

CONGREGATION
InFormation

Week 5
Justice

What is God doing in the world? What are we called to do in the world?

Justice may be used as a synonym for social or political activism. Although these may be an expression of justice, for Christians, the definition is rooted in spirituality: justice is aligning our intention with God's intention. When we are in harmony with God's intention, we are in **shalom**. This Hebrew word is God's gift of wholeness in community, a social reality where there is enough for all, forgiveness abounds, people live in harmony, and there is respect for creation. **Shalom** is based on a triad of worship, righteousness, and compassion.

We don't have to look far to see that the world is out of alignment. Justice begins with our prayerful discernment of God's intention for ourselves, our community, the Church, the world, and creation. If we believe that God's ultimate desire is for **shalom** then we will be partners with God in bring that about.

During worship services in Lent at Creekside, we have expanded our pattern of intercessory prayer, to include prayer for our neighborhood, nation, and world, as well as ourselves and those whom we care about. We should be careful what we pray for: praying for God's intention is more than hoping that God will fix what is broken. It means we are open to the Holy Spirit calling us to action. The cliché is "putting your money where your mouth is," but righteous action may mean more than money. Donations to local or distant charities or service organizations are certainly appreciated, but Jesus modeled justice which was personal: touching, healing, serving by example. The most formative experiences involve personal contact with those who are helpless, hurting, or in need. Ask anyone who has accepted the call to volunteer service, been on a disaster relief trip, or provided childcare after a natural disaster—sometimes we get more than we give when we make time to serve others in Christ's name.

There are many needs in the world; it is not our task to meet them all. But if we remain open to the Spirit's urging for justice, we may find ourselves in a place that will change us.

Take 10 minutes or so each day this week to pray and prepare for Holy Week. The following structure may be helpful:

Find a quiet place where you can be focused.

Offer prayers of thanksgiving, especially for the life and witness of Jesus Christ.

Pray for yourself and those you care about.

Pray for your community and for your neighbors.

Pray for the church in all places, and those who speak in Christ's name.

Pray for all those who suffer as a result of violence or war.

FURTHER
Information

Being of service to others is part of Christian formation. The Beatitudes remind us that the way we act toward others—with meekness, righteousness, purity of heart, as peacemakers-- will have a profound effect on who we become. It is one of the ways which we claim our identity as the children of God (Matthew 5:1-11)

What we ask God for in prayer says a great deal about what's important to us. We may not immediately think of prayer as a practice of justice, but if we believe that prayer forms us, then we should pay attention to what we are being formed by. If our prayers of intercession are exclusively for our health problems or those of our immediate family, then we have made God's love too narrow, and we have made ourselves less available to the Spirit.

Some congregations and individuals have practiced a structure of intercessory prayer which goes further than the one we have been using at Creekside. They practice praying around the world: choosing a nation or region which is the specific focus of their prayer time. There is a regular rotation, or the area is announced in advance to give opportunity for pray-ers to be better informed, should they choose to look at news or other sources.

The most radical, and most difficult, form of intercessory prayer is praying for enemies. Praying for those who have hurt you or those you love, or those with whom you disagree is an act of grace that is nearly impossible, if we attempt it at all. That Jesus would command it is challenging. That he could practice it himself while dying on a cross is amazing. (Luke 23:34).

This week, as you prepare for Holy Week and Easter, take time to pray for people all around the world: those who have embraced Jesus' death and resurrection, those who do not believe, and those who have yet to hear the story. They are all children of God, people with whom we are called to live in **shalom** until God's intention for creation is fully realized.