

What's Fair is Fair  
Text: II Corinthians 8:1-15  
Preached by David Radcliff  
At Enough for All conference  
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What's fair is fair, isn't it?  
Or is it not.

God meant for the Goodness of the earth—  
seas and skies, veggie burgers and pad thai—  
to be shared equitably by all—  
or did God not

Did God indeed decree that some should languish  
while others lavish—  
look at us  
3 cars for every 4 of us  
4 t.v.'s for every 5  
cell phones glued to our ears like some  
evolutionary appendage

So many things that we know not where to keep it all—Oh, that our  
denominations has invested in self-storage units 10 years back—we'd all be  
flush—adding environmental staff rather than slicing them

and speaking of "self-storage"  
Americans will spend \$40 billion on diet products this year  
while today around the world 30,000 children will perish of preventable causes,  
mostly related to lack of access to the good earth—  
clean water  
food from the earth  
energy to provide basic needs  
air that's clean enough to breathe  
These deaths  
though ten times as many as we suffered on that bright September morning  
though an everyday occurrence rather than a one-time abhorrence,  
raise no outcry or mobilization against some "ism"  
because they die not at the center of power but at the margin of global society.

And as if to add injury to insult,  
more and more of the earth's people, young and old, are suffering consequences  
of deeds they did not do.

Our emissions rise up high  
warm the earth  
unleash the storms, disrupt the rain patterns and they—whose carbon  
productions pales compared to ours—they are left either washed away or high  
and dry.

On the flight out here my seat mate was headed to Alaska  
A U-Conn—as in University of Connecticut— professor studying the impact of  
pollution in the form of air-borne mercury on native communities.

These people may live on the frigid fringe of global society—but they can't  
escape toxins from power production half a world away.  
Nor can they—like the people in the Nigerian delta or Baghdad and Basra or  
along the pipeline in Burma—nor can they escape our grasping for black gold,  
Texas T.

Last summer in the base-of-the-Brooks-Range Gwich'in community of Arctic  
village we heard of Gwich'in dependence on the caribou for food, tools, culture—  
even life itself—as  
their creation stories are co-mingled with the caribou's.  
We were amazed to learn that even if they are starving, they would not cross  
over to hunt on the coastal plain during the caribou's birthing time—they consider  
it sacred ground—and we'd go there for six months worth of oil?

The Average American household takes 60 car trips per week—  
Cut out 2 of those and we wouldn't need oil from Iraq—  
Ground all the SUV's for one day a week and we wouldn't need oil from the  
Arctic—  
(I just made that up, but it's probably close— )

A friend of mine has long been concerned about what our car use is doing to the  
planet—  
then he had a hunch that petroleum might also have something to do with our  
war on Iraq.  
So he decided to walk to worship on Sunday—had to get up at 3 am—it was 19  
miles.  
He made the evening news—  
when we do things that seem perfectly sensible to us and perfectly in keeping  
with what's sensible from the earth and its people, but way out of step with  
society,  
we will draw attention—

and we must be drawing attention to the things that are facing us.

Or we can wait for the earth to do it for us—  
get our attention—things like climate change could do that—melting the ice caps

and raising the sea levels—and we always thought the west coast cities would end up in the ocean by shaking, not by baking.

Did you see that little “seismic activity” indicating light in the elevators?  
Where are the global warming indicator lights  
on the dashboards of our cars  
or the walls of those big house we’re building  
or labels of the food we eat that’s been shipped half-way across the country?  
We don’t want a light, because we don’t want to know—we have to have the courage to open our eyes.

We must find ways to draw attention to the critical questions facing God’s people in the period of human history.

What is fair?

What is fair when we think of who has how much of what on this planet?  
What is fair when we think about who suffers from what and why on the planet”  
What is fair when we think about who is victimized by war over the bounty of the planet?

What is fair when we think about generational justice—who will be left with what on this planet after our little picnic is over?

What is fair when we think about what is for all of God’s creation—and not just for “homo consumus”?

These questions are not being asked—certainly not by those with temporal power—I was in Washington, D.C. a few weeks back—I had a free morning and visited the various monuments—these are National Parks, right—and as I walked I began picking up aluminum cans to recycle—because not recycling a can is like filling it half full of gasoline and pouring it out (that’s how much energy is saved by recycling one can)—and I found bag in a bush, and before long had a bag-full—but couldn’t find a place to recycle them.

Here in the nation’s capital, in National Parks, outside the President’s back door—the President who’ll send us to war or have us drill in our last wild places for energy—there was no place to recycle a can!

Posing the question of fairness can begin to lead us to the possibility of the peace and security we all seek.

Paul sets the standard for fairness a bit high in our passage this morning

He doesn’t appeal to our sense of fair play  
although he might

He doesn’t say to share out of fear that if  
we don’t we’ll be despised and perhaps targeted.

He doesn’t say that any decent human being would care about  
what they are doing to the earth  
to their neighbors

and to their souls  
by hoarding so much for themselves

He says "Look what Jesus did,"  
now follow the leader  
"Although he was rich—he became poor  
Although he had it all—he didn't keep it all,  
but gave of himself so that others might have"

Here as elsewhere in the Gospels and Epistles we are called to be like Jesus in one way—  
Not modeling his style of preaching or his manner of teaching  
Not mimicing his way of dressing or his levitational techniques over bodies of water

No, here, there, and everywhere we are called to be like Jesus in one way—that is, in his self-emptying for others as epitomized in the cross

Dare we see the cross as something more than our swipe card to get on that elevator to heaven? Dare we see it as a metropass for the local bus traveling the highways and byways and backroads of this good earth carrying on the self-emptying ministry of Jesus in our time?

Being like Jesus in this way will bring with it certain unexpected but not unsurprising consequences.

For one thing, we cannot seek fairness and sustainability in a world bent on avarice and consumption and not get noticed—  
And this can be good  
Seattle Times coverage of the church with its compost pile invites others to new ways of thinking of "holy ground."

It can also be disconcerting:  
A Brethren pastor who spoke his conscience on the war with Iraq, suggesting it might have more to do with our Empire than their Regime found unsigned hate mail in his mail box in the vestibule

But we must remember that just because so much of what we do and who we are seems like craziness—or worse, unpatriotic—to many others around us, it may not be because we're on the wrong track, but because they are.

Take heart—you may be the sane ones. Look around this room and ponder THAT for a moment....

Being like Jesus in this way can also have another unexpected consequence—there may be people who are thinking the same way

My bike and I made the front-page of the Elgin paper a few months back. They were looking for a voice opposing the impending war—and already had a veteran on the "pro" side

So our office got the call, and it was transferred to me  
I told them I'd stop by for an interview—as is my custom, I was on my bike

Along with my comments about the position of our church and my thoughts about the conflict, I told them I'd added another reason to my list for biking

-there's exercise

-reducing greenhouse gases

-being close the world around us

-all the little furry creatures it spares (every mile you don't drive saves .0001 squirrels)

-and now there's geo-politics

Don't go to war for oil for me, Mr. Bush

Anyway, during the interview, I found the reporter saying my lines before I could say them—he'd ask a question and then give his response—which was very similar to my own perspective—I was afraid he'd be quoting himself—give me a break, this is my 15 seconds of fame!

What we are saying makes deep sense and there are others with whom it will resonate

And finally, being like Jesus in this way,

Voluntarily giving up our advantage

Voluntarily asking the difficult questions that have equally troubling answers

Voluntarily setting our sights on fairness when so many see this as craziness  
doing these things is an act of solidarity with our neighbors and with all living things

And of all the campaigns we launch and programs we initiate and lifestyle choices we make, and all the legislative battles you folks in DC wage on Capital Hill—good things, all—

Nothing is more important to our struggling neighbors than knowing they are not alone

That they have been joined in their struggle by others who have taken on their struggle—even as Jesus has taken on the cross

I think this was one of the reasons Paul was so determined to take up an offering among the out-lying churches for the mother church in Jerusalem

These congregations were in distant lands

Many of the members were of Gentile extraction

And they were evidently much better off than the folks back in Jerusalem

Paul understood the message it would send and the ministry it would bring if they paid no mind to race and place; if they didn't hold close their economic advantage as some God-given right

But chose instead to share in order to be fair—after the model of our Lord

I am troubled when I hear people of faith speak of God's blessings them—as if God intentionally blessed us first-worlders with 3-car garages and mammoth vehicles to put in them

I believe God has blessed this earth with enough for all—it's up to us as to how we divide it from there

In a village there was a wise old man who sat by the village gate—people would bring him their questions and problems, and he would always know just what to say—so he became respected far and wide. In the village there was also a young man who resented the old man for the respect given him by others, and who wanted to show the old man a fool. He hatched a plan—"I'll catch a small bird, put it in my hands, and take it to the old man. I'll say, 'Old man, everyone knows you are wise and widely respected for your wisdom—I am sure this wisdom is well-earned. As you are so wise, tell me, old man—this bird in my hand—is it alive or is it dead?' If the old man says it is alive, I will crush it, then open my hands to show the old man a fool—if he says it is dead, I will open my hands, the bird will fly away, and again the old man will be shown the fool."

The day came, and the young man caught the bird and went to visit the old man in the village gate. People were gathered around, sharing their problems and questions with him. The young man approached. "Old man, everyone knows you are wise and widely respected for your wisdom—I am sure this wisdom is well-earned. As you are so wise, tell me, old man—this bird in my hand—is it alive or is it dead?"

The old man looked at the young man's hands, then into the young man's eyes, and said simply, "Young man, the bird is in your hands."

Friends, God has placed this precious and precarious and productive earth in our hands. May we share it in a manner that is fair, after the manner of our Lord.

"What's fair is fair"

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