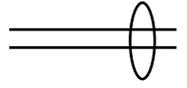


Theology of Polity – Truth and Justice

Session Starter Number 9



Unison Prayer:

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

According to your steadfast love remember me for your goodness sake.

In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

Introduction:

In section 395 of the *Book of Forms*, we find described the grounds upon which a prior judicial decision may be appealed. For example, such a decision may be appealed if it is believed prejudice or injustice played an unfair role in the decision-making process. Clearly, as a Christian church, we want to guard against prejudice and injustice creeping into anything we do. This is an important principle upon which our legislation is based.

In this Session Starter, we are reminded that our polity is designed to help us deal with the life of the church in ways that are intended to be impartial and fair to all.

Scripture: *(Invite an elder to read the following passage.)*

‘With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’

He has told you, O mortal, 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 6:6-8

A Brief Commentary: *(Invite another elder to read the following commentary)*

Micah recognized that God’s people may have confused a form of worship with faithfulness to God. They had come to believe acts of sacrifice were sufficient to honour and serve their creator. In an exaggerated way, Micah caused his listeners to understand that God could not be bought by the sheer volume or the enormity of their offerings. Instead, Micah pointed to a more challenging path. God’s people are not to be identified by ritual, but by the nature of their daily living. God’s people are to be identified as those who act justly, who embrace mercy and kindness, and seek to walk the righteous paths of God.

Reflection:

Fortunately, now that my daughters are young women who genuinely enjoy each other's company, I rarely have to leap into their sibling rivalries to act as judge and jury. There was a time when I did - frequently. I might, for example, see Anna snatch the only good badminton racquet out of Lucy's hands and drop the one with a couple of broken strings at her feet as they make their way into the yard to whack the birdie about.

Lucy shouts, "Hey, that's not fair. You had the good racquet yesterday!"

Anna replies, "Who cares? You couldn't make a good shot if your life depended on it. I deserve the good one."

If the argument continued and seemed destined to dissolve into tears or possible violence (most likely pinching), I'd intervene by saying something like, "Anna, you need to take turns. Let Lucy use the good racquet today."

"You're always on Lucy's side!" Anna would undoubtedly moan.

Then, sounding vaguely like Superman, I would make my well-worn declaration. "I'm not on anybody's side. I'm on the side of truth and justice."

As this Session Starter continues with the theme of the theology of our polity, we are reminded that *The Book of Forms* is meant to provide the church with an impartial method of handling the broad variety of issues with which we are faced. In the purest sense, our polity ought to guard against favouritism or the temptation to sweep conflict under the carpet. Whether we are dealing with issues of church discipline, electing elders, calling a minister, or conducting a congregational meeting, the guidance of the polity should move us to the side of truth and justice. Since we are susceptible to self-serving sin, it is tempting sometimes to invent our own methods for handling church matters. When we do, however, the results are very often less than fair and objective.

Imagine, for example, a session has decided to elect elders. The minister might desperately want to hand-pick Ms. Bea Quick and Mr. I.M. Wise partly because they would make good elders, but also because they are personal friends who would almost certainly support his or her vision for the congregation. The minister might suggest bypassing the "rigmarole" of the prescribed elder election methods and simply have the two declared elders by the session. In elder elections the polity of our church provides the congregation with an opportunity to ponder what it means to be an elder, to pray about the decision, to think about the gifts God has planted in their midst, to discern God's will for the congregation. All this is meant to serve as an unbiased method of calling women and men to serve the church in a vitally important role.

Though there are times when our polity can seem cumbersome, it has been carefully crafted, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through general assemblies, to serve individuals, and the whole church, by helping us to act justly, and to embrace mercy and kindness while walking God's paths of righteousness and truth.

Follow-up Questions:

1. List examples of how our polity of decision-making (prayer, study, recommendation, debate, voting) can help us avoid tyranny, favouritism, or prejudice and draw us onto paths of truth and justice.