

Voices: Justice looks like being willing to be uncomfortable

November 9, 2020

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.

It was the morning of July 9, 2020.

I kept refreshing the [SCOTUS Blog](#) webpage. A decision *had* to be today. Suddenly, my eyes welled up and a lump formed in my throat.

I sat there for several seconds, attempting to swallow, processing what my eyes were taking in. When I finally could speak, my fist raised in the air, I looked at my husband who was casually drinking his morning coffee. The only words I could say were, "We won!"

The Supreme Court affirmed part of eastern Oklahoma remained Native American land. Specifically, it remained the land of the Mvskoke—commonly known as the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, my tribal nation.

This decision is important to the collective Native community. It showed to the nation *we are still here*.

I prayed in the following minutes and thanked God for a piece of justice being served.

- Justice for the constant battle against invisibility as a people, yet hyper-visualization as a culture.
- Justice for a people forced to leave their own land through the Indian Removal Act in 1836, led by President Andrew Jackson.
- Justice for the resiliency of a people to adapt and thrive with unfamiliar soil and terrain.
- Justice for being stripped of that new land by the Treaty of 1866.

Recognizing injustice

To recognize justice, we first must know the face of injustice. I find injustice is nurtured and maintained when we focus on centering ourselves and our comfort.

Within Christianity, comfort too often is projected as theology or doctrine. The Bible becomes the weapon to protect our preference over the truth. In order to be the hands of Jesus, the opposite must occur. We must become the selfless and focus on the well-being of those around us.

Discomfort can result in un-Christian reactions, which must be resolved through confession and repentance so love, kindness and humility can thrive and ultimately heal through justice.

What could be lacking in our pursuit for justice? Gary Vanderpol, in *Return to Justice*, has a straightforward statement about Christians and justice. "Too often [we] choose justice issues that [we] feel do not implicate [ourselves] so that [we] can play the heroic role of rescuer."

We are pro-justice up to the point where we have been unjust. For example, when it comes to racial injustice, our money, votes and our social media posts tend to confirm what Vanderpol presents. We support the areas we feel cannot implicate us among the guilty. Once we enter areas of guilt, we stand by preference, not truth.

Symbolic vs. true sorrow

Although many showed support for the Muscogee over the years in their pursuit for the right to have their land, the focus ultimately was not on the Muscogee's welfare. When the U.S. Supreme Court decision was announced, concern immediately switched to the impact on the non-Natives living on Native land and the economic result for Oklahoma.

This switch in concern revealed much of the support received was individual and, as Sarah Deer—University Distinguished Professor at the University of Kansas and herself Mvskoke—calls “symbolic sorrow,” rather than a true desire for justice for Native Americans.

I often hear phrases like: “This all takes time” or “Justice is happening. It has to go through the process.” I usually hear these types of responses from white Christian sisters and brothers who tend to benefit from injustice toward others.

Raymond Chang, from the Asian American Christian Collaborative, shares an important step in justice work.

“The burden can't always be on people of color to be patient and endure when the changes that need to be made aren't that complicated,” Chang writes. “At some point, people need to start taking responsibility for the inequities they perpetrate—whether or not they themselves fully comprehend it.”

For me, justice looks like being the hands and feet of Christ. That means I may become uncomfortable, challenged and dismissed. To pursue justice means I stay in those moments and keep moving forward, because it is not my preference at work, but God's truth.

What does justice look like for you?

EDITOR'S NOTE: Updated Nov. 9, 2020, to clarify a citation from Sarah Deer.

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