Good Morning!

“Do not blame your people Israel whom you redeemed, O Lord, and do not hold them accountable for the bloodshed of an innocent person.” Then atonement will be made for the bloodshed. In this manner you will purge the guilt of innocent blood from among you, for you must do what is right before the Lord.” Deuteronomy 21:8-9

Once again we are searching for the thoughts and attitudes of the LORD found in Deuteronomy. In this series of sermons Moses preached to Israel just before they were to enter the Promised Land and just before Moses knew he would die. They are all inspired from God Himself, but given to us as Moses seeks to warn the people with whom he has lived for 40 years, on how to live before the LORD their God. So much of it does not apply to us because it was given to a people who lived with the Tabernacle and the priesthood. We are now the tabernacle of the Lord and we now are a kingdom of priests. But we cannot write this book off - because in it we find so many examples of how God thinks and so how we should learn to think. This morning it is of guilt and innocence and of “John Does.”

The story is found in the beginning of Deuteronomy 21. They have found a man, slain in an open area and there is no clear evidence about him. He is a John Doe, a person that no one can identify, otherwise his city of origin and his family would take on the responsibility of solving the crime.

People didn’t generally travel alone, they didn’t travel far from home and they didn’t leave without telling family where they were going. So this may be a foreigner and not even an Israelite. Everyone in the towns around must stop and deal with this crime against a man who is not one of them. Altogether, they must determine the city closest. Then they must sacrifice an innocent animal and the elders must wash their hands over the animal to demonstrate their innocence in the matter. Then they must swear to God that they *are* innocent! All this for an unknown man who isn’t of them and just found dead in a field.

Every life matters. This is not meant to be a takeoff on the BLM movement or even the ALM movement. This is what God thinks of the lost, the forgotten, the homeless and the outcast. We can easily attach evil or criminality or unrighteousness to people found like this. God, who knows all, does not. Or at least He gives us no opportunity to look on this person as anything but His child. As His children we must show the utmost of respect for this unknown man.

This act will purge “blood guiltiness” from God’s people. Now the underlying idea is that everyone in this city and the adjacent cities *is* innocent of this crime. But they bear a “blood guiltiness” for the crime. This is meant to be a sobering reminder of the natural guilt of all men. We are born sinners, and are aligned to sin all of our lives. Justice is outside of our ability. We are to practice justice as much as we can, but we never have absolute justice. This is our fault. We sinned and we fell, so “blood guiltiness” is always upon us until we appeal to the LORD. We are not guilty in a way that we deserve punishment for this sin, but we are guilty in that have this sin in our hearts. This acknowledgement keeps it out of our actions.

This is the very basis of the justice God demands of us. Everyone deserves justice – even the unknown and, as it is here, the unknowable. He deserves justice just like anyone else and in some way, we are all guilty until he gets it.

A very present day thought from the ancient Scriptures.

In Christ, who justifies the ungodly…

Pastor EA