

Psalm 82 is a tough nut to crack. It's a head-scratcher that causes us to read closely to decipher what's going on here and the message the psalmist is singing about. The psalmist begins by imagining a divine court scene already in session. There are no opening or closing statements, no witnesses to cross-examine, no evidence that proves guilt. God, the judge, knows the truth and delivers the judgment to the gods.

Who are the gods in this divine council? Who are the "heavenly beings," the judges who are failing to act according to God's law for justice? Many different scholars hold different opinions, but here's one that makes this Psalm relevant: We are. We are the gods, the judges whom God appointed to do the Lord's work. Psalm 8 tells us: God "made [humans] only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority – that flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents."¹ God has given us power and authority to rule alongside God, as part of God's divine council. God has appointed us as judges to carry out God's justice in the land.

What is God's justice? Simply, it's fairness. Equality. According to *Feasting on the Word*, "All people should receive their due in the legal system. All people should have access to goods and services. All people should be given an opportunity to thrive and flourish. Those who are vulnerable and defenseless should receive adequate attention and protection. The rich and powerful should not receive preferential

treatment. These 'gods' have had the responsibility to uphold and enforce this system of justice. [Yet,] they have failed in their responsibility, and God judges their failure."²

When we are among the weak and the orphan, the poor and the oppressed, we are on board with God's judgment. But, when we're the gods who hold the power and fail to act, the judgment the psalmist writes about makes us uncomfortable. It should. That's the point of the psalm. That's the Word that God wants proclaimed.

The psalmist chooses this divine court room image because we all have a thirst for justice. We all want "justice [to] roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). There's an innate "longing to see justice done, to see right triumph over wrong, and truth uncovered beneath deceit."³ We root for the underdog.

The psalmist reminds us that in order for the underdog to come out on top, it takes us to act. In order to "give justice to the poor and the orphan; [to] uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute, [to] rescue the poor and helpless, [to] deliver them from the grasp of evil people (v.3-4)," in other words, to deliver God's justice, it will take us to use our power and authority that God has given us as God's appointed.

We can no longer turn a blind eye. We can no longer expect someone else to do the work. We can no longer step over the person in the ditch nor cross the street to ignore the injured as in the Good Samaritan story. God can use each of us to uphold God's plea for justice.

Sometimes we make excuses for not acting: It's a busy time in our lives; We just

¹ New Living Translation.

² Charles Aaron, *Feasting on the Word*, Kindle edition, Location 7841.

³ Lisa Lamb, "Feasting on the Word, Kindle, location 7884.

don't have time right now. We are barely making it ourselves; We just don't have anything extra to give. We're not political people; the immigration issue has just become so political. The problems that face the LGBTQIA community don't affect me. I don't know anyone who is homeless. How can I help? Let us be reminded of Martin Luther King, Jr's, proclamation: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We are called to fight for equality for the sake of equality. We are all connected as God's children, so "none of us are free until all of us are free."⁴

Often, we may feel like we want to do something for hurting people, for the oppressed, but there is so much work to be done. It is overwhelming, and we just don't know how to get started. It starts with what stirs your heart. What keeps you up at night. What bothers you so much that you can't stop thinking about it. God has called each of us to "give justice" somewhere, to someone.

God said in his judgment to the divine council, "You are gods; you are all children of the Most High" (v.6). We have the power, authority, and responsibility to uphold God's justice. God continues: "But you will die like mere mortals and fall like every other ruler" (v.7) if we continue to remain silent or fail to act justly. But that's not the final judgment for us. We can turn things around. We can act. We can speak up. We can do the work God is calling us to do. And, while we are discerning that, we can always continue to live out the three simple rules of the Methodist movement: 1. We can do no harm. 2. We can do good. 3. And, we can stay in love with God by observing the ordinances that grow our faith.

In the words of the psalmist, "Rise up, O God, and judge the earth, for all the nations belong to you" (v.8). Rise up, all powerful and all loving God, and show us where you are calling us to give justice. We thirst for justice; we hunger for fairness and equality for all people. Forgive us when we have failed to act or remained silent. Forgive us when we have deserved the judgment given to the gods of the divine council. Help us to do no harm, to do good, and stay in love with you. Stir our hearts until we act. Amen.

Response to the Word

⁴ Fannie Lou Hamer.