

Living the Questions...

January 2013

Justice - the practice of creating the common good

Questions

What is your experience of justice in your life?

What does the common good look or feel like?

How do you contribute to the work of justice and the common good?

What inspires you to work for justice?

How have you witnessed others around you create the common good?

Readings and Excerpts

Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.

- Frederick Douglass

I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.

- Abraham Lincoln (1809 - 1865), speech in Washington D.C., 1865

“The poet is representative, and he stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

- Martin Luther King Jr. (1929 - 1968), Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963

It is clear that those constitutions which aim at the common good are right, as being in accord with absolute justice; while those which aim only at the good of the rulers are wrong.

- Aristotle, Politics

The arch of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

- Unitarian Minister Theodore Parker, later quoted by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Global Justice is Not Impossible

Humans we are, getting sick of being
Chinese, Jewish, Arabs, British, Viking,
French, Indians, Americans, Asians, Africans,
Brazilians, Spanish, or south Africans
Muslims, Christians, or Buddhism,
All of us, being wealthy , poor, or in between,
Being with identity other than human beings
Time changes, so men's minds
Change, why then we don't change
And use a new concept of beauty, fairness
And nobleness to replace
In our education systems,
In our mentalities, the concept of national
Citizenship, and promote global citizenship?
With similar needs and dreams,
With noble thinking, and noble actions,
A concept, lives of all in common have, short durations,
And no life stands forever, no one owns perfectness,
And all we love music, dancing, and laughter,
A concept of new ways of living with nobleness,
A concept of having peace, love and justice
A concept breaks the silence of centuries
Living animal-like lives. With no spirits,
Full of self-slavery and selfishness,
Looking for justice in a dark room of consciousness.
While like politicians we have, lighters
Get ruined in our minds' pockets.

- Dr. Hasan Yahya,

Professor, Arab-American writer, scholar, and professor of Sociology.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying that
the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
That is what we are about:
We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything and
there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete,
but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

- Archbishop of El Salvador Oscar Romero, assassinated in 1980.

Justice work must fit our religious life. James Luther Adams, Unitarian minister and one of the most influential liberal theologians of the twentieth century, said that liberal religious people come to church seeking two things from the religious life: intimacy and ultimacy. Intimacy refers to the human relationships, trust, and support that lead to a sense of belonging. I prefer the term community, which maintains Adams's interpersonal focus while encompassing a broader range of group dynamics and activities. Symbolically, we may view intimacy or community as the horizontal dimension of religious life.

Ultimacy refers to connection and relationship with something greater than oneself, the depths of our nature and existence. Although it might extend beyond Adams's original intent, I prefer the term meaning, which covers both ultimate matters of existence and our human desire for depth in everyday life. Because it connects us to the heights (the sacred, our aspirations, creativity, and insight) and to the depths (our core values, our authentic identities, the significance underlying our days), ultimacy or meaning represents the vertical dimension of religious life.

- From *A People So Bold: Theology & Ministry for Unitarian Universalists*, John Gibb Millspaugh, Editor; excerpt from the essay 'Community, Meaning, and Justice' by Rob Keithan, Consulting Minister at the Unitarian Society of Germantown in Philadelphia, PA.