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Beloved Congregation of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,

Perhaps the most asked question of us as evangelical Christians is why a, or our good God lets bad things happen. Such a question normally disregards the matter of sin in the world, human responsibility and how God uses even the tragic things of the lives of His children for good and further intimacy. Now that answer takes faith to accept and often it is skepticism, lack of faith that drives the questions that are often not really questions at all but are in fact attacks.

The matter before us this morning is such a matter. Isn't religion, in general and then Christianity in particular, the cause of so much injustice and suffering in the world? Whether it is Beirut or Bethlehem, or Belgrade or Belfast, Muslims hate Orthodox Christians who hate Roman Catholics who hate evangelical Christians. Hindus have attacked others, Muslims have attacked others and so too have people in the name of Christ. Is that what Christianity is all about? What do we say about Christians and so-called Christian culture that in the past has allowed for and even propagated slavery in North America? What about Apartheid in South Africa and the knock even comes against the Reformed Churches.

That is just on a large scale. Many have in the church organized felt ostracized, confused and hurt by the people of God. Has the church always protected morality properly while also reaching out and loving others, speaking the truth in love properly? I think we can honestly say, "No, not always."

What shall we say then to these things? Well what does God say? What has Jesus told us in the Word? What has God communicated to us in Christ the crucified and risen savior—our saviour? I bring to you the Word of the Lord under the theme:

Jesus' People Are Known by Their Good Deeds: 1. Christianity Criticized 2. Christianity Realized

Christianity Criticized I think we can admit for a moment that there has been a lot of prejudice and violence committed in the name of religion. We have together discussed the whole matter of religious freedom and personal freedom. Christianity it is said is a straight jacket and allows for no variance or freedom of thought of lifestyle. We saw that traditionalism or legalism sometimes creeps into the church and where we must repent, let us repent. However, we also saw that there is as little freedom elsewhere. My views as a Christianity are not acceptable in the LBQT (and whatever letter I am missing) world. The police are not welcome at the so-called PRIDE parade. Muslims are not going to accept the Bible as the only ground of truth and the Hindus either and yet in different ways. Community means that we stand in unity with others and even if we say that the community must be by nature all-inclusive you will exclude those who believe otherwise. Let those who criticize at least be honest and especially those who claim all-inclusiveness or complete tolerance.

That said and that being true it means that when one religious group seeks absolute freedom and what's more believes it considers itself alone true, then other religious groups must become either subordinated or destroyed. Islam is a religion that is bent on world domination, and so too Christianity by the way—the means of doing that prescribed by our books, the Koran and the Bible and our prophets Mohammed and Jesus Christ are very different however. So, the first reality we must admit is that there are not two or more true religions but only one and then of course we must, and others must decide not only which one but also how that religious group is going to handle matters.

Humanism too is a kind of religion as we have mentioned the Bible does not allow for atheism. Liberal humanism sells itself as a softer and kinder religion. It speaks of welfare for the poor and help for the unwed mother and yet it despises Christianity and the unborn and the rich and so on and by way of public education and the media they too have sought dominance over a culture. Generally, though the criticism comes from that camp against Christianity and to be honest sometimes they have a point.

I am going to leave the matter of the crusades alone for a moment. The church ought never to be politically dominant—I mean that church ought not to run the state—but the church ought to be influential bringing to light the morality and truth of the Word of God to the government. But too often the church has become insular and apathetic. If we as Christians were making a good living, able to build our churches and even Christian schools it was all ok. We just figured that our neighbors thought as we do, and it is likely that in an earlier day most of neighbors at least shared our basic sensibilities. Too often in the Reformed Churches we became Old Testament in our thinking figuring that everyone will come when we put up the church and the sign and live in the community that we isolated ourselves from. Suddenly, things changed so fast. And then when people come to church with their baggage, sorrows and unchurched lifestyles and utterly different way of thinking, fashion and lifestyle we were threatened, scared and critical of them. We too often hit back with legalism and morality forgetting that we were saved by grace. They in turn have felt hurt, angry and

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confused and so they criticize us of intolerance and injustice. Sometimes God's people have engaged in the political realm in aggressive and non-loving ways. All one needs to do is look at social media and we see complaining Christians who are more concerned about our own political freedoms than we are about the souls of the lost whom we argue with and then it turns into a fight! We complain and angry about abortion or the welfare state and come off as those who do not care for the vulnerable pregnant young girl or the truly confused poor while the humanist come off looking good and kind and loving. The church used to be at the leading front of schooling, hospitals and care for the outcast, but now it is the state and our criticism of the state is not always accompanied with actions of true love and help. Yes, the state has usurped its proper domain to be sure, but where was the church and the people of God when all this was happening? What were we doing? Were we administering justice and love for all the oppressed?

The criticism has been levied in two ways. One is that when a person who comes to a community church looking for love and support finds ostracism or anger that person is confused angry and critical of the church. The other is when these folks spend some time with us and they notice our anger, sin and our humanness. We are in fact sinners from the littlest to the leadership. We fail in living out the law of love of God and neighbor. Then the criticism comes of hypocrisy. The church full of sinners is unjust when they point the sins of others, the sins of society. Then that law comes back at us: judge not lest you be judged!

What shall we say then? Are they correct? You know what? In part they are correct. We need to be conscience about that. We also need to properly understand what is going on.

First, where does the notion of injustice hurled at us from liberal and secular humanism come from? It comes from the thinking produced in Europe by the enlightenment with its distrust of the authority of the day both in the academy and the Roman Catholic Church. "No God and no master" they claimed. We all needed to be free to think, to learn and to question. This criticism as the church as the cause of injustice came too from the Reformation of the church which had a profound effect on Europe of the 16-18th centuries. These people who criticize the church and Christianity often forget or are ignorant of the fact that much of their thinking about morality and what is right and wrong is rooted in Biblical-Christian morality. The Church taught about care and cared for the poor, the underclass and the underdog. The church was the agency that confronted the barbarians of an earlier day and proved that Christ is right and not that "might is right." It was unthinkable to the barbarians that real humanity is about becoming weak for the other and that real domination comes by means of teaching and living as an influence. But in time the Holy Spirit conquered Europe and the church became the most important influence in education and politics. But!

But! This is important, and I think some very good apologetes in the church are missing this point—Satan is alive and active in the church. The demons are active and alive in the church and the hearts of the people of God. They do all generally acknowledge the sins of the people of God. What we profess we do not always do. We have seen the abuse of little children by leaders in the church. We have seen the abuse and marginalization of women from time to time in the church. Satan and the devils are tempting, luring and goading and we weak creatures do fall and sometimes in some very public and ugly ways. The church is not perfect, and Christians are not perfect! The answer is not, however, to get rid of God's law of love and the moral code laid out by God for us as so many want to do because of the abuse of power and periodic injustice! The very thing the secular humanist is looking for—namely to fight injustice—is to be found in the very Christian principles they are rooted in and yet criticize.

On the one hand we need to take legitimate criticism to heart. We need to see whether we have spoken the truth in love and we also need to embrace the Christian way of life in word and deed. However, we also need to be a confessing people. We need to be upfront that we are sinners saved by grace who are still struggling with sin, self and Satan! We need to be clear that we will, like all people (including those who criticize us), fail. And as those who fail but have been shown mercy; let us be merciful! We who so desire forgiveness and love God for forgiving us who came to us by means of the good news and came to us in the wonder of a Christ who suffered the ultimate injustice. We need to confess a Christ who died for us and our sins on the cross though He had committed no crime and had never sinned and yet loved us. Yes, Jesus calls us to a new life and appoints us as His servants in the world. In Mathew 25, Jesus says that there is a judgement day coming and he will justly judge the living and the dead, but he does not come with the weaponry of physical violence but with the power of persuasion, the word and the Spirit through the community of love.

It has happened that the church has been an agent of injustice but let us not miss the truth of the matter that real love and justice has been administered by the faithful as Jesus has worked in them. We have considered Christianity criticized but let us also consider Christianity realized.

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Christianity Realized Sure we must be self-analytical but, in the end, and in the main Christianity has not generally been the agent of injustice but it has often been Christians that have brought real justice and the Word of God to right wrongs.

When the masses in Europe were held by the oppressive and false Roman Catholic Church and her fallen clergy it was Christians like Martin Luther and John Calvin who called for justice in doctrine and life. The called out the injustices laid upon the poor and oppressed. When slavery reared its ugly head in the Southern United States and the slave trade in the Netherlands and England it was a Christian movement both in the United States and England led by born again Christians like William Wilberforce who sacrificed so much for so long in the name of the justice of Christ. Too among others, Christians, born again and Bible believing led the way in South Africa based on Christian principles to bring equality and equity to the Apartheid torn country. What's interesting is that more and more revisionist history simply does not mention the Christianity of these folks involved turning them into secular humanist and rather crediting the reformation with the reforming of Europe they put stock in the enlightenment and humanism and that of course is to discredit the realization of Christianity in this world.

Christianity forever changed Europe though it and her churches are backsliding and that is happening sadly here too in Canada and Toronto as humanism's dominance is ruining real justice and equity. But wherever God's people have gone, churches have been built, the poor have been helped and charity provided. Why is that?

Look at Jesus' words to the people of His day as we have read them in Matthew 25. What does the church do? They feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and visit in the prison. Now, we must be clear Jesus speaks first about care within the church community. But there can be no doubt that this spills over into the community. Christians for instance in our own Reformed community are doing amazing work in US prisons and here in Canada too. It is a largely untapped field of evangelism. They need love and instruction and care and what's more we can advocate for at least human treatment. Christians have been on the leading edge of care for communities just ask your own deacons about what they are involved within the community. Churches sponsor refuges and ensure good care and adjustment to the new culture. It was Jesus who said we are to love even our enemies. We are the channels of peace on earth!

Listen what Isaiah says about Jesus our King!

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD— and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

(Is 11:1-4)

Jesus is Kings and Lord over all now! We are not waiting for some magical 1,000-year reign. The power of Christ is present on the earth now and in the main the true church filled with Bible believing Christians is the representation of the community of justice and righteousness on the earth. Yes, we have failed from time to time. But look at Jesus for a moment. He comes to the world in truth and righteousness and they crucified Him. Jesus told His followers and us too, do not be surprised that they hate you! Be we are surprised! All we want to do is our best and do good, to admit our failures and ask for the Spirit's help. But the darkness will not tolerate the light. Look at the injustice upon the church here in Canada and around the world. We are a persecuted lot! It is likely going to become ore difficult to be a true believer for Satan will do all he can to stop us. Ultimately, he cannot. But let us not become angry or bitter or discouraged. Let us fight the good fight of faith in a faithful and good way. It is not about our political rights first but about the glory of God the Father and the honoring of Christ. It is about the power of the Word and Spirit in us. To us is given the challenge of justice and the example of love in the world and by the power of Christ it happens! Christ is with us. He who suffered such injustice says by the letter to the Hebrews:

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. Heb 10:34 You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will

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of God, you will receive what he has promised.

(Heb. 10:32-36)

In this world you will be the subject of unfair criticism and injustice. Let us reach out in love and justice—the justice of Christ the just who suffered for the unjust. They will throw you into prison and refuse to visit you, they will take your things before they give you anything and they will and do watch us die. Let us be rich in mercy and love even to those who hate us. Let us not be consumed by frustration and hate but forward as the children of Christ. Let us also listen to the words of Christ for if we refuse to care for the downtrodden and the oppressed within the church and beyond Jesus will on the great day of judgment say, “I never knew you!” In Hebrews 10 it also says that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of an angry God! We will live as the righteous and in faith by grace look forward to the eternal glory and life with Christ! Let us confess our sins and failures but also, we may not deny what Christ through His Church and Kingdom is doing on the earth. Let freedom and justice reign! Amen!