

"Seek Justice"

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Texts: Micah 6: 6-8 and Matthew 5: 1-16

"This Beatitude is surely both spiritual and social," writes Richard Rohr (*Daily Meditations*, Friday, February 2, 2018), "Most Bibles to this day soften this Beatitude: 'hunger and thirst for what is right' or 'for righteousness' are more common faulty translations. But the word in Greek clearly means 'justice'." Why is it that people feel the need to soften the Beatitudes? In my mind it's because we often soften the words of Jesus so we can worm our way out of hard things. Justice for many people, literally means "just us", where the purpose is we get our rights preserved, our economic and social life secure, and others pay for what they have done. That last point is called retributive justice, and it's the one we're most familiar with. People pay for what they do, especially if they do it to me. Restorative justice, or the justice of the New Testament, is a lot harder and honestly, simply avoided by most people.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice: they shall have their fill (Matthew 5:8)" "What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)." You'll find justice all over the Bible, but what is it? Is it the blind person with the scales? Is it courts and lawsuits? Is it protesting and counter-protesting?

Cornell Law School defines justice in this way:

Justice is the ethical, philosophical idea that people are to be treated impartially, fairly, properly, and reasonably by the law and by arbiters of the law, that laws are to ensure that no harm befalls another, and that, where harm is alleged, a remedial action is taken - both the accuser and the accused receive a morally right consequence merited by their actions.

Lots of things to think about with that definition. Laws ensure that no harm befalls another...receive a morally right consequence merited by their actions. No wonder we argue about justice all the time.

We all have had experiences where we believed that justice was served. And we also have had experiences where we believed the justice was nowhere to be found. Sometimes we agree with a verdict, but don't agree with the sentence. Whole shows and series are made about verdicts that we think the jury reached in error. Those who should have been

convicted were not, and others innocently placed in prison -- or worse.

Why Jesus himself, from one perspective, received justice. From another it was the collusion of church and state that resulted in his conviction and death penalty.

What are we to do? Well, I think Richard Rohr is again helpful here. He says a couple of things that I would offer to you as you consider not only what is just, but what can you do to make a difference in the world? Remember, this Beatitude is both spiritual and social. Richard writes, "To live a just life in this world is to identify with the longings and hungers of the poor, the meek, and those who weep. This identification and solidarity is in itself a profound form of social justice." Later he writes, "Seek justice as if it were your food and drink, your read and water, as if it were a matter of life and death, which it is."

"How do we hunger and thirst for justice? By making global justice a priority in our lives. This Beatitude requires us to join a grassroots movement that fights one or two issues of injustice and to get deeply involved in the struggle. Since all the issues of injustice are connected,

fighting one injustice puts us squarely in the struggle against every injustice." Martin Luther King Jr. said over and over again, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We're invited to befriend victims of systemic injustice, side with them, listen to their stories, let their pain break your heart, join the movements to end injustice, tithe your money to the cause, and commit yourself to the struggle. (Rohr, *Daily Meditations, February 2, 2018*).

The truth is that none of us alone can fight every injustice. I believe the journey begins by the listening to those who have suffered systemic violence. We live in a culture that holds our hands over our ears about so many things. It's true that it's overwhelming sometimes, but we have to allow ourselves to hear the voices of others -- especially those with whom we disagree. It doesn't mean we never speak, or that we only listen, but I believe the world would change a lot if more people listened and less people spoke. There will come a time where your voice and mine gets added to the cause of justice, but first we must understand, especially if the experience is not our own. Challenge yourself to begin to understand what might be "morally right" to use the Cornell definition. That's makes justice

a spiritual issue. What is the right thing? Why? Who benefits? Who loses?

Is there any way both can be restored?

Try this legal definition of justice. It comes from the University of Wisconsin Law School:

Justice seeks to examine the harmful impact of a crime and then determines what can be done to repair that harm while holding the person who caused it accountable for his or her actions.

Accountability for the offender means accepting responsibility and acting to repair the harm done.

Does that fit any better? Words like examination, repair, impact, accepting responsibility. You see I left out what type of justice I'm speaking about here. This isn't retributive justice like we spoke of earlier. This is the definition of restorative justice. Clearly it won't always work, but I think it's much more Biblical and we'd be well served to work for restorative justice not only in the big picture, but in our own lives as well.

We've all harmed someone in some way. We have acted unjustly. All of us. What if we and the person we harmed spent time examining the harmful impact of what we had done, and then seek a way to repair that harm? Turn it around. You have been treated unjustly, I'm sure. What if

you and the person who wronged you spent time examining the harmful impact of what was done to you and then seek a way to repair that harm? Is there any chance that you both would be better off? For most of us, this seems impossible. We are so schooled in retributive justice that we don't even consider what restorative justice might look like. It takes more work. It takes both parties. It's harder.

In my experience, if it's harder, it's likely the way of Jesus. If it's easy, then it's the way of the world. As Christians, we are called to live in as Christlike a manner as possible. Which often does mean the hard way.

I'd like to teach you a song (which you may know), and then invite us to sing it together as a round. I've asked a couple people to help me lead this. Here's the words:

What does the Lord require of you?

What does the Lord require of you?

To do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

Justice, kindness, walk humbly with your God.

"Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice: they shall have their fill. (Matthew 5:6)."

