; and don't gather up every remaining bit of your harvest. Also do not pick your vineyard clean or gather up all the grapes that have fallen there. Leave these items for the poor and the immigrant. (Lev 1: 9-10)
- ✘ All this is summarized in the statement from the prophet Micah that we heard 4th Sunday of Epiphany:
 - "What is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)
 - ▲ To do Tzadeqah and to love Hesed
 - "Hesed" loyalty to the requirements laid down for us as trustees of the Covenant

 Social Justice

- ✘ Rabbi Sacks writes that the nearest English equivalent to Tzadeqah is the phrase "Social Justice."
 - This deals with the concept that no one should be deprived of the basic requirements of existence,
 - (shelter, clothing, water, food)
 - ▲ That those who have more than they need must share some of that surplus with those who have less.
 - ▲ That is why you leave something on the edge of your harvest for those who are hungry
 - That is why you don't pick up the fallen grapes but leave them for the poor and the immigrant.
- ✘ This is the kind of righteousness, the kind of Tzadeqah, that Jesus speaks about when he says that "you must be more righteous than the Pharisees"
 - It's not your personal piety that makes you righteous,
 - ▲ It's how you put your faith into action that makes you righteous

- ▲ It's how your faith is expressed as you connect head, heart, and hands in faith and righteousness
- Jesus announced the meaning of righteousness at the beginning of his ministry, when he read aloud from the prophet Isaiah:
 - ▲ *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.* (Luke 4:18-19)
- × Matthews' gospel emphasizes that righteousness is expressed in connecting head, heart and hands.
 - Jesus' passion for righteousness led him to reach out to those on the margins of society — the poor, women, children, Samaritans, lepers, tax collectors and prostitutes...and even, as we read today, our enemies.
 - The message of Jesus is that our love of God is expressed by our acting righteously with others, even our enemies,
 - ▲ And that is the most challenging demand on the human heart.

 Empathy/Action

- × Perhaps, then, a way to translate Tzadeqah into English may be by using the combination word, "*empathy/action.*"
 - By empathy, we imagine how the experiences of others may feel,
 - ▲ And from that we would have the compassion to leads to action.
 - By empathy/action we will have the tools to love not only our neighbors (defined as anyone in need in Luke 10:25-37) but also our enemies (Matthew 5:44).
 - By empathy/action we can make the connection between justice and charity and
 - ▲ By empathy/action we can reorient our lives to the rule and reign of God that Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue in Nazareth and that we should be proclaiming today.