

# RECLAIMING THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND TRUE FREEDOM OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Nell Becker Sweeden  
Ph.D. Student, Boston University

## *Abstract*

This paper will focus on the nature of justice presented in Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 58:6-7; 61:1-2. These texts provide a unity between the Old and New Testaments inviting us to see the under flowing current of justice that becomes the very heartbeat of the story of God, as well as the task of the church as the people of God. God in Jesus Christ ushered in the justice of the kingdom promising a new historical reality. Through these passages I will expound upon the nature of justice of the kingdom of God, and specifically on how they shape identity, transform purpose, and define the task for the people of God today. This justice restructures life in such a way that human relationships and interaction promote sustainable and holistic living, rather than lives drained by consumption and fragmentation. This identity, purpose, and task in Christ form both an everyday and cosmological mission, as well as a personal and social responsibility. This new historical reality is about the restorative justice of God that re-claims a true freedom that is missing in the often celebrated ‘freedoms’ of Western contemporary society. This holistic and restorative justice is what the people of God are to be about.

## *Introduction*

The concepts of ‘justice’ and ‘freedom’ are packed with implied meaning. They evoke different connotations and images according to context, perspective, location, and time. Justice in the context of a Western nation-state may immediately bring to mind a justice system developed in order to provide law and order, to right wrongs, and to maintain peace. Also, freedom, in this context, may imply preserving independent choice according to one’s personal interest. Yet at the same time, justice under dictator rule may evoke fear or corruption, while freedom longs for the voice of the people that has been silenced. Justice and freedom in a society torn apart by genocide and paramilitary warfare may evoke no image at all. Their meanings are simply unimaginable to victims of such atrocities. At best, one may hope that justice is clearly defined revealing a clear understanding of right and wrong for the flourishing of humanity, while freedom works toward release from captivity. Often, however, the understanding and visible presence of justice and freedom remain elusive and difficult to find in the world. At the same time, in peering into Christian scripture one finds justice and freedom are imagined and longed for throughout the biblical narrative.

Christian scripture narrates a sense of justice that imagines and hopes for complete restoration—a fallen people actively restored to become God’s new creation. Instead of justice resulting in penalty and punishment, it is redefined and recast in light of the resurrection of Christ which ushers in gracious restoration. Justice is here redefined by the incarnation and life of Christ and made possible by his death and resurrection. Christians are called to a faithful life in Christ in which he has called humanity to a new life as a new creation. In this narrative, the language of salvation and restoration becomes wedded with a new reality of justice for the world characterized by grace and love. This is the justice of the kingdom of God. It is in this justice

that humanity is granted freedom—release from captivity. This is not a justice that binds up and punishes, but a justice that releases humanity for God in gracious liberation. As a result, life in God looks different than life in the world. In this way, the people of God are made to imagine a new life in Christ through participation in the Body of Christ. As Stanley Hauerwas reminds us, the church is called to be a microcosm of the ways of the kingdom—

The church is not the kingdom but the foretaste of the kingdom. For it is in the church that the narrative of God is lived in a way that makes the kingdom visible. The church must be the clear manifestation of a people who have learned to be at peace with themselves, one another, the stranger, and of course, most of all, God.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the people of God are called to embody a life radically transformed by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This life is characterized by the restorative justice of the kingdom of God as narrated in Christian scripture.

This paper will focus on the nature of justice presented in Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 58:6-7; 61:1-2. These texts provide a unity between the Old and New Testaments inviting us to see the under flowing current of justice that becomes the very heartbeat of the story of God, as well as the task of the church as the people of God. God in Jesus Christ ushered in the justice of the kingdom promising a new historical reality—“a visible socio-political, economic restructuring of relations among the people of God, achieved by divine intervention in the person of Jesus as the one Anointed and endued with the Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> Through these passages I will expound upon the nature of justice of the kingdom of God, and specifically on how they shape identity, transform purpose, and define the task for the people of God today. This justice restructures life in such a way that human relationships and interaction promote sustainable and holistic living, rather than lives drained by consumption and fragmentation. This identity, purpose, and task in Christ form both an everyday and cosmological mission, as well as a personal and social responsibility. This new historical reality is about the restorative justice of God that re-claims a true freedom that is missing in the often celebrated ‘freedoms’ of Western contemporary society. This holistic and restorative justice is what the people of God are to be about.

### *Narratological Imagination of Justice and Freedom*

Scripture reveals that justice is not limited to one aspect, time period, or segment of human existence. Justice is not something that one chooses to do one day and declines another. Rather, it flows out of one’s very being and life, both communally and personally. As noted in Amos 5:24, God desired abundant justice in Israel—“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream” (NRSV). This all-consuming mission requires the eternal presence of the Lord; it requires the fullness of the Holy Spirit; it requires the willing hearts and bodies of faithful followers of Christ. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus’ ministry is surrounded by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ baptism (Luke 3:21-22), temptation in the wilderness (4:1-14), and proclamation of the year of the Lord’s favor (4:14, 18) all begin with his being full of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit, the hearers and readers of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 97.

<sup>2</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 29.

Luke's gospel are prompted to listen more intently, because it is here that the good news is revealed and the kingdom of God inaugurated. This language surfaces more attentively in chapter four of Luke. Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit when he goes into the wilderness where he triumphs over the temptation of the devil (4:1); he is full of the Holy Spirit when he returns to Galilee (4:14); and the Spirit of the Lord is on him when he makes his proclamation (4:18). Jesus' resistance to the temptations has proven his faithfulness, now his speech in Galilee inaugurates his ministry and sets him on the mission that characterizes his future ministry.

In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus' words usher in a new way of life. These words are the Good News:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
 Because he has anointed me  
 to bring good news to the poor.  
 He has sent me to proclaim release to  
 the captives  
 and recovery of sight to the blind,  
 to let the oppressed go free,  
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (NRSV).

The inauguration of the year of the Lord's favor has much to say about God's restorative justice and gracious liberation. Here we find God's purposes stated through the words and life of Jesus to bring salvation to the world. This is a salvation that speaks to freedom as release from social injustices and physical captivity. These words of Jesus quoting Isaiah offer rich imagery and symbols as well as continuity of purpose in understanding Jesus' mission, God's restoration and salvation for humankind, and the crucial role of justice in the mission of Jesus and the mission of his church.

These themes of which Jesus speaks in chapter four are not limited to the Gospel of Luke. The gospel writer threads the theme of God's purposes to bring salvation to the world through Jesus throughout the entire gospel and this language parallels that of the long-awaited Messiah in Hebrew scripture. Jesus' words echo a prophetic message and recapitulate language and symbols to which a Jewish audience would have been accustomed. These words of the prophet Isaiah 61:1-2 are here announced as fulfilled by Jesus in the present. These are familiar words for the Jewish people, but this is an unexpected announcement. The words now signal to those present that the following verses are an illustration of what God seeks to do through Jesus. The gospel writer crafts Jesus' announcement so that specific themes and images are woven into the Isaiah 61 citation, altering the language slightly to direct the audience toward God's purposes for a cosmological and eschatological salvation.

### *Good News of Release*

In verse 18 we find that Jesus has been anointed to preach good news to the poor. The notion of being poor in first century Palestine is not limited to the kind of economic destitution

that it often connotes today.<sup>3</sup> Rather, poverty was understood in a holistic sense to which various social factors contributed. The poor are those literally marginalized in society based on their class, race, gender, family heritage, religious purity, social standing, and economics. Poverty signified not only a less-than-livable day's wage, but also neglect and rejection by society. The poor were offered virtually no hope in the structures of society. This understanding of poverty would have been understood on multiple levels in both Greco-Roman rule as well as Jewish culture. In a Greco-Roman patronage system, one who was poor was without any benefactor by which to receive protection. Benefactors relied on others to return their favors as a form of payment and social advancement; the poor, as they were without means and standing in society, could offer no incentive for a patron and were rejected. In Jewish culture, the poor were confined to jobs that made them "unclean" and, therefore, unable to participate in regular temple activities. Politically, socially, and religiously, poverty in first century Palestine was a socially fixed state of being. Good news for the poor was unheard of in this societal structure. As this passage will continue to show, however, the ways of the world are clearly not the ways of God's kingdom.

Good news for the poor is not a new theme in Scripture. Much of Hebrew scripture anticipated the Messiah who would bring this good news. Additionally, it is clear from the birth narratives in Luke's gospel that Israel awaited such good news. The infancy narratives of Jesus depict Mary alluding to good news for the poor in her praise song to God—"He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:42, NRSV). Interestingly, the reversal of social position, which is good news for the poor and lowly, is couched between language of salvation and fulfilled promise for Israel. Such language signals that the justice of God's kingdom does not operate according to societal rules that distinguish between poor and rich, weak and strong, or slave and free. Here one finds the powerful brought down and the poor lifted up placing them at equal position. God's salvation levels the world's hierarchy of social status and initiates a true deliverance and equality among persons.

Continuing with his message of deliverance, Jesus also proclaims release to the captives. According to the social reality of first century Palestine, the poor were enslaved by their social position. Social mobility was not a feasible possibility. One born into poverty remained poor. A common possibility for protection and security during this time was to indenture oneself to a wealthy landowner as a servant or slave. In a very real sense those marginalized were held captive on multiple levels by their status, their disabilities, their debts, etc. Ringe notes, "Those persons who would hear such words as 'good news' are clearly those for whom 'debts,' whether to God or to other persons, result in captivity that denies the fullness of life."<sup>4</sup> Jesus, in turn, proclaims and offers release regardless of the many internal and external forces and circumstances holding one captive. This release, in turn, allows even the poor a true fullness of life in God.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 51-64. and Joel B. Green, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 197-219.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

At the same time, it is likely that such language of release would have evoked images of deliverance from exile to this Jewish audience in the synagogue. Israel had a long history of captivity by foreign rule. At this time in particular, such words might have evoked more joy to this Jewish audience held captive by the Roman Empire. This was a political and religious captivity from which Israel longed for deliverance. Luke's gospel notes others who longed for redemption from captivity that the Son of God would bring. In Luke's gospel, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna, and John the Baptist all speak to this redemption for Israel and fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. This was Israel's long awaited eschatological salvation where "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6 NRSV).

Jesus continues his good word in next proclaiming recovery of sight to the blind. Here Jesus deviates from the language of Isaiah 61:1-2. Thematically, however, these words coincide with what Luke documents of Jesus' ministry, as well as Hebrew prophecy. Blindness implies both a literal and figurative disability. Those with physical blindness and handicaps were especially marginalized in society. Such disabilities prevented people from contributing in daily tasks, forcing them to rely on others for care. Their disabilities labeled them as useless and burdens on society. We see throughout Jesus' ministry, however, that he has a special place for the physically blind and heals them so that they can enter into the community again. The figuratively blind, however, are often prevented from seeing Jesus because of lack of understanding and hardness of heart. Jesus often refers to the religious leaders, Pharisees, and Scribes as being figuratively blind. It is evident throughout Jesus' ministry, however, that he does not neglect them. He earnestly seeks to give them sight into the kingdom, but their blindness prevents them from seeing the purposes of God. It was often those of higher privilege and status that failed to see the purposes of God being carried out in Jesus.

Jesus moves to the end of his speech with language that does not appear in Isaiah 61:1-2, yet is reminiscent of Isaiah 58:6. Here, Jesus recapitulates the language of release; along with the captives, the oppressed will be released. This repetition emphasizes the new freedom that God's kingdom inaugurates. Oppression surfaced in a number of ways in first century Palestine. One could be oppressed by Roman law, Jewish purity laws, economics, gender, race, class, etc. Ringe notes, "The image of God's reign as beginning precisely in the breaking of...dehumanizing pattern[s] supports the theological affirmation that God is in fact claiming sovereignty over all of life, and that the advent of God's reign is indeed an event of liberation at the most basic level of human existence."<sup>5</sup> Contrary to the political and societal regulations that enslave, Jesus sets forth the oppressed in release.

### *The Year of the Lord's Favor*

This language of release also alludes to the expansive biblical theme of year of release or Jubilee. Jesus concludes his inaugural speech with a direct allusion to this year of release from Isaiah 61:2. Yet, contrary to his listeners' expectations, Jesus fails to complete the Isaiah 61 citation, which concludes with "the day of vengeance of our God" (61:2b). This omission would have been glaringly apparent to a synagogue audience that knew this passage well. Most certainly, they were also awaiting God's vengeance on their oppressors. The intentional nature of this exclusion, accordingly, places more emphasis on the restorative, rather than retributive

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

nature of the year of the Lord's favor. The emphasis on the year of the Lord's favor would have reminded the Jewish audience of the sabbath-year, where every fifty years the Lord commanded that all land return to its original owners and all debts be released. If during those fifty years a person was sold into slavery from debt, he and his family would be released from this obligation. Leviticus 25:10-12, 18 reads,

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the after growth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee, it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces. You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances (NRSV).

The jubilee year allowed for a restructuring of society back to God's intention, in directing Israel's trust to Yahweh. This involved a two-fold understanding of rest and jubilee—a vertical directing of one's devotion to Yahweh, as well as a horizontal or social directing of one's life to the principles of release in God's order. This vertical and horizontal understanding is echoed in Jesus' two commandments to love the Lord and love one's neighbor, as well as in the Torah (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). Intended to take place every fifty years, this restructuring naturally prevented God's people from living by their own systems of justice and domination. This peculiar notion of release reveals the justice of the kingdom of God. Walter Brueggemann notes, "The Old Testament Jubilee is understood theologically as a command of YHWH, the God who makes promises of inheritance and who wills the protection of the weak and vulnerable from the power of the strong and rapacious."<sup>6</sup> This practice thus speaks to Yahweh's control of the lives of Yahweh's people. Their obedience to this ethic of justice signified their allegiance and loyalty to Yahweh. Many scholars have questioned whether the sabbath-year was historically practiced. It is not recorded as historically taking place in Hebrew scripture; however, this ethic of release, equality, and the sovereign rule of God are constant themes throughout Scripture. Though perhaps not practiced, the Jubilee ethic was known and most certainly imagined eschatologically in Second Temple Judaism. Ringe notes that the principles of Jubilee were very much alive in the Hebrew Scriptures (Exod. 21:2-6; 23:10-11; Deut. 15:1-18; Jer. 34:8-22; Is. 61:1-12)—

In these traditions liberty is presented in economic, social, and political terms: freedom for slaves, release for captive peoples, cancellations of debts, redistribution of the land, care for the poor, food for the hungry, and healing of physical ailments. The language is primarily the language of ethics, dealing with values, social relationships, and the establishment or restoration of justice.<sup>7</sup>

These same principles of justice are alive in the life of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels. God's justice points to practice of sustainability and balanced equality that the ways of the ancient world did not. In fact, the ways of the world still do not reflect this justice of God's kingdom. Yoder simplifies the concept of Jubilee to, "the time when the inequities accumulated through

---

<sup>6</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 115.

<sup>7</sup> Ringe, Preface xiv.

the years are to be crossed off and all God's people will begin again at the same point."<sup>8</sup> God in Christ is allowing for this beginning again.

*Fasting for Release and Justice*

Along with allusions to Jubilee, the language of release for the oppressed might have invited the audience into deeper reflection on Isaiah 58. Release in relation to fasting might have been particularly poignant to a Jewish audience concerned with ritual purity and pious devotion to Yahweh. Here the prophet describes true fasting in contrast to what was actually happening. He writes,

Is this not the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the bonds of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
Is it not 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? (Isaiah 58:6-7 NRSV)

Here true fasting is equated with the notion of release and practices of justice. Again, fasting reveals a vertical devotion to Yahweh, as well as a social responsibility to practice justice and care for one's kin. Fasting in this context is not characterized as a practice that involves sacrifice to the Lord, but a practice that sacrifices in order to release the oppressed. It is implied that *this* release is what is most pleasing to the Lord.

This sort of fasting, characteristic of the justice of God's kingdom, appeared to be missing from the lives of certain Jewish groups throughout Luke's gospel. Fasting is but one practice out of many by which one could release the oppressed and show justice to the poor. In Luke chapter eleven, Jesus responds,

'Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these that you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others (Luke 11:39-42 NRSV).

Clearly the Pharisees are experts in the law but fail to see God's intention behind the law. They are experts of outward signs of purity, yet inwardly neglect the practices of the heart. They maintain outward purity at all costs—they tithe the best to Yahweh, and perhaps one might speculate that they also most devoutly fast and make large sacrifices to show devotion to God—yet at the same time they do not give alms nor sacrifice for the sake of the poor. Their sacrifices to Yahweh are clearly blinded by their own predatory greed. Yet, in this very passage Jesus gives

---

<sup>8</sup> Yoder, 29.

them a cure—“so give for alms those things that are within” (11:41). In this sense, the cure for their greed—that which would make their sacrifices and devotion to Yahweh pure and acceptable—is through alms giving.<sup>9</sup> The Pharisees, however, failed to see this connection. Consequently, it is clear that the message of Isaiah still needed to be heard in the first century, yet continually fell on deaf ears and hard hearts. In recapitulating the language of Isaiah 58, Jesus suggests the true purpose of fasting; it is a practice that seeks justice for the victims of injustice and cares for those in need. It inherently proclaims and embodies freedom for the oppressed. This signals that one’s devotion to God is intimately wedded with being an agent of release to one’s neighbor. In so doing, one becomes an agent of God’s sovereign justice in the world.

Jesus’ words inaugurate a new salvation and kingdom. Jesus’ life reveals the true purposes of God. Though Jesus’ words speak to his mission, they also imply the faithfulness and justice that his church is also to embody and teach. Jesus’ inaugural speech in Luke 4 re-presents and recapitulates the heart of justice in the kingdom of God, which speaks to the mission of God’s people as the Body of Christ. Salvation, the redemption of Israel, and the promises to Abraham are recast in language of love, justice, release, and Jubilee. Such practices and faithfulness illustrate and inaugurate the year of the Lord’s favor.

This understanding of true fasting, images of release, and allusion to Jubilee point to the restorative justice within the kingdom of God. These themes run throughout the Gospel of Luke as well as the narrative of Christian scripture. Likewise, they provide the church with a transformed vision of the kingdom of God as exemplified in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. These themes are embodied and exemplified in being a good neighbor like the Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and in the father’s embrace of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). They illustrate and embody the greatest commandments. In showing love and care for one’s neighbor, one is at the same time revealing her allegiance to God. In loving her enemies, the church shows the love of God. In inviting the poor, the lame, the outcast to one’s banquet, one is inaugurating the eschatological banquet (Luke 13:15-24). In preparing the way for Jesus by whom, “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6), John the Baptist instructed people how to live in the world. His images are reminiscent of that same release of debts, Jubilee, and true fasting. He teaches, “whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise” (Luke 2:10). This restorative salvation, which includes all and releases for freedom, is surrounded by images of sharing, giving, loving, and invitation.

### *The Church’s Continued Narratological Imagination*

As the Body of Christ, the church is called to continue Jesus’ mission in the same spirit of justice. The church is called to embody Christ for the world. Stanley Hauerwas in *Peaceable Kingdom* notes that, “scripture as a whole tells the story of the covenant with Israel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the ongoing history of the church as the recapitulation of that life.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus mission was not to extend a wise teaching or to make people think about justice, but to reorient lives toward God’s kingdom. In embodying this reorientation or repentance (*metanoia*), followers of Christ are invited to reflect God’s reordered reality on earth.

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 198.

<sup>10</sup> Hauerwas, 29.



Disciples are instructed to pray for the kingdom come (Luke 11:2). Living the ethics of this kingdom requires radical transformation.

The gospel commands us to submit to a vigorous and continuing discipleship if we are to recognize our status as subjects and properly understand the requirements for participation in the kingdom. Furthermore, to be a Christian is not principally to obey certain commandments or rules, but to learn to grow into the story of Jesus as the form of God's kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

This physical presence of the gospel ushers in the kingdom that all God's people await—the year of the Lord's favor. What can these words, these images, and these stories teach God's people about living faithfully today? How might faithful living mirror the restorative justice of the kingdom? How might the justice of the kingdom train and shape people's lives in such a way that they form new habits and practices that characterize God's kingdom? These words of Scripture speak to individual and corporate lives today. What fast has the church chosen? What does this release have to do with how Christians help to bring justice to the hurting and marginalized in the world, in their particular neighborhoods, towns and cultures? Through the story of Jesus, one is released to increasingly reach full potential as a participant in God's community of peace and justice.<sup>12</sup> This is a journey of faithfulness.

The Isaiah passages and Luke 4:18-19, together with the themes narrated throughout the gospel of Luke, reveal a way of life for God's people oriented toward the kingdom of God. This way of life remind and direct Christians first and foremost of how to live as God's people in the world. Jesus warns against taking more than one needs, hoarding wealth and neglecting those in need (Luke 6:32-36; 11:39-44). These are striking words in light of growing Western consumerism that seeks efficiency, expediency, and productivity at all costs. Jesus message of release in his inaugural speech announces release from debts together with an ethic of care for one's neighbor that requires one to share bread and shelter. In this sense, living a kingdom ethic of justice and release requires that one live face-to-face in responsibility to another. Underlying Jesus speech is the ethic of not allowing oneself to get richer while a neighbor gets poorer. This message requires that God's people balance living in such a way that provides for oneself and one's family, while not allowing oneself to consume more than one's even share. The justice of the kingdom of God points to sustainable life in which Christians live as a people reconciled to one another. Such kingdom living transforms both public and private habits for the gospel. As the Body of Christ—a microcosm of the justice of the kingdom of God—this message speaks to the life of the church today.

### *Parody of Freedom: Majority Rule and Individual Choice*

The Christian narrative imagines a restoration that is unlike the socio-economic rule of first century Palestine or the twenty-first century Western nation-state. In contemporary Western culture, individual autonomy and privatized ownership is celebrated. 'Freedom' is implemented as a democratic right that allows individuals to make their own choices and pursue their own interests. Such freedom tends to function on a procedural level in order to maintain each person's

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 94.

right to pursue self-interest without infringing on the rights of others. When ‘freedom’ stops at the procedural level, it fails to work toward a substantive *telos* or goal. As the choices and privileges of a procedural ‘freedom’ are governed and maintained by structures dictated by wealth and power, one begins to suspect that the substantive goal of this ‘freedom’ breaks down. The ‘freedom’ to pursue self-interest reveals itself to be a privilege (as opposed to a right) that many do not have. They do not have it because their race, class, gender, social status, etc. have not afforded them the same opportunities, protections, and privileges. Ultimately, one finds that seeking self-interest can never direct society toward a fuller notion of restorative justice and freedom because self-interest perpetuates competition by which some gain more at the expense of others. Such ‘freedom’ has come to affirm a Western way of life that permits the rich to get richer while the poor get poorer. In the same way, ‘freedom of choice’ has evolved into another form of bondage to the laws of the market and Western individualized politics.<sup>13</sup> According to the laws of ‘free market’ the consumer chooses to buy at the best price, while the consequences of such low prices remain hidden. Similarly, multi-billion dollar corporations are able to provide the lowest prices, attract consumers, and, as a result, smaller businesses that cannot compete go out of business. Undocumented immigrants enter into countries seeking a promised freedom of opportunity, but are often exploited, mistreated, underpaid, and unable to be protected by labor laws. In the name of a ‘free’ market economy, transnational corporations are entitled to seek the lowest price for goods, which often means capitalizing on the lack of regulations and the destitute realities of those living in a third world economy. Western ‘freedom’ has become the right to personal gain even at the expense of the livelihood and survival of others. Individual, autonomous ‘freedom’ is celebrated in a ‘free’ market economy, while the consequences and effects this ‘freedom’ within the web of economic, political, global and local relationships falls on deaf ears. This individualized ‘freedom of choice’ has resulted in a fragmented existence in which human relationships are subjugated by personal gain.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, this ‘freedom’

---

<sup>13</sup> See, Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 338-339. “For in the liberal public realm individuals understand each other and themselves as each possessing his or her own ordered schedule of preferences...Each individual, therefore, in contemplating prospective action has first to ask him or herself the question: What are my wants? And how are they ordered? The answers to this question provide the initial premise for the practical reasoning of such individuals, a premise expressed by an utterance of form: ‘I want it to be the case that such and such’ or of some closely cognate form...What was new in this transformation of first-person expressions of desires themselves, without further qualification, into statements of a reason for action, into premises for practical reasoning. And this transformation, I want to suggest, is brought about by a restructuring of thought and action in a way which accords with the procedures of the public realms of the market and of liberal individualist politics.”

<sup>14</sup> This notion of freedom as it relates to a market economy needs further development. William Cavanaugh in his most recent book, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), goes deeper in his explanation of how the ‘freedom’ of a free market has come to lack any substantive meaning. Consumers are taught to consume for its own sake, rather than work toward a fundamental principle or goal. Building on Augustine’s notion of the relationship of desire to ends, Cavanaugh writes, “In order to judge whether or not an exchange is free, one must know whether or not the will is moved toward a good end. This requires some kind of substantive – not merely formal – account of the true end, or *telos*, of the human person. Where there are no objectively desirable ends, the individual is told to choose his or her own ends, then choice itself become the only thing that is inherently good” (p. 13).

easily spirals into abuse and exploitation particularly of the poor and underprivileged of society. Clearly, something has been lost when ‘freedom’ no longer means release.

*Freedom: Participation in Narrative Imagination*

The goal of God’s freedom, however, is not in one’s own self-guided autonomy and desires but in participating in a larger fullness for all humanity found in God. Hauerwas notes,

for philosophers such as Aristotle, freedom was not an *end in itself*; we became free only as we acquired the moral capability to guide our lives...In contrast to our sense of ‘freedom of choice’ the virtuous person was not confronted by ‘situations’ about which he or she was to make a decision, rather the person determined the situation by insisting on understanding it not as a ‘situation’ but as an event in a purposive narrative.<sup>15</sup>

The notion of justice and freedom in Christian scripture indeed forms a purposive narrative. Such a narrative directs humanity to both an ontology and *telos* that is beyond itself. The narrative of God unites humanity with God and with one another in a way that heals moral and social fragmentation. Ultimately the tragic flaw of human existence lies in its deciding of its own morality to heal a fragmentation that humans themselves have created. Individual desires have become the foundation of existence. Humanity cannot overcome its own alienation by a freedom of choice, rather humanity must shape desire toward its proper end—God.

Hope lies in participation in the narrative of God’s intervention—the in-breaking of the Son of God into the world and his inauguration of the year of the Lord’s favor. The hope of Christian salvation is found not only in God’s in-breaking into individual hearts and lives, but God’s complete transformation of the world to restoration and fulfillment of God’s promises. One finds this restoration in the purposive narrative of God—in the language and imagery of Isaiah 58, 61, and Luke 4. Justice and freedom begin with the faithfulness exemplified in Jesus. They begin with the ordering of human desires and efforts toward God’s ends. This faithfulness is what Christ’s followers are to imitate. Faithfulness in Christ directs God’s people to fit their lives into the larger narrative of God. Here one finds God’s kingdom characterized by a transformational and restorative justice that is embodied in preaching good news to the poor; releasing those enslaved and oppressed in their poverty, rejection, and disability; healing the blind; and ushering in the year of the Lord’s favor. The people of God are guided not by their own initiative, but by the initiative of the Lord. In Luke 4:18-19 one finds that the Lord’s initiative is a radically restructured way of life that reflects the justice of the kingdom of God. Here, God’s people are instructed to love God by redirecting their lives to love one another. As they live this restored justice they testify to their allegiance, devotion and trust to God, embodying a new life in Christ for others. This is a life of peace, in which the fullness of one’s life no longer depends on the destruction of others. Instead, fullness of life depends on the restorative justice of God in which God’s people learn to love one another.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Hauerwas, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 87. “In effect Jesus is nothing less than the embodiment of God’s Sabbath as a reality for all people. Jesus proclaims peace as a real alternative, because he has made it possible to rest—to have the confidence that the form of life of a people is on the move. God’s kingdom, God’s peace is a movement

One finds evidence of this restoration and peace, in practices of Sabbath as it parallels the year of release. Sabbath practices combat destruction, because they allow the land and people to rest and replenish, releasing debts so that people and generations of ancestors are not born into debt and slavery. One finds evidence of this Sabbath rest and release in refusing to take so much that one's neighbor is left in need. One finds this in sharing what one has with those who do not have. One finds this in relying on the provision of the Lord, rather than securing one's own future. These are practices that sustain life and reorder justice from penalty to release, possession to gift, retribution to restoration, and the day of vengeance of our God to the year of the Lord's favor. This justice seeks sustainability on individual and corporate levels and characterizes a people of renewal, release, and restoration (rather than a people who suck land and lives dry with an insatiable drive for more). By allowing Scripture to narrate their life, the people of God reclaim the true meaning of freedom, justice, and restoration.

*Justice and Freedom: Life Together in Christ*

In the present context, the church must also repent (*metanoia*) and be transformed toward God's restorative justice. This transformation requires a restructuring of desire from freedom of individualized choice to release for the other. The church is not divorced from the world, but must be a prophetic voice that speaks to and embodies the God's reality. As a microcosm of the justice of the kingdom, God's people across streets and across oceans must be trained to reorder their lives toward the gospel. This means feeling the tension and pull of consumerism, yet being reminded that God's kingdom is not about getting more but about sharing as an act of loving one's neighbor. The church learns this as it befriends the poor and marginalized in society and invites them into the narrative of life in the church. God's people must be trained to see beyond their self-absorbed blindness that stops short at its own individual choice. Life together in the church transforms isolated individuals into communities of people who follow Christ. God's people are called to allow their lives to be transformed in order to see this web of relationships and find ways to sustain mutual interaction and life together for God's glory. The church is called to reclaim lives by the restorative habits and virtues of the kingdom.

Christian communities reclaim the true sense of justice by the very witness of their life together. This is a justice that Christians do not rely on the nation-state or the justice system to teach. To learn the justice of God's kingdom, one must be grafted into a new way of life. Hauerwas reminds us, "The kingdom is present in Jesus Christ. It is thus the ultimate realism that calls into question our vague ideals of freedom, equality, and peace. We do not learn what the kingdom is by learning of freedom and equality; we must first experience the kingdom if we are to know what kind of freedom and what kind of equality we should desire."<sup>17</sup> The justice, freedom, and equality of God's kingdom is not implemented in laws or policies, but by the very life together with those who seek embody the life of Christ with one another.

---

of those who have found the confidence through the life of Jesus to make their lives a constant worship of God. We can rest in God because we are no longer driven by the assumption that we must be in control of history, that it is up to us to make things come out right.

"Such a peace is not just that between people, but between people and our world. For it is a genuine eschatological peace that renews the peace of the beginning, where humans and animals do not depend on one another's destruction for their own survival (Gen. 29)."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p 113

This Western sense of freedom leads to a world in which the self rules. This is both idolatry and a parody of God's freedom. Ultimately, this fragmented existence ends in bondage to the desires of the self. True justice leads humanity beyond itself and its own dominion and domination. The restorative justice of God's kingdom presents the possibility of a true freedom—a release for those who have been held captive by their own idolatry. Rowan Williams reminds the church that the true power of the resurrection, is not in understanding the story of humanity in light of Jesus, but in God's people conforming their lives to the life of Christ and interpreting their existence in light of the narrative of God—"The resurrection calls forward into a life that is genuinely new and effectively changed by grace which both displaces the ego from its central and domineering position and grounds the self more and more profoundly in the accepting love of the Father."<sup>18</sup> This is the justice that God's people seek; it is justice motivated by the love of the Father for creation. We are no longer master, but participant in the life and story of God narrated in Scripture. Ultimately, it is the mission of the church to reflect the love of God shown in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>18</sup> Rowan Williams, *Resurrection* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1982), 88. See also Hauerwas' paraphrase of Williams in *Peaceable Kingdom*, 89. "Rather the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate sign that our salvation comes only when we cease trying to interpret Jesus' story in the light of our history, and instead we interpret ourselves in the light of his."

*Works Consulted*

- Brower, Kent. *Holiness in the Gospels*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.
- Green, Joel B. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Peaceable Kingdom*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.
- Resseguie, James L. *Spiritual Landscape: Images of the Spiritual Life in the Gospel of Luke*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.
- Ringe, Sharon H. *Jesus Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Luke*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995.
- Tannehill, Robert C. *Luke*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.
- Weinfeld, Moshe. *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Williams, Rowan. *Resurrection*. Williams, Rowan. *Resurrection*. London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1982.
- Yoder, John Howard. *Politics of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.