

Justice is Spiritual

From Nayiri Karjian, General Minister, Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast, UCC | January 19, 2023

There seems to be a general understanding about “justice,” that it is political. Many churches do not want to address poverty, wealth, hunger, oppression, inequality, racism, sexism, etc. often believing that justice is political and that politics has nothing to do with Church.

This is perhaps, the result of a politicized culture and in my opinion, a misunderstanding.

We humans have a penchant for justice and are passionate about impartiality, neutrality, equality. When we are treated unjustly, we object. When we are harmed and injured wrongly, we make our case known. We generally expect to be treated fairly and intend to treat others the same way. Even as children, we have a sense of fairness and balance, some kind of equilibrium perhaps that exists in the universe. We sense it because we are a part of it, the whole picture.

Justice is spiritual as well as biblical. In the biblical story, the word “justice” itself is mentioned 328 times, which is not nominal. Justice is spiritual because in its concept, it includes health and well-being, wholeness and dignity, peace and integrity, balance and equity. Justice means all is well, within and without.

This brings me to another general understanding, about the “spiritual.” Many think that the spirituality is about one’s inner life alone. There is truth in that. Spiritual practices always include taking care of one’s spirit, paying attention and being mindful, reflecting and praying, all of which are introspective practices for personal growth, and finding peace and wellness within.

But there is more to spirituality and spiritual life than

one’s own inner life. The spiritual takes one within only to discover that one also has to “go out” of the self, connecting with the Divine and all creation, learning compassion and love.

The goal, the purpose of spirituality, is not only about one’s inner life, it is about learning compassion and love, which include peace and wellbeing, justice and dignity. What good is a spirituality if it does not help one grow in compassion and love, peace and connection, justice and kindness? Spiritual people are compassionate and loving people. They are passionate about justice and equity for all.

Perhaps it would help if we thought of spirituality not as an object one can possess, or not. Instead, think of the “spiritual” as an adjective – spiritual life, spiritual practice. The spiritual is something one practices or lives, not something one has or possesses. When one is nurturing the spirit, growing in connection to the Divine and all creation, learning love and compassion, one cannot but discover that justice, peace and compassion are inextricably linked.

Justice itself is not an object to be possessed, or not. Justice is a verb that is lived and practiced. Justice is spiritual work, faith work, that spiritually growing people live, practice and make happen. That is what Jesus did. Jesus lived and practiced justice when he interacted with others, when he healed, when he shared bread, when he spoke truth to those in power, when he recognized the dignity of all, including the “unclean” of his time.

This week, we hear the voice of Martin Luther King, Jr continuing to call us to justice. Let’s be spiritual and practice it.