

LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN
(UMCA - June 7 or 14, 2020)

INTRODUCTION

- Theme today is "justice." Not a topic we talk about much as the church.

- Divided by syllables, the word comes out "just-ice". Justice has to do with the cold, hard realities of life as we try to live together on this earth. It is a word seldom found in the OT; even rarer in the NT; yet where it is found in both, it is spoken of powerfully as of the very soul of the kingdom of God.

- When we say we "didn't do justice" to a person, an opportunity, an experience, we usually mean that we didn't take them seriously enough to put forth the effort required.

- Prophet Micah sums up all the ethical & spiritual requirements of religion where we read: "He has shown you, o man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to DO justice, to love kindness; and to walk humbly with your God" ().

- Notice justice is a verb (something we are required to DO); that it is listed first, & is connected to the call for kindness & humility.

- There are many kinds of justice. We will look at justice to self, justice to the earth, & justice to others.

^{To}
JUSTICE ~~OF~~ SELF/PERSONAL JUSTICE

- President Trump once said, "I don't analyze myself; I'm afraid of what I might find there." Doing justice to our SELVES is a scary but necessary business. Some people don't take their lives seriously enough to look deeply at them. Yet that is precisely what our spiritual & psychological & physical growth & health require. It is one of the ways we DO justice to our SELVES & to others whom our lives affect. Part of our calling is to DO justice to our spirits & our bodies.

- When we are careful about what we eat & drink, & get enough exercise, we DO justice to our bodies. I credit my wife with seeing that our family ate well. She was into natural foods long ago. Just don't ask her, or me, about the ice cream I love to eat! You do understand that what a preacher says is always better than what he does.

- When we value our SELVES & are kind to our SELVES, we DO justice to ourselves & walk before God in a sacred manner. Of course, sometimes we need a swift kick to jump start our growth. Sandy Cline. Lester Holt each night signs off the news by saying, "Take care of yourselves, & one another.

- For all its negatives (esp. the deaths of over 100,000), the pandemic has provided us with an opportunity for solitude - time to think, meditate, pray, read -- if we can resist the TV, computer, I-Phone. Someone described solitude as "the furnace of transformation" (Henri Nouwen).

- When we do justice to our SELVES as individuals, we can then move in ever-widening circles to include the earth & all peoples of the earth.

JUSTICE TO THE EARTH/ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

- D.H. Lawrence said that "man is the only creature that fouls its own nest."

The earth is more than our nest; it is our Mother. It is alive, and we are killing it.

The pandemic may be one of the earth's alarms to us that we human are living beyond our limits. Other alarms: climate change, melting glacial & polar ice, rising seas, dying off of species (some, like the bee, critical for growth of food).

- Bible begins with 2 creation stories: First one speaks of humans "subduing" the earth & having "dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth"(1:28. The second creation story tells us to "till the garden & keep it." Unfortunately, for us & the earth, Western culture has chosen the first story, not recognizing that the original Hebrew does not mean that we are superior over the rest of nature; but that we are part of it, & have special responsibility to treat the earth with the same kind of care (dominion) with which God treats us. We are to "subdue" the earth in benevolent & peaceful ways (Keep the garden), not rape it.

- The way we treat the earth is part of Doing justice. It reflects our relationship with God, & the reflection is not always a good one. Trash on roadways, sidewalks, lake, beaches. People don't clean up after their pets. Don't they realize how slippery & dangerous that can be! Service man sitting in his truck suddenly wiped his mouth & threw something on the ground in my direction. His chaw of tobacco! I was 6+ feet away, so at least it didn't hit my feet. At least it was organic! Well, maybe. Around 60% of MN lakes & rivers are polluted. Technology won't solve that. Need attitude adjustment.

- (In 2018, 4 months before it was to be completed, the US government stopped environmental study of the effects of copper mining in northern MN. Now the government says it will not release the findings of the study because it was not finalized. Doesn't take a genius to figure out what that is all about - they didn't like the findings. On top of that the federal government is trying to bypass the authority of the states & tribes to enforce state & local laws for rivers & lakes. Sure, there is a question of copper wire for all our appliances & electronics, but will that be done to the earth? Copper mining is notorious for sulphuric acid pollution. Mining companies have poor safety records.

- Perhaps Chief Seattle put it best when he likened the earth to a web, with humans being only one strand in that web. What happens to one strand, happens to all.

- It may be that the traditional Native American understanding of their relationship with the earth is the only thing that will save the earth, our home.

JUSTICE TO OTHERS/SOCIAL JUSTICE

- "Justice is the social expression of love."

- Many UM do not know that our denomination has a book of "Social Principles," and that justice is one of those principles. Probably get a copy through the church office or church library.

Used to have social concerns committees in our church & conferences.

- Prophet Amos puts our religious observances in the context of social justice where it is written that God says, "Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let JUSTICE roll down like waters, and right-living like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24). The point is that even good worship is distasteful to God, if we are not also dealing with issues of social justice. In short, justice is part of our worship of God.

- Amos was denouncing Israel & neighboring nations for relying on military might, for injustice in social dealings, & more. Our money says, "In God We Trust" as a nation. Fact is, we believe in military might & the power of money to solve our problems. They may help, but history tells us that the problems are deeper. We have a War College, but not a Peace College.

- With the pandemic the world has gotten smaller & the need for global understanding, cooperation & justice has gotten larger & more urgent. It is forcing us to learn what it means to "love our enemies," and to be in solidarity with people. Yet our national leadership is pulling away from international involvement. There will be no peace among nations, in our families, in our communities, in OUR nation without justice. The pandemic is testing that. The shooting of yet another young black man in Georgia is testing that. Let us pray not just for peace, but for PEACEMAKERS! Let us pray not just for justice, but for justice SEEKERS.

- 2 examples of justice being on trial: one from the past; one from the present. (1) When I-94 was built through Minneapolis, it destroyed Rondo, a thriving black community. (Ever notice how highways, waste treatment plants, power plants & other potentially hazardous facilities are often built in or near poor communities?). And with the present administration watering down regulations of all kinds, tragedies will continue.

(2) In SD the Cheyenne River Sioux & the Pine Ridge Oglala Sioux have set up checkpoints on road entering their reservations. They see this - plus wearing masks & social distancing - as a way to control the spread of COVID-19. Nationally, the pandemic has devastated some Native American communities. Few hospital beds on the reservations I larger hospitals can be 3 hours away. As far as I know, the state of SD has provided no assistance or guidance to the tribes for dealing with the virus. Gov. of SD has said the tribes cannot use checkpoints, has threatened legal action, & now has asked President Trump for assistance. (Bad move!). Bi-partisan group of SD legislators say the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 & 1868 give the tribes that right, & that a 1990 court ruling said that the state has no "jurisdiction over highways running through Native lands without tribal consent." US government has not honored treaties. As one elder said, "They fulfilled only one promise. They promised to the our land; and they did." Will justice be done?

- Both examples involve racial justice, plus. Do we see a pattern here?

- Jesus chastised the religious leaders of his day for going through the motions of religion, but "neglecting the WEIGHTIER matters of the law, JUSTICE & mercy & faith", which they ought to have done without neglecting the others"(Mt. 23:23). In short, they are all important; but justice is one of them we neglect. WHERE IS THE CHURCH'S PROPHETIC VOICE TODAY? Not in predicting the future, but i the biblical sense of interpreting the present. WHY DOES IT TAKE A PANDEMIC TO MPVE US AS A NATION TO DO WHAT WE SHOLD HAVE ALREADY BEEN DOING - BOTH HERE AT HOME & ABROAD. OUR GIVONG TO MISSIONS IS OVERSHADOWED BY DOMESTIC & FOREIGN POLICIES.

- MLK said that "the oral compass of the universe bends towards justice." Our job is not just to flatten the COVIF-19 curve, but to put our WEIGHT into bending the curve of the universe towards justice.

- Every 4 years the UN Human Rights Council does a review of all member nations. The review is based on standards & human rights treaties that the US has accepted. Last February the US missed its deadline for submitting its own self-evaluation. Our government has withdrawn from global efforts to safeguard human rights & is redefining human rights protections. Itv is working to reshape "human rights" based on a narrow religious interpretation of the rights of women & children, marriage & the family, Roe V Wade.

- We nay not like to hear how "Unexceptional we are as a nation. But, given our strengths, the is the only way we will learn humility. We cannot serve justice if we do not understand our weaknesses, as well as glory in our strengths.

- We have elections coming. No preacher should tell people WHO to vote for (although some do). But every preacher should help people to know HOW to vote - how to apply the gospel of Jesus Christ to the human issues of the day. Jesus stressed the plight of the poor. The pandemic has been terribly hard on the poor around the world because poverty itself leads to poor health; because poorer people often work in "essential businesses", where they are more likely to be exposed to the virus. Not good to be a one issue voter, but we should ask every candidate for all offices what has been & is their position toward the poor. We should ask how our decisions & actions affect the poor. US government has provided \$\$ billions in relief since the medic struck. Great! But why haven't we as a nation been doing that before the pandemic? The need was there then. Do e need such a horrible excuse to do justice to others? Will nurses, nurse's aids, janitors, housekeepers, teachers, etc. receive a decent pay after the virus subsides?

- Since the pandemic arrived, some people have done some amazing, creative its of kindness. In that sense, has the pandemic been a blessing? I'm no suggesting that then pandemic is "God-sent", as some preachers did after the hurricane hit New Orleans. I a suggesting that the pandemic can be "God-used." But that will happen only if we participate in our salvation from this courage; only if we stand even stronger for justice after the virus subsides.

- Prophet Isaiah tells us that "the Lord is a God of

justice" (30:18). That affirmation of faith has been tested by untimely & tragic deaths, devastating floods, storms & fires & earthquakes & by man's inhumanity to man - like Holocaust in Germany & the American holocaust. Some jews in Auschwitz put God on trial for the horror that they were going through. They found God guilty, Unjust. Then they heeded the rabbi's call to worship.

- If God was incompletely & immediately in control, the world be a better world. But He is not. Some, like John the Baptist, wait for God to fix things. Jesus tells us that God waits for us, & challenges & empowers US to touch the world for good. In Christ, God has handed the world over to us as our responsibility.

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