

CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE 2023

DAY 1, Wednesday, January 18th

Learning to do the right thing

Scripture

Isaiah 1:12-18: Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan; plead for the widow.

Luke 10: 25-36: He asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Meditation

According to Isaiah, God requires Judah not only to practice justice but to embrace the principle of always doing the right thing. God wants us not only to care for orphans and widows but to do what is right and good for them and anyone marginalized by society. The Hebrew word for good is yaw-tab’ and it means to be glad, joyful, pleasing, to do well, to make something beautiful.

A lawyer asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus’ response asks us to see beyond the divisions of religion, tribe and nationality to recognize our neighbor in need. Christians likewise must see beyond these divides and the divisions within the Christian family to recognize and love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prayer

Lord, you called your people from slavery into freedom,
Give us strength and courage to seek out those who are standing in need of justice.

Allow us to see this need and provide help, and through your Holy Spirit gather us into the one fold of Jesus Christ, our Shepherd.

Amen.



CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE 2023

DAY 2, Thursday, January 19th

When justice is done . . .

Scripture

Proverbs 21:13-15: When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous, but dismay to evildoers.

Matthew 23:23-25: Justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done.

Meditation

The Book of Proverbs sets out to provide wisdom and instruction in “wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity” (1:2). Throughout its oracles of wisdom, the call to act justly and to pursue righteousness is a constant refrain, relentlessly shared and affirmed as more acceptable to God than sacrifice. In a one-sentence pearl of wisdom, the speaker testifies that the righteous rejoice when justice is done. To seek justice is to strike at the heart of powers, making space for God’s just ordering and enduring wisdom in a world all too often unmoved by suffering. There is joy in affirming the pursuit of justice.

The religious leaders Jesus addresses in the Gospel passage have grown accustomed and comfortable with the injustices of the world. They are happy to perform religious duties but neglect the weightier and more disruptive demands of justice, mercy and faithfulness. Similarly, Christians often see the world the same way.

Prayer

God, you are the source of our wisdom. We pray for wisdom and courage to do justice, to respond to what is wrong in the world by acting to make it right; We pray for wisdom and courage to grow in the unity of your Son, Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, reigns forever and ever. Amen.

CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE 2023

DAY 3, Friday, January 20th

Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly

Scripture

Micah 6: 6 – 8: And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Mark 10: 17-31: Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Meditation

We – not me. The prophet warns the people what faithfulness to God's covenant means: "...and what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God? God has shown us what is good, asking us to do justice by loving kindness and walking humbly with God. The love that God invites us into is always a love which gathers us into communion: we – not me. This insight makes all the difference in how we "do justice". To do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God, calls Christians to act together. "Walking humbly" was challenging for the rich young man who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. He had obeyed all the commandments from his youth, but he could not take the further step to join Jesus' disciples because of his wealth; he was beholden to his possessions. How difficult it is for us to let go of that which we perceive as riches.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, Expand our vision with all of our Christian brothers and sisters, to show forth the justice and loving kindness of your kingdom. Help us to welcome our neighbors as your Son welcomed us.

Help us to be more generous as we witness to the grace that you freely give us.

Through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE 2023

DAY 4, Saturday, January 21st

Look, the tears of the oppressed

Scripture

Ecclesiastes 4: 1-5: Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed - with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power with no one to comfort them.

Matthew 5: 1-8: ...Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted...

Meditation

A young woman looked and saw the tears of the oppressed. The video she shot on her phone of the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 was seen all around the world and unleashed a holy anger as people witnessed, and finally acknowledged, what African Americans have experienced for centuries: undue subjugation by oppressive systems in the midst of privileged blind bystanders.

The progression from simply looking to seeing and understanding gives encouragement for us as actors in this earthly reality: God can remove scales from our eyes to witness things in new and liberating ways. As those scales fall, the Holy Spirit provides insight, and also, conviction to respond in new and unfettered ways.

Prayer

God of justice and grace, remove the scales from our eyes so we can truly see the oppression around us.

We pray in the name of Jesus who saw the crowds and had compassion for them.

Amen.

CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE 2023

DAY 5, Sunday, January 22nd

Singing the Lord's song as strangers in the land

Scripture

Psalm 137:1-4: For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked us for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

Luke 23:27-31: Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

Meditation

The lament of the psalmist originates in the exile of Judah in Babylon, however, the pain of exile is one that reverberates across time and culture. Perhaps this poem emerged with a shrug of indifference that can only come from living within injustice and feeling powerless to effect any meaningful change. However the words were brought forth, the heartache of this passage finds resonance in the hearts of those who are treated as strangers in other lands or in their own lands.

In this psalm generations of the oppressed are given their voice. We sing because we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. The ancestors and saints inspire us. They encourage us to sing songs of hope, songs of freedom, songs of liberation, songs of a homeland where a people is restored.

Luke's Gospel records that people, many of them women, follow Jesus even as he carries his cross to Calvary. Jesus recognizes their struggles and the suffering that they will have to endure in faithfully carrying their own crosses. Thanks to the ecumenical movement, Christians today share hymns, prayers, reflections and insights across traditions. We receive them from one another as gifts borne of the faith and loving discipleship, often enduring struggles, of Christians from different communities than our own.

Prayer

God of the oppressed, open our eyes to the harm that continues to be inflicted on our sisters and brothers in Christ. May your Spirit give us the courage to sing in unison, and raise our voices with those whose suffering is unheard.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE 2023

DAY 6, Monday, January 23rd

Just as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me.

Scripture

Ezekiel 34: 15-20: I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.

Matthew 25: 31-40: I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Meditation

In the Gospel of Matthew, we are reminded that we cannot separate our love for God from our love for others. We love God when we feed the hungry, give the thirsty something to drink, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoner. When we care for and serve "one of the least of these," we are caring for and serving Christ himself.

Recent history has made visible the immense suffering among God's family members. In Minnesota, the murder of George Floyd by a police officer exposed continued racial injustice. Floyd's cry of "I can't breathe" was also the cry of many suffering under the weight of both the pandemic and oppression. As Christians, we must be unified in our responsibility to love and care for others, as we are cared for and loved by God. In so doing, we live out our shared faith through our actions in service to the world.

The prophet Ezekiel describes the Lord God as a shepherd. Unity is the Father's desire for his people and he continues to bring about this unity, to make the flock whole, through the action of his Holy Spirit.

Prayer

God of Love,

We thank you for your unending care and love for us. Help us to sing redemption songs and to extend your compassion to the whole of the human family.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE 2023

DAY 7, Tuesday, January 24th

'What is now does not have to be'

Scripture

Job 5:11-16: So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.

Luke 1:46-55: He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.

Meditation

Job was living the good life and unexpectedly suffered the loss of his family and everything he had. We all have suffering that is manifested in our minds, bodies, and spirits. We may pull away from God and others. We may lose hope. Yet, as Christians, we are unified in our belief that God is with us in the midst of our suffering.

According to Fr. Bryan Massingale, a leading Catholic social ethicist and scholar in racial justice, "Social life is made by human beings. The society we live in is the result of human choices and decisions. This means that human beings can change things. What human beings break, divide and separate, we can with God's help, also heal, unite and restore. What is now does not have to be, therein lies the hope and the challenge."

The *Magnificat* is Mary's song of joy for all that she sees God is doing: restoring balance by raising up the lowly; righting injustice by feeding the hungry; and remembering Israel, his servant. It is easy to overlook or undervalue the faith of those who belong to other Christian communities, particularly if those communities are small. But the Lord makes his people whole by raising up the lowly so that the value of each is recognized.

Prayer

God of Hope, help us to remember that you are with us in our suffering.

Grant us the gift of being grounded in your loving Spirit as we work together to eradicate all forms of oppression and injustice.

Give us the courage to love what, whom and how you love, and to express this love in our actions. Through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE 2023

DAY 8, Wednesday, January 25th

The justice that restores communion

Scripture

Psalm 82: 1-4: Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.

Luke 18: 1-8: Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?

Meditation

In Psalm 82, God calls for a justice that upholds the basic human rights to which all people are entitled: freedom, safety, dignity, health, equality and love. The Psalm also calls for the overturning of systems of disparity and oppression, and fixing anything that is unfair, corrupt, or exploitative. This is the justice that we, as Christians, are called to promote. In Christian community we join our wills and actions to God's, as he works his salvation for creation. In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, The Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, who was spiritual adviser to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. states that: "We must proclaim the truth that all life is one and that we are all of us tied together. Therefore, it is mandatory that we work for a society in which the least person can find refuge and refreshment. You must lay your lives on the altar of social change so that wherever you are, there the Kingdom of God is at hand."

Jesus tells the parable of the widow and the unjust judge in order to teach the people "about their need to pray always and not to lose heart" (Lk 18: 1). Jesus has won a decisive victory over injustice, sin and division, and as Christians our task is to receive this victory firstly in our own hearts through prayer and secondly in our lives through action.

Prayer

God, Creator and Redeemer of all things, teach us to look inward to be grounded in your loving Spirit, so that we may go outward in wisdom and courage to always choose the path of love and justice.

This we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.
Amen .