

# Justice

Katherine J. Chase, September 30, 2018/October 14, 2018

## INTRO

On a beautiful, warm sunny evening a few weeks ago, 5 of us were balancing our bikes beside a trail on Mt. Helena. Just up the trail, a large craggy boulder jutted out from the path. Our leader Jane had showed us the “line”, or the best way to climb up and across this rock. This was my third try.

As I pushed off on my bike, I went over the path across the rock in my mind once again. I sped up the trail (as fast as I dared), pushed halfway up and across the boulder, and then just ran out of steam and stopped. It was so frustrating! In my mind my reasons for not making it included: I’m not in condition, I haven’t been doing weights, and on and on. But our leader just shook her head and asked, “where were you looking?”

Where was I looking? Well of course I was looking at that giant rock! In fact it got bigger and bigger as I approached it. But that was the problem. One of the first rules in mountain biking is you have to look down the path, not at the obstacle right in front of you. Our bikes with their wide knobby tires are designed to roll over those obstacles.

In this way, mountain biking is like our spiritual journey. Where are we looking? This morning, I am blessed to have the opportunity to talk with you about JUSTICE. “What does JUSTICE look like?” It’s so easy to get mired in our problems and our disagreements, to stumble around on those boulders if we lose our focus. We need to remember that, just as mountain bikes were designed for rugged trails, God designed us to work together along the difficult, rocky path toward JUSTICE in the world.

## I. Discipleship Cross

For our series on DISCIPLESHIP we have been focusing on this DISCIPLESHIP CROSS. It’s important that we started at the top, looking toward God. Dominic talked about the top left part of the cross, where we spend time in DEVOTION. We learned to think of the bible as a love letter from a God who yearns to connect with us. Patti talked about gathering together to WORSHIP God, shown on the right side of the cross. There’s an energy and a magic that happens when we are in community. Hearts are changed. We have to start there, at the top, with God. That’s where we can become both grounded in where we are, today, and where we develop a vision of where we are going. We also need to spend time in DEVOTION and WORSHIP to make sure we are rested and nourished spiritually.

But God did not create us to stay there forever. In fact, to paraphrase Reverend Patti and her favorite song, “faith without ACTION is about as useful as a screen door on a submarine”. God demands that we love and lift up and serve our brothers and sisters. And that’s what the bottom part of the DISCIPLESHIP CROSS signifies. Patti talked about Mercy, at the bottom left. She challenged us to be present, to listen, and to be aware of God’s presence when we spend

time with the suffering and the vulnerable. I'll be talking about that bottom right part of the cross, where we work in COMMUNITY to serve others, to bring about JUSTICE.

## II. What Does Justice Look Like?

Visions or descriptions of Justice are threaded throughout the scriptures. I'll focus on the vision described by the author of Revelation, in verse 22.

### Eden Restored

**22** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. <sup>4</sup>They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

The world that I see in this scripture is a JUST world, with clean water, the tree that offers food and shelter, and HEALING, and light.

### A. Water of Life

We start with a crystal-clear river. Water is my passion and my life's work. When I learned that many many families, even in the United States, are without clean drinking water, I decided to focus my studies on how to fix problems related to water. I worked on irrigation and drinking water systems as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nepal. And now almost 40 years later, I am still striving to understand our rivers and lakes and what our future water resources might look like.

Access to clean water is a social, economic, and political issue. Globally, 3 in 10 people lack clean drinking water in their homes. Many of those people spend hours, every day, walking to get water. Even in our own United States, communities from Michigan to Texas have been grappling with contaminated water. It seems that the poorest of our brothers and sisters, here and in other countries, are the ones affected by pollution, or by water supplies drying up or being damaged.

JUSTICE means continuing the hard work of keeping water clean, free from contamination. There always will be a balancing act between economic development and potential to dirty our water supplies. But we have to protect our lakes and streams. Also, we are called to assist our brothers and sisters in other countries who are struggling to survive as water supplies dry up due to conflict or drought or mismanagement. The UN has declared, starting this year, the International Decade for Sustainable Water Development. How can we help alleviate this thirst?

### B. The Tree of Life Offers Food and Shelter

The tree of life grows on both sides of the river. Pastor Tyler Amundsen likened this tree of life to our 2 churches, Covenant and St. Paul's, on each side of town, working together on a shared mission. The tree could symbolize two sides of an issue, or two opposing political parties. This tree offers fruit that never runs out, and shelter. In a just world, no one is hungry, and everyone has a home. So many in this congregation are working towards this vision. We have brave and wonderful leaders who stepped forward so that we can be host churches for Family Promise, and it has been an honor to meet and talk with these families who are working hard to get a home. We work with food share, and habitat for humanity.

What more can we do? Can we meet the needs of a world hungry for bread and searching for spiritual nourishment as well? Can we stand with those working on laws and policies that eliminate hunger and homelessness?

### C. And the Leaves of the Tree are for the HEALING of the Nations

My heart aches for so many of our brothers and sisters who are hurting. In a just world, we take care of each other! Spiritually and physically. Health care should be available to everyone.

So many are in need of healing. Our brothers, our sisters have been hurt, simply because they look or love or pray different than we do. Even the church, where people should be welcomed with open arms, has damaged and destroyed some.

Our mission is to reach out, to welcome in, to offer love and reassurance and healing. For all. We can do that better than just about any other group out there. We should be THE example of healing for a hurting world.

I am so proud that this church is part of the "Reconciling Ministries network", seeking JUSTICE and HEALING for people of all sexual orientation and gender identities.

### D. Light

A light so bright that even the sun is no longer needed. Darkness has been vanquished. John 1:5 describes the light that shines in the darkness, that darkness cannot overcome. We receive and soak in this light while we are in Devotion and Worship, then beam this light of life to the world where it is so desperately needed. Indeed, the United Methodist Church has a long history of concern for social justice, we strive to transform conditions that create injustice and inequality.

What injustices make you angry? Or tug at your heart? Can we shine a light:

- For Native Americans that live in poverty, who have suffered injustices for 100s of years. Especially Native American women who are particularly vulnerable, and who make up a staggering 25 percent of missing persons in Montana.
- For victims of sexual abuse, for victims of war, and victims of drug addiction. And victims of human trafficking.
- For refugees, forced from their homes, on perilous voyages. In this Dialogs book on the Refugee Crises, I learned that there are more than 20 million refugees in the world today.
- For the Mobility-impaired. As my dad put it a few weeks ago, to you that is simply a curb. To me, that is MOUNT EVEREST.

- For Victims of racial or gender discrimination
- Gun violence.

### III. The CHURCH is needed – now more than ever

Crystal clear water. Food and shelter. Healing. Light. This is one vision of JUSTICE. What is your vision? And what do we do now?

We can strive to understand issues, to get beyond the screaming headlines and news blurbs. Wednesday's at 6:30, Phaedra Raymond is leading "Dialogues" on Immigration and Refugee Crisis. And soon there will be a class looking into poverty, called the "Cries of the Poor".

As individuals, we can vote. We can throw our support behind candidates that share our vision for a just world.

As a church, we can work together around policies and laws that foster equality, and that eliminate poverty, hunger, and homelessness.

We can stay in the discussion around some of these very difficult problems even when things get sticky and uncomfortable. As a CHURCH, as Christians, we can strive to stay out of the muck and refrain from joining the negative fray, and keep to the high road of treating everyone with respect, kindness, and yes as Jesus said, even LOVE. That's what sets us apart, right? That's what we are about.

So help me out here. Our church is already doing amazing work providing food and shelter and water and light. I look at all of you and from the bottom of my heart I thank you for your leadership and all that you do to bring about JUSTICE in our world. Can we do more? What should our vision be? In your bulletin is an announcement about our new "JUSTICE League", a team of people with a passion for social justice. Please sign up on the back of the presence form, or contact Patti or the church office if you are interested.

There will be those boulders in the way. But we need to look up, we need to keep our eyes on our vision of a JUST, fair world. Our closing Brother Vann hymn reminds us that we might not live to see that vision entirely realized. But our children will build on that vision, and bring about something amazing, something greater still.

In Phillipians 4:13 Paul says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." He doesn't say "I might be able to get around and maybe do some of these things I'd like to..." No, when we work together with Christ as our guide and our light, we can accomplish "all things". So, keep up the good, holy work. The World IS About to Turn. Towards JUSTICE, towards the eternal light of Christ.