

**DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS,
WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD**

Micah 6:1-8

I have a homework assignment for all of us. Take a look today at the *social justice* window on the south side of the nave, at the upper level, third window down from the transept. It's entitled *Make No Peace With Oppression*. It's filled with inspiring characters. At the top right of the window is St. Francis of Assisi, giving food to a woman and her children. At the top left is the prophet Amos, who spoke out strongly against the social injustices in Israel. Above him is a grasshopper from his vision of disaster upon Israel: "This is what the Lord God showed me: it was a swarm of locusts hatching when the later corn, which comes after the king's early crop, was beginning to sprout" (Amos 7:1). At the very top of the window is the Holy Spirit holding a plumbline: "This is what the Lord showed me: there he was standing by a wall built with the aid of a plumb-line, and he had a plumb-line in his hand" (Amos 7:7).

Below Amos is Father James O. S. Huntington, founder of the Order of the Holy Cross, who ministered to the poor on New York's Lower East Side. He was a pioneer for social action in the Episcopal Church.

Below St. Francis is St. Paul writing on behalf of the slave Onesimus: "I, Paul, appeal to you about my child, whose father I have become in this prison. I mean Onesimus, ... Perhaps this is why you lost him for a time to receive him back for good - no longer as a slave; as a dear brother, very dear to me, and still dearer to you, both as a man and as a Christian" (Philemon 10, 15-16).

Below Paul and Onesimus is Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago, the first settlement house in America.

At the bottom of the window is the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., martyr to the cause of civil rights in the turbulent 1960's. He was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

In the lower right corner is the figure of John Woolman, riding a horse. He was an American Quaker whose personal mission was to fight slavery.

The window was given in memory of the Hon. Schuyler Merritt in June, 1969. (St. John's Web site, <http://stjohns-stamford.org/parishlife/glass/socialaction/>)

The issue of justice is more than a window, more than a concept we as Christians adhere to, it is at the heart of our faith and our Church. In our Baptismal Covenant – the baseline of our faith that we need to turn to again and again – we to promise *strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being*. That's a big promise – a huge promise – and I thank God that we don't just say "*sure, we'll do that.*" Instead we promise that "*we will with God's help.*" A prayer for *HELP* is a big part of the promise.

In my first year of ministry at St. John's the Vestry and I revisited our common mission. In fact we wrestled for four months before we agreed upon our present vision/mission

statement. Many of us wanted to put words about God's love and our service for others in the statement. Everyone was fine with that but Peter Stroilli insisted *love* and *service* didn't go far enough; we needed to speak about *justice*. But *justice* is a hard word. We don't all agree what *justice* looks like. It calls us to work for something bigger than ourselves. It calls us to work against *injustice*. But none of us had to search very far in scripture to know that Peter was absolutely right, *justice* is at the heart of our Biblical faith. And so we included in our mission statement that "*we are to serve as instruments of God's peace, justice and love in the world.*"

Our Old Testament scripture reading today includes one of the most famous statements in the Bible: *He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* If Judeo Christian ethics had to be summarized in a bumper sticker, this is it.

What does it mean to *do justice*? Doing *justice* is hard for many people to associate with the work of God. Many people prefer a God of love to a God of justice. We often prefer to speak of God as *welcoming, forgiving, accepting, merciful* and *inclusive*, and indeed God is all of these. African American Christians are much more likely to speak of a *just* God because their forbears were slaves, and because they still experience injustice at many levels of our society. Poor and marginalized people all over the globe do not have leisure to watch television programs discussing injustice; they know about it first hand. Therefore the news that God is just means a great deal to them. (Fleming Rutledge, "**The Justice and Righteousness of God**" Program #5022, First broadcast March 25, 2007, http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/rutledge_5022.htm)

One of the preachers at Diocesan Convention several years ago suggested that we tend to want to mix up the verbs in this passage. Instead of *doing* justice and *loving* kindness, we have a tendency to *love* justice and *do* kindness. It's easier to *love* justice in principal than to *do* justice in fact.

The biggest problem with *doing* justice is that we see so much injustice all over the world and we seem so powerless to change it. How do we change society? How do we overturn wrongs? How do we change the huge inequities between rich and poor, between haves and have-nots?

Of course, just because the playing field seems so large and we so small, doesn't exempt us from doing what we can. There are many concrete steps toward justice we can all take.

- We can speak out against injustice whenever and wherever we see it.
- We can give and raise funds to help the poor and downtrodden.
- The Episcopal Church has a lobbying arm of its mission – *The Episcopal Public Policy Network* (EPPN). The network's goal is to educate, motivate, organize and empower Episcopalians to action for justice, peace and the care of all God's creation. They are charged by General Convention and Executive Council through resolutions that direct the mission work of the Church. If interested you can sign up to receive information and updates from EPPN and participate in advocacy with your representatives in government with those issues that are

important to you. And EPPN is the tip of the iceberg. There are many kinds of groups advocating for justice. Get involved in one that you believe in.

- Work towards any one of the 8 Millennium goals to half extreme poverty in the world is work for justice. That includes very much our work with our mission partner in Haiti.
- Closer to home just last week we commissioned a task force to find ways of making our facilities more accessible to all. Accessibility is a justice issue. Support that work and/or give financially to help make our facilities more accessible.

Prophetic spirituality should cause us to hunger for social transformation as well as personal transformation. There are many ways, if we care passionately about it, that we can work for justice.

The second part of Micah's equation is to *love kindness*. In a 2003 radio sermon on this text Dr. Daniel Vestal proclaimed:

Mercy, that other word in this definition of biblical religion, means being big-hearted, tenderhearted, generous, giving, and forgiving. I'm sure you've heard the story of the woman who went to a photographer, and after her pictures, she said to the photographer, "These pictures don't do me justice." "Madam," the photographer said, "you don't need justice; you need mercy." Well, we all need mercy. Mercy means getting and giving not what we deserve but what we need. (Day 1, Dec. 28, 2003 http://day1.org/484-a_rediscovery_of_biblical_religion)

We are invited to *love mercy*. We love the mercy that God gives to us – undeserved mercy, forgiveness, grace and power to heal. To love mercy or kindness means not only to love it for ourselves but also to share the same quality of mercy with others.

Last Micah invites us to *walk humbly with our God*. *Humbly* means simply to walk without pretension. We walk *humbly* when we recognize ourselves as sinners and are therefore less quick to judge others. We walk humbly when we learn to trust God's love and depend more and more upon his goodness. We walk humbly when we let God grow within us and we let our own ego grow smaller.

As we look at that powerful Social Action stained glass window and as we contemplate Micah's call to live faithfully I invite you to pray with me a collect for Social Justice found on pg. 261 in the BCP.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.