

Voices: Justice looks like awakening

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EDITOR'S NOTE: "Justice looks like ..." is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer's understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.

You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudice. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.

[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.

I have witnessed injustices in my life.

During my time in college, I comforted a young lady who had mustered the courage to press charges against the young men who sexually assaulted her, only to find a system that did not defend her or find her case important.

I witnessed children being taken away from their mother, because the mother did not have the money, citizenship status or resources to defend herself.

When I think of justice, I often think of the justice system, and the times it has failed those it should have protected.

But, what about me? When have I failed to protect the vulnerable in my community?

What about you? When have you failed to protect your neighbor?

Awareness of others and oneself

I am a social work student, and I am a pastor. As a social worker in training, we are taught to develop the skills of tuning in to our client and of self-awareness. Tuning in develops empathy. You put yourself in your client's shoes. Self-awareness is the ability to recognize your beliefs, attitudes, biases, emotions, values, strengths, weaknesses and what motivates your behavior.

As a pastor, I encourage my congregation to love their neighbor as themselves. I encourage reflection, confession and repentance.

Tuning in to the other and self-awareness pair well with the Christian teaching of loving our neighbor. Liberation theology calls this conscientization—the dynamic of awakening, of helping people become aware and that they have the power to bring about change.

Justice looks like awakening—awakening ourselves to the plea of others, tuning in to the pain of others, developing empathy, and doing something about it.

Justice is an action

In Spanish, to do righteous acts is to do *justicia*—justice. Miguel A. De La Torre, in his article [Breaking Barriers: Reading the Bible in Spanish](#), writes: “For English speakers, righteous means morally right or justifiable, acting in an upright, moral way. The definition implies an action that can be performed privately.”

But “righteous” in Spanish is “justice.” And justice “only occurs in community ... [and] cannot be reduced to a private expression of faith; it is a public action,” he continues.

Good Samaritan displays justice

The parable of the good Samaritan tells the story of a man robbed, beaten and left “half dead” beside the road. A Jewish priest and then a Levite stumble upon the man, but each continues his way.

A Samaritan also stumbles upon the man, stops and helps the injured Jewish man. One should note: Samaritans and Jews were enemies. However, the Samaritan interrupted his journey and went out of his way to help the injured Jew. He took him to an inn, stayed with him, and when he left the inn, gave the innkeeper enough money to provide for the care of the injured man.

Jesus then asked an expert of the law, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

“The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’”

“Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:36-37).

This parable expresses justice. It shows us justice is a public action. It shows justice in awakening oneself to the plea of another, self-awareness and action.

The Samaritan man tuned in by empathizing with the injured Jew left on the side of the road. He must have become self-aware by recognizing his own beliefs, biases, emotions, values, strengths and weaknesses. He was a Samaritan, and we can assume the injured man was a Jew.

The Samaritan must have recognized the racial tension and the power of

resources he had—a donkey to carry the man to an inn, bandages, oil, wine and just enough money to take care of the man—and that he may have to reimburse the innkeeper for any additional expenses.

In the story we see the Samaritan man put justice into practice by doing something about the man left on the side of the road.

Practicing justice

In life, we will stumble upon injustices like the injured man left beside the road. The question is, will we fail to protect our neighbor? Will we allow ourselves to awaken to the plea of another?

Despite the differences we may have with the other—like the Samaritan and the Jew in the parable—will we use our power and our resources to do *justicia*?

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[Click here](#) to read the full “Justice looks like...” series.