



Touchstones Project

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Justice



sive triumph of ... right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. **But from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.** Things refuse to be mismanaged long. Jefferson trembled when he thought of slavery and remembered that God is just. Ere long all America will tremble." Martin Luther King, Jr. reworked the bolded phrases above: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."



Introduction to the Theme

Justice has challenged humans from the beginning. Ancient Greeks considered justice a fundamental concept permeating all aspects of individual and collective life. They saw it as crucial for the community's well-being, the legal system's functioning, and the development of virtuous individuals, despite slavery being widespread and females being the property of their fathers or husbands. Justice was for the privileged, injustice for everyone else, a formula that has persisted across time.

In his 1853 sermon, *Of Justice and the Conscience*, Unitarian minister Theodore Parker wrote, "Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progres-

Wisdom Story

Don't Sleep During the Revolution

Washington Irving was born in Manhattan on April 3, 1783. It was a special week because the residents there learned of the British ceasefire ending the American Revolution. His parents, who immigrated from England, were part of the merchant class. They named him after George Washington, the hero of the just-completed American Revolution. When he was six years old, Irving met George Washington, who was settling into the first U.S. capitol located in New York City. The meeting made a lasting impression on him. Perhaps it's why Irving, a famous writer, wrote a long-forgotten 5-volume biography of George Washington. We remember him for his short stories Rip Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

Rip Van Winkle lived in a small village in the Kaatskills mountains. It was part of the New Netherland, a colony the Dutch founded in 1614. Just 30 years later, the governor surrendered under threat of attack by British troops. The villagers found themselves living in the English colony called New York. Of course, that didn't matter. They were Dutch, and they would always be Dutch. Of course, this happened long before Rip Van Winkle was born. His story began before the Revolutionary War.

Children loved Rip because he taught them to fly kites and shoot marbles and helped them when they played sports. He also told long stories about



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Justice & the Common Good

The Common Good is not an accidental byproduct of society. Given the power of privilege and wealth, good should be limited to the elite. It should not be common, yet some good flows like righteous streams. The Common Good has been created, sustained, and increased through enormous effort. Our second source reminds us of "Words and deeds of prophetic men and women which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love." This call to justice has been answered in every generation, and we must answer it today to ensure that the rights and freedoms that uphold the Common Good are not all sacrificed on the altar of greed and intolerance.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Reimagining the Common Good

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ghosts and witches. He never refused to help a neighbor, like building stone fences, regardless of how hard it was. The woman in the village also admired him because he would run errands and do odd jobs that their husbands wouldn't. Unfortunately, the one thing he couldn't do was run his farm. His fences were continually falling down, his cow would roam the village, and the only thing that grew better than his potatoes and Indian corn were weeds. The only person who was not happy with him was his wife. She nagged him constantly. To escape, he went to a small inn to talk with other men. That inn had a picture posted outside of His Majesty George the Third, the King of England.

One day, Rip fled into the woods with his dog and gun to go hunting. As he walked higher up the mountain, he met a man carrying a keg of liquor. They walked together until they reached a clearing where strange men played a nine-pin bowling game. The man insisted that Rip serve them some of the liquor, which he did. He also drank a little and then more, and then a lot until he was so drunk he just fell asleep.

When he woke up, he thought it was the next morning, but his dog was gone, his rifle was rusted, and his beard, now grey, was more than a foot long. What happened? He returned to the village and learned that everything had changed. At the inn, the picture of King George was gone. In its place was a picture of a man with the name George Washington underneath it. Rip slowly learned that he had been asleep for 20 years and completely missed the American Revolutionary War, which lasted eight years. Though his wife had died, his daughter was now grown and married with a young son. She took him into her home. And as they say, he lived happily ever after.

The story of Rip Van Winkle has long been famous, but it took on added significance during the Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr. began talking about Rip Van Winkle in his ad-

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People have bent the arc toward justice countless times. The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in Canada (2008-2015) addressed the horrific damage done by Residential Schools (1831-1996) to the children and families of the First Nations. It is too soon to judge how far Canadians will bend the arc toward justice on behalf of First Nations. However, the annual *Truth and Reconciliation Day* (aka *Orange Shirt Day*), first held on September 30, 2021, will keep the issue front and center.

The U.S. 1964 *Civil Rights Act* and 1965 *Voting Rights Act* bent the arc toward justice. They ended *Jim Crow* laws following Reconstruction (1865-77) to enforce segregation and disenfranchise Blacks. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Shelby County vs Holder* gutted the *Voting Rights Act*. Chief Justice Roberts wrote, "Our country has changed, and while any racial discrimination in voting is too much, Congress must ensure that the legislation it passes to remedy that problem speaks to current conditions." Predictably, Congress did nothing, but 14 new laws in eight southern states have voting restrictions. This made 2013 like 1963. With the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade*, 2022 became 1972. Fifty years of justice lost.

Does Lady Justice, inspired by the Roman goddess *Justitia* and the Greek goddess *Themis*, offer hope? She holds scales of justice and a sword, with a blindfold for impartiality, but it did not always exist. Desmond Manderson writes, "The first known image to show a blindfolded justice comes from a woodcut, possibly by Albrecht Dürer.... This 1494 image is not a celebration of blind justice but a critique. A fool applies the blindfold so that lawyers can play fast and loose with the truth." In

1559, an engraving by Pieter Brueghel the Elder entitled *Justice* showed a similar disregard for justice. Manderson writes, "Justicia ...is a statue, inanimate on her pedestal. In addition to the blindfold, ...she gives the sense of having been dressed up as a prop for those around her." The blindfold meant that Lady Justice was blind to injustice.



The scales held by Lady Justice weigh the evidence presented by each side, but what if they also weighed law versus justice? As Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. asserted, "This is a court of law, young man, not a court of justice." Bertrand Russell added, "Law in origin was merely a codification of the power of dominant groups, and did not aim at anything that ... would appear to be justice." Not all laws are just, not all legal out-

comes in courts are just, and privilege almost always wins. Injustice is not accidental; it is built into the structure of society. To seek justice, we must understand the structure of injustice and the systemic oppression that it wields.

Injustice can be invisible because of the way we have been socialized. It's related to the amount of privilege and protection we have, not unlike Siddhartha Gautama before he became the Buddha. We can be blind to the injustice that the oppressed see and experience daily. The entire structure of society perpetuates injustice, including law, politics, education, the economy, churches, institutions, businesses, cultural norms, and more. The rich and powerful hold the status quo together, and many down the ladder comply if they receive benefit.

This is not to say that there is no justice. Justice exists, but it is applied unequally in many different ways. The arc of the moral universe requires our

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Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: “Quick reminder: Kindness and justice are not synonymous. Be kind. And advocate and work for justice. Lives depend on it.”
Bernice King

Day 2: “If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you recognize that your liberation and mine are bound up together, we can walk together.”
Lilla Watson

Day 3: “Environmental justice ...goes something like this: no community should be saddled with more environmental burdens and less environmental benefits than any other.”
Majora Carter

Day 4: “You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know.”
William Wilberforce

Day 5: “Justice is not a matter of opinion but an imperative of the soul.”
Simon Wiesenthal

Day 6: “We need the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people, the courage to fight for social justice. In many instances we will be stepping out on nothing, and just hoping to land on something. But that’s the struggle. To live is to wrestle with despair, yet never allow despair to have the last word.”
Cornel West

Day 7: “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Day 8: “The beauty of anti-racism is that you don’t have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself.”
Ijeoma Oluo

Day 9: “Restorative justice is not a soft option. It takes courage to face the truth about the harm that has been done and the suffering that has been caused. It takes courage to face the truth about oneself.”
Howard Zehr

Day 10: “If you’re calling for an end to unrest, but not calling out police brutality, not calling for health care as a human right, not calling for an end to housing discrimination, all you’re asking for is the

continuation of quiet oppression.”
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Day 11: “The absence of economic justice and opportunity undermines the very fabric of a just society.”
Bernie Sanders

Day 12: “The first duty of society is justice.”
Alexander Hamilton

Day 13: “We can either have democracy ... or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can’t have both.”
Louis D. Brandeis, Associate Justice

Day 14: “It is the spirit and not the form of law that keeps justice alive.”
Earl Warren, Chief Justice

Day 15: “There is a court of law, young man, not a court of justice.”
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

Day 16: “There is a higher court than courts of justice and that is the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts.”
Mahatma Gandhi

Day 17: “Sometimes justice was all about the small victories.”
Susan Dennard

Day 18: “We make our fervent pleas for the high road of justice, and then we tread unflinchingly the low road of injustice. This strange dichotomy, this agonizing gulf between the *ought* and the *is*, represents the tragic theme of man’s earthly pilgrimage.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Day 19: “Economic justice is not a partisan issue; it is a human rights imperative that transcends political divides.”
Yanis Varoufakis

Day 20: “When we identify where our privilege intersects with somebody else’s oppression, we’ll find our opportunities to make real change.”
Ijeoma Oluo

Day 21: “Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other’s welfare, social justice can never be attained.”
Helen Keller

Day 22: “Unlike a lot of people, I don’t feel powerless. I know I can do something. But anyone can do something. It’s not about being special. It’s about deciding to do it—to dive into work for peace and justice and care for everybody on the planet.”
Patch Adams

Day 23: “I’ve finally gotten to a point in my life where I’m not afraid to speak. Where my shadow no longer haunts me. And I don’t want to lose that freedom—not again. I can’t go backward. I’d rather be shot dead screaming for justice than die alone in a prison of my own making.”
Tahereh Mafi

Day 24: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”
Martin Luther King Jr.



Day 25: “Environmental justice is social justice in action, recognizing the interconnectedness of our communities and the shared responsibility we have to protect our planet for all generations.”
Van Jones

Day 26: “Restorative justice is an invitation to look beyond traditional responses to wrongdoing, and to consider the needs and responsibilities of all those affected—victims, offenders, and community.”
Kay Pranis

Day 27: “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Day 28: “Justice grows out of recognition of ourselves in each other—that my liberty depends on you being free too.”
Barack Obama

Day 29: “A democracy cannot thrive where power remains unchecked and justice is reserved for a select few. Ignoring these cries and failing to respond to this movement is simply not an option—for peace cannot exist where justice is not served.”
John Lewis

Day 30: “Justice is doing for others what we would want done for us.”
Gary Haugen

Day 31: “Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. YOU can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom.”
Nelson Mandela

Second Source People

A liberal theology of justice asks that we ground our commitment to justice in fertile soil to grow strong and weather the challenges that working for justice inevitably brings.

The prophet Micah was active in the Kingdom of Judah during the last half of the 8th century BCE. People asked Micah what they could do to please God, wondering if burnt offerings or sacrifices might suffice. In

verse 6.8, Micah said, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "Here ... we find one of the high water-marks of the Old Testament. The divine demand upon men is expressed in terms of elemental simplicity—justice and kindness between man and man, and a humble walk with God."

Simplicity: Justice, Mercy, and Humility. Megan McKenna writes, "It is only by doing acts of justice, by solidly standing with those in need of justice, and by resisting injustice that justice can become a reality." Justice is not humanity's default position, something that happens automatically. Self-interest, privilege, and greed are too ingrained and powerful. Justice is hard won and hard kept because others will seek to destroy the gains. Too often, people play life as a zero-sum game where your gain is my loss. Justice for me is injustice for you. Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis writes, "Justice is not a finite resource. We can fight for all of the people, all of the time." She is calling for a positive-sum game where we can always increase justice.

McKenna adds, "The second demand is 'Love mercy' (or 'Love tenderly') [or 'Love kindness']. The Hebrew word

hesed, compassion, means coming to the rescue of the poor, the outcast, the alien, the slave, the powerless, hearing the cries of those in misery, giving love that is faithful, sustaining, enduring." Loving mercy encourages a compassionate understanding of people's situations and motivations. Mercy recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every person. A mindset of loving mercy aligns with the principles of restorative justice, which seeks to repair the harm caused by a crime and restore relationships. It involves those harmed in the justice process. It emphasizes healing, rehabilitation, and the possibility of redemption.



The book *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson, the UUA's 2015-16

Common Read Book, focuses on Stevenson's representation of Walter McMillian, a young man who a Monroe County, Alabama court sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately overturned the verdict. In an interview, Stevenson said, "We don't put crimes in prison; we put people in prison." He

added, "The justice system is devoid of mercy," concluding, "Justice without mercy is injustice."

Micah's final request was to "walk humbly with your God." McKenna quotes Howard Thurman's response, who wrote, "How do you walk humbly with God? How do you? How do you walk humbly with anybody? ... [By] coming to grips with who I am, what I am as accurately and as fully as possible: a clear-eyed appraisal of myself. And in the light of the dignity of my own sense of being ... with my weaknesses and strength, with my abilities and my liabilities...."

Micah did not write "God;" he wrote "your God." He was descriptive, not prescriptive. Who is God for you: the God of the Trinity, the energy in the universe, the sum of all reality, the Spirit of Life,

Love, or something less or more traditional? The point is that you choose. Our Universalist forebears would approve of humility as part of the equation. They might have asked, "Do you want to be right or good?" Advocating for goodness, they would ask that we not rush to judgment. The desire to be right can affect how we look at a situation, causing us to close our mind, erode empathy, and selectively seek and interpret information that supports our pre-existing positions, which is confirmation bias. Humility encourages open-mindedness, fosters empathy, and calls for decisions that ensure fairness for all parties.

A liberal theology of justice is grounded in our first principle, "the inherent worth and dignity of every person." Ideally, worth and dignity cause people "to act justly," but that is not always true. At its most basic level, justice is interpersonal, as is injustice. How we regard and treat each other matters. Despite the teachings of Jesus, we forget our neighbors, near and far.

Our second principle advocates for "justice, equity, and compassion in human relations." It acknowledges that justice without equity and compassion is insufficient. The *Article II Study Commission* thought these were so important that they included all three in their seven proposed values: justice, equity, and love (i.e., compassion). Of justice, they write, "We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression." We should understand their words in the broadest terms possible because Earth and all the life that dwell here are also victims of the systemic oppression promoted by dominion theology.

Justice without equity can be blind. Unlike equality, which assumes everyone has the same opportunity, equity considers the unique circumstances and disadvantages people may face, primarily because of systemic oppression and historical inequalities. It also recognizes that authorities can use the criminal justice system unjustly.

Nicholas Rossis writes, "Justice without compassion is ...tyranny." In retributive justice systems, like the ones

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in the U.S. and Canada, punishment can be excessively harsh. Compassion seeks to avoid overly severe or disproportionate punishments. It calls for recognition of the humanity of offenders by treating them with dignity and respect while holding them accountable for their actions. Compassion values rehabilitation, restoration, and reintegration: uses imprisonment to change attitudes and build skills to reduce recidivism and prioritizes the harm done to victims through restoration, which includes reintegration into the community.

As crucial as calling the criminal justice to account, much more injustice demands a response. A liberal theology of justice recognizes and honors our implicit covenant with the world, given the reality of our interconnectedness and interdependence. It must also be mindful of the intersectionality of oppressions that marginalize people and foment despair. This calls for intersectional justice, tugging at multiple strands of injustice that braid together and strangle those it assaults. Further, to prioritize the Common Good, we seek the fair distribution of resources and good within society. Finally, we must embody a liberal theology of justice through activism, often as an ally in coalitions of diverse people. May we become *Second Source* people who “confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.”

Source: Touchstones



A More Perfect Union

The Jewish theologian Martin Buber (1878-1965) gave an unpublished address in 1952 entitled, *Fraternity*. Related to Buber’s address, B.R. Ambedkar wrote, “In short, justice is another name of liberty, equality and fraternity.”

Buber, who was not enamored by either capitalism or socialism, addressed his concern through a parable. The parable began with the French Revolution, which sought to secure the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, (i.e., kinship or fellowship). For Buber, these ideals became disconnected following revolutions in countries like France, America, and Russia.

Liberty went west to America, but it changed in troubling ways becoming destructive in its capacity to exploit the land and people. It was a restricted liberty excluding Native Americans, slaves from Africa, and women.

Equality went east to the Soviet Union. It, too, changed, extinguishing individualism in the cauldron of the collective, central economic planning, and the horrors of the forced labor camps of the Gulag.

Kinship (i.e., fraternity) went into hiding and was unable to mitigate Western individualism or Eastern collectivism. Kinship is the ideal that we belong to each other, that we are brothers and sisters of one human family, and thus that we owe each other a fierce loyalty. Rev. John Buhrens wrote, “...unless we remember the missing element, human kinship. This ...religious element ...alone can bind together the other two. It reminds us that we are all sisters and brothers on this earth, children of one great mystery.”

Buber wrote, “Life, in that it is life, necessarily entails justice.” Liberty without equality is abusive, and equality without liberty is dehumanizing. Together they point to justice.

Source: Touchstones

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continual attention.

Unitarian Universalism has been active in the pursuit of justice since its founding. The *Edict of Torda* in 1568, advocated for by Ferenc David, the founder of Unitarianism, sought justice through religious tolerance and freedom of belief. He died as a martyr, imprisoned for his beliefs. Universalists were especially active in the Social Gospel movement in the early 1900s under the leadership of Universalist minister and educator Clarence Skinner.

UUs were celebrated for marching at Selma and advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights, including marriage equality. We have also been rightly criticized for our inability to address racism and privilege since the 1960s. But we have persisted, even and especially in seeking to pursue antiracism in the frame of white supremacy, which privileges privilege.

Not only does our second principle affirm and promote “Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations,” but the *Article II Study Commission* chose justice as one of seven values necessary to guide our faith into the future. They wrote, in part, “We covenant to dismantle racism and all forms of systemic oppression.”

This is not the work of a season or a year. It is the work of a lifetime, many lifetimes. It is multi-level work because individuals, nations, and all the structures in between can cause injustice. It requires acting alone, as an ally, in communities and congregations, by networking among groups, and in movements. The movements are diverse because injustice is pervasive. They can include racial justice, reproductive rights, climate justice, immigrant rights, food insecurity, voting rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, economic justice, disability rights, gun violence, and more. When we place our hearts and hands in service of justice, we touch the moral arc, and, with others, we make a difference.

Caring About Justice

Teaching children to care about **justice** for themselves and others is essential. It is a basis for morality, social development, and citizenship. Exploring justice can begin with a focus on **fairness** because children have a keen sense of what is fair and unfair and are quick to complain, “But, that’s not fair?”



Fairness can lead to considering **equality** because children expect, at a minimum, to be treated equally, although many wouldn’t mind being the favorite. Understanding the importance of equality is another building block, but children learn over and over again that there are many ways in which they are **not equal**. They differ by appearance, physical abilities, ability to learn, interests and hobbies, gender differences, social skills, living conditions, ethnicity and race, special needs and disabilities, and more. These differences are significant because they make each child unique, but they can lead to some children being discriminated against. Alongside the idea of equality, the concept of **equity**—being aware of differences and taking them into account as needed—means making things fairer than otherwise. A younger child may get a step stool to reach a cabinet that a taller brother or sister would not need.

We cannot create equity if we don’t perceive obvious and subtle differences. The emotion that helps children recognize and respond to the feelings of others in a sensitive and caring way is **empathy**. Empathy can help motivate children to care about justice when they encounter someone being mistreated or worse.

Responding with empathy often requires **self-reflection** to help children identify their perspective about what

is going on and what responses and actions they want to consider and pursue. **Discussing feelings** can help children self-reflect as they explore what they are experiencing and witnessing. This can be supported by encouraging children to **ask questions**. Often, children may not be aware of information critical to exploring their concerns. Getting that information will enhance their understanding.

Agency refers to a child’s ability to make choices, set goals, and take actions to influence their environment on their behalf and on behalf of others. This becomes, “I have power, and I can make a difference.”

While not exhaustive, these help equip a child to recognize injustice, consider what they might do in response, and act.

Source: Touchstones

Family Activity: *Whose House?*

In *This is Our House* by Michael Rosen, author and Bob Graham, illustrator, “George has a house made from a big cardboard box, and he says that no one else at the playground can come in. Not Lindy, because George’s house ‘isn’t for girls,’ nor Freddie, because it ‘isn’t for small people.’ Sophie can’t come in because, George says, ‘This house isn’t for people with glasses.’ But when George leaves his house for a moment, ...” something happens. Read the book (its in print) or watch a video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQa04z0fCSw&t=21s> (5:07).

After reading or watching have a discussion about the book. Consider the following questions. Which children did George discriminate against and why? Do others discriminate against people with those same characteristics? Why? How do you think it make those children feel? How would you feel if you were treated that way? Was George being fair? Why do you think George was acting that way? Do you like the way the story ended? Why or why not?



Shall We Overcome?

Rev. Dr. Forrest Church

Holidays exist for two reasons. The first might be called the “gathering” or “significant cause.” We take time off to ponder something essential or meaningful in the lives we share. All religious and national holidays spring from some deep collective need to ponder of celebrate, to mourn or give thanks. They exist as compass points for our souls.



But they exist for another reason as well. Even those who participate in the religious or patriotic ceremonies that mark these holidays tend to lapse into a primary appreciation of their secondary cause, vacation. The long weekend, the gift of a little discretionary time, the luxury of an extra day off. We need that too. ...In and of itself that is a good thing.

But because it is a good thing, we can easily overlook the reason we have been given this time.

...More than any other, Martin Luther King Day is the quintessential American patriotic holiday. Through the pain of its true sponsors, it harks back to the aspirations of our founders and the passion of our prophets. It permits us no easy celebrations, no mindless, instantly forgotten rituals, because, the moment we pay attention, it reminds us that we have yet to overcome our own prejudices and fears. If we are paying any attention at all, it reminds us of just how far we have to go to break down the many barriers between people that subvert the idealistic blueprint for this republic, “Out of many, one.”

Source: *The Cathedral of the World: A Universalist Theology* by Forrest Church

Restorative Justice

Our system of criminal justice is based upon retribution, which involves proportionate punishment of a crime. This goes back to the *Code of Hammurabi*, the law of ancient Mesopotamia (1754 BCE). Included in these 282 laws is the famous proclamation, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” which is echoed in Exodus 21:24. Known as *lēx taliōnis*, this is the law of retaliation in which a punishment should correspond in degree and kind to the offense by the wrongdoer. Challenging the wisdom of this approach are words ascribed to Gandhi: “An eye for an eye will leave everyone blind.”

In retributive justice, the crime against a person or persons is considered an act against the state in which victims are peripheral to the justice process (despite the *Rights of Crime Victims* in the *U.S. Code*). Accountability by the offender is defined as being punished by the state.

Restorative justice, by contrast, places the process of justice within the community where the community is the facilitator of the process, the victim takes an active role in the process through dialogue and negotiation, and the offender is expected to assume responsibility, take actions to repair the harm, and work to be reintegrated into the community. The goal is wholeness for all.

Antecedents to restorative justice can be found in the *First Nations* of Canada and America, as well as the *Maori* of New Zealand whose system of *Utu* protected individuals, social stability, and the integrity of the group. The most exemplary contemporary use of restorative justice was the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission that attempted to heal the wounds of apartheid (1948-1994) in South Africa. Desmond Tutu wrote, “To pursue the path of healing..., we need to remember what we have endured. But we must not simply pass on the violence of that experience through the pursuit of punishment. We seek to do justice to the suffering without perpetuating the hatred aroused. We think of this as restorative justice.” This is justice with eyes and heart wide open.

Source: Touchstones

The Eightfold Path to Justice

Rev. Tom Owen-Towle

...**First**, ...Unitarian Universalist justice-builders are determined “to make justice our life-calling.”

...**Second**, justice must be soaked in a sense of respectfulness, one of the least practiced aspects of human relationships. ...As ...Sam Keen puts it: “respect is love at second sight.”

...**Third**, every one of us can be an ally, in some sense, for the cause of justice. ...To be an ally in justice-building requires steadfast courage. ...Advocates alone can’t create a just and merciful world, neither can allies, but together ... “we can move mountains.”

...**Fourth**, justice demands being uncompromising.... Speaking our truths means not being worried about offending others (which we will) or worried about undercutting ...power structures (which we must).

...**Fifth**, ...Meg Riley reminds all of us that ...[siding with] love” isn’t merely a song or a banner slogan, but an action to be taken ...always recognizing that love actually doesn’t only take sides but also builds bridges across sides, so we might become one human family: friend, stranger, foe.

...**Sixth**, ...Co-equality ...redistributes resources and equalizes privilege. It radically alters our personal and communal lives. It calls us to build social justice rather than ...personal egos or empires.

...**Seventh**, justice work won’t be easy, but it can be fun. ...Genuine justice-building is balanced with joy-sharing.

...**Eighth**, justice requires staying at the table, and when someone ... inevitably screws up, rather than beat a hasty retreat..., we must be willing to seize the opportunity to deepen the dialogue. Justice-building means ...being ...hopeful.

Source: *Theology Ablaze: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary Year of Unitarian Universalism* by Tom Owen-Towle



Loving the Hell Out of the World

As far back as Homer in Greek literature, the concept of *dikaion*, used to describe a just person, gave rise to the general idea of *dikaiosune*, or justice, as a virtue that we should apply to society. In the *Republic*, Plato, dissatisfied with conventional theories of justice, treated justice as an overarching virtue of societies and individuals. UU theologian James Luther Adams recalled a late-night conversation with social psychologist Erich Fromm, who said, “I learned from the Old Testament prophets that the meaning of human existence is the struggle for justice.”

Justice ebbs and flows. The tide of justice responds to the push and pull of the hands and hearts of people, those committed to extending justice and those committed to denying it. When the tide of justice is out, justice is redistributed by favoring the powerful few and placating some groups enough to maintain social “stability” while disenfranchising minorities. Benjamin Franklin concluded, “Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”

Systemic injustice occurs when injustice in one sphere, like the distribution of wealth, is used to create injustice in other spheres, like education. Michael Walzer argues that the results of distribution in one sphere should not influence the distribution in other spheres. While distributive justice typically focuses on economic goods, Walzer extends concern to the distribution of social goods like honor, education, leisure, work, love, etc. Unfortunately, interlocking systems of oppression sweep up all social goods in service of systemic injustice. This reality magnifies Martin Luther King, Jr.’s concern that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Cornel West said, “Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” In a world that is a living hell for so many people, we are called, as someone once said, to “go love the hell out of the world.”

Source: Touchstones

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion: Justice

Preparation: (Read *Touchstones* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren’t pessimistic, you don’t understand data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren’t optimistic, you haven’t got a pulse. What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world.” *Paul Hawken*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake)

(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “True peace does not exist until there is justice, restoration, forgiveness. Peacemaking doesn’t mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight

nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free.” *Shane Claiborne*

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Does the moral arc of the universe bend toward justice. Why or why not?
2. Do people with privilege fail to see the oppression and injustice that exists in society? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe that equity and compassion should be used in the justice system? What value would they add?
4. What grade would you give the criminal justice system? Why?
5. Do you think a restorative justice approach is more effective than one based on retribution? Why or why not?
6. In what ways does environmental degradation and climate change intersect with issues of justice?
7. What justice issues are especially important to you? Why?
8. How do our laws promote justice? How do they institutionalize privilege/injustice?
9. To what extent does economic inequality affect justice in society? How can this be addressed?
10. Is it important for UU congregations to work for justice? Why or why not?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones)
We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words Rev. Philip R. Giles
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Don't Fall Asleep

(Continued from page 2) **Wisdom Story**

dresses and sermons. He told a bit of the story and then said, “When he started his quiet sleep America was still under the domination of the British Empire. When he came down, she was a free and independent nation. This incident suggests that the most striking thing about the story of Rip Van Winkle was not that he slept twenty years, but that he slept through a great revolution. While he was peacefully snoring up in the mountain a revolution was taking place which completely changed the face of the world. Rip knew nothing about it. He was asleep. There is nothing more tragic than to sleep through a revolution.”

He told this story repeatedly because a revolution for civil rights was taking place, and he needed as many people as possible to help make his dream of a better world come true, the dream of all people being judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. We have not yet realized that dream, so the revolution continues. Don’t be like Rip Van Winkle and sleep through the revolution. Help make a difference. Help make the dream come true by working for justice. And don’t fall asleep!!

Source: *Touchstones*

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