

Voices: Justice must precede peace, calm and healing

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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 prejudgment. 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.

In the days and weeks after a tumultuous transfer of U.S. presidential administrations, pastors and public servants around the country asked themselves, "How do we calm the ideological storm raging in America?"

What sermons can we preach or speeches can we give to heal a divided country, divided communities and divided congregations?

I even have heard commentators from conservative media outlets wonder, with a hopeful tone, "Can President Biden bring healing to this hurting nation?"

Admittedly, I also want peace. I want calm. I want healing. I want government and even church to be boring again. But peace, calm and healing cannot precede justice.

If we attempt to skip the Christ-inspired work of caring for the impoverished, providing food for the hungry, ensuring health care for the sick, and justice for our brothers and sisters of color, we are not simply divided; we are delusional. That is not how the equations of peace and justice work.

No justice, no peace.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, rates of food insecurity in the United States have doubled.

My colleague Elaine Waxman, senior fellow at the Urban Institute, [found](#) while the initial round of pandemic relief improved the situation somewhat for people who had lost their incomes, “by fall 2020, more than 1 in 5 adults were living in food insecure households, about the same proportion as in the early weeks of the pandemic.”

Sadly, but predictably, these hardships weren’t spread evenly among all Americans. Waxman and her team found food insecurity rates among Black and Hispanic/Latinx adults were roughly double that of white adults.

We also know from research those experiencing food insecurity are among the most at risk for COVID-19, job losses and underemployment. They are bearing the weight of our broken social systems in the United States.

The church’s part in justice

What role can congregations play when the challenge is so daunting?

One of the primary answers to this question is faith formation. Transforming any of the challenges amplified in recent months—from food insecurity, health inequities made increasingly visible during the pandemic, or structural racism—we need to make straight theologically crooked paths

that allow our congregations to remain silent or indifferent to injustice.

We need to come to terms with the uncomfortable truth: Many of our congregations and denominations provide a theological framework that allows these injustices to occur. This will require us courageously to set aside worries about how our message of repentance will be received, and simply preach it.

The biblical witness is clear: Injustice is sin. If people do not have enough food in a world that produces more than enough food for everyone, an injustice is present.

Structural injustice is structural sin. If particular populations bear the weight of poverty and hunger more than others, then that is a structural injustice. Any of us who have spent more than a few minutes in a Baptist Sunday school class know the answer to sin is repentance.

Walk with those who suffer

This Sunday, when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we pray not only for ourselves and our families, but also for those who are hungry.

We commit ourselves to walk alongside those suffering from injustice as an act of solidarity. We commit to walking alongside them in and through their suffering, and to work with them to make the crooked paths of injustice straight to end their suffering. This is faith formation informing societal transformation.

Churches do not have to walk this path alone. Organizations and individuals in our communities have been dedicated to feeding the hungry and healing the sick for some time. They already have the tools to effect change. But they need our help and partnership.

Churches can provide volunteers and resources. They can grow fresh

produce on their properties to assist these organizations in bending the world towards justice. In turn, the justice community can educate and inform congregations how to put their faith into action.

This is how we bring about justice and make room for peace and ultimately heal as a nation.

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

A podcast interview with Jeremy can be heard [here](#).