



# **JustUs**

**2018 Lenten Devotional**

**Hennepin Avenue  
United Methodist Church**  
511 Groveland Avenue | Minneapolis, MN 55403

# JustUs

## Lent 2018 at Hennepin

The prophet Amos speaks through time:

***But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.***

Our sacred scriptures call us to acts of justice and mercy. If we read carefully we will see that many of the the places and people held my oppression and injustice has not changed much over time. And still the call continues. During Lent we are invited to reflect on the themes outlined in Marcus Borg's book *Speaking Christian* that will be explored during our worship life together. Reading from the prophet Amos, and the gospel writers John and Luke, we will hear the many ways Jesus turned the world upside down with acts of of resistance, persistence, justice and deep love. His message was countercultural and often subversive. His invitation to us echoes through the centuries.

When have you been called to go beyond your comfort zone...to resist, to persist, to say to yourself and to those around you, there is no one but JUSTUS to do what needs to be done? Where have you witnessed someone sent to be the hand of justice in the world? What has been your own experience of seeing the presence of Jesus reaching out in compassion?

*Author Annie Dillard in her book Holy the Firm offers this wisdom: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? There is no one but us. There is no one to send, nor a clean hand, nor a pure heart on the face of the earth, nor in the earth, but only us, a generation comforting ourselves with the notion that we have come at an awkward time, that our innocent fathers are all dead-as if innocence had ever been.... But there is no one but us. There never has been."*

Thank you to all who gave voice and word to this theme of 'justus' for Lent 2018. May we be inspired to be the change we hope to see.

The Devotional Team:

Kent Peterson

Nate Melcher

Jolene Roehlkepartain

Sally Johnson



*On Easter Sunday, everyone is encouraged to use the parking ramp at the Walker Art Center. Keep your car safe and warm, and help free up space in our parking lot for other guests, members and visitors. Be sure to get your voucher for free parking from an usher or at the reception desk before you go back. Also, remember there are about 50 spaces available to us at the Alliance parking lot (400 Clifton Ave). See our website or pick up a handy map at the reception desk!*

# Holy Week

**MAUNDY THURSDAY | MARCH 29**

12 Noon in the Art Gallery

7pm in the Art Gallery\*

**GOOD FRIDAY TENEBRAE | MARCH 30**

12 Noon in the Art Gallery

7pm in the Sanctuary\*

**EASTER SUNDAY | APRIL 1**

7am Sunrise Service in Art Gallery

8am Pancake Breakfast in the Social Hall

9am & 11am in the Sanctuary\*

\*nursery care available

# ASH WEDNESDAY

## Through Us and By Us

Amy K. Griffiths

Several years ago I lost my home. It didn't burn to the ground, or get swept away by flood. The house itself still stands. But during the six years when the house was my home, it wasn't actually *mine*. It belonged to the person I planned to marry. He'd bought it when we became engaged, having sold his house in New York to start a new life in Minnesota with me. When he changed his mind about marriage and ended our engagement, ownership of the house was in his name only. Although I had no place to go, I couldn't stay.

It was a dark time. Only 9 months earlier, I'd lost my mom to cancer. Without her, my heart-home was gone. Grief was a cloud of ash that surrounded my every move, choked every breath. When I wasn't weeping, I was furious. And what a blessing that fury proved to be. It became the fuel, burning green in my heart, that put me into motion. In a daze of anger, I scoured Craigslist for apartments, I gave trunks-full of household items to Goodwill, I found odd jobs house-sitting other people's homes in order to squirrel away money, and when the loneliness crept in at the end of each day, I rode my bike around the lakes until it was too dark to see.

In time, I found a charming one-bedroom apartment, on the edge of a rough neighborhood yet close to a park, with monthly rent that was within my budget. But as anyone who has ever had to move will attest, moving is *expensive*, and despite my penny-pinching, when it came time to write the check for the first and last month's rent, I couldn't cover it.

I couldn't cover it on *my own*, that is. What I needed most in those brutal months of losing and letting go was God, and every day I prayed prayers tinged with accusation and hurt and desperation. God, of course, was there all along, and came to me through the generosity and love of my family. When I went to see the apartment, my dad came with me, and when we stood together in what would become my new living room, without so much as a blink, he loaned me the money I needed to make myself a new home. It was a simple gift that gave me back my life.

I knew then and know now that not everyone has a father who can afford to pay that rental deposit. Not everyone who needs to move can move, and not everyone who needs to remain in a home they don't own can stay.

Not on *their own*, that is. So this Lenten season, when we consider how God's work in our lives is ultimately done *through us and by us*, I am the one reaching for my checkbook, writing a check to the DCEH Emergency Rental Assistance Fund, giving joyfully from the abundance of my life these many years later, hoping and believing that this time I can be a way that God comes through to someone who has lost, who is lost, and who is called to rebuild a better life.

**As we begin this journey of Lent, Holy One, mark us with the ashes of Earth. Breathe through us with the gift of your presence so that we might be your hands and feet in the world. Amen**

# Do Mitzvot Anyway

Steve Blons

Let me start with an embarrassing confession. I don't do nearly as much justice work as most of my friends. They talk about volunteering for Community Meals, helping at the Dignity Center, giving dictionaries to inner city third-graders, advocating for clean energy, supporting ex-offenders, working with refugee families, participating in mission outreach to Haiti or Sierra Leone. All these opportunities are within easy reach for me or any of us right here at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church. You might think that by now all these stories would have inspired me to jump in. Instead I take little action and feel guilt and shame.

I am writing this piece for myself and for anyone else who finds excuses to do little: "It's too overwhelming." "It's not where my gifts lie." "It's just not my thing." These sound so lame when I say them out loud.

The fact is, Jesus won't let me off the justice hook. It's clear that if I want to call myself a follower of The Way, I need to, as they say, walk the talk. This love business—this bringing forth the Kin-dom of God here and now – is hands-on stuff. Uncomfortable? Hop over it!

In Jewish practice, good works, Mitzvot, are to be done with a joyful heart. But even if your heart cannot be joyful, the instruction goes, do Mitzvot anyway. In other words, it makes no difference whether you feel good about stepping into the justice arena. Do it anyway.

Despite my very limited engagement, there are stories of injustice that break my heart or that infuriate me. Especially ones about children or people at the margins. This is a good place to start. Move in the direction of injustice. Make some contact with those who are suffering; be moved by their stories. Or just tag along with a friend on one of their pet projects.

It's OK to admit this feels hard. It's OK to recognize my resistance. But I know there are so many ways to begin. I also know that only I can discover what only I can do. Just me. Just us.

**Holy God, I hear the clarity of your call. But still sometimes I want to say 'no.' Help me to lean into my resistance. Help me to embrace and accept it, as it is. Lead me forward into the unknown. Lead me along the path of faithfulness. Amen**

# The Lens to See the World

Sally Howell Johnson

The lens with which we see the world makes a difference. It makes a difference in what we value, how we believe, where we give our time and our resources, how we shape each and every day. It also makes a difference in how we practice acts of compassion and justice. In times of great division, in both the church and the wider world, it is important to remember this.

Lately, I have been thinking a lot about my own lens. When I hear or see people so readily choosing sides in ways that confound me, I wonder about their lens. When fear or judgment is our lens, we behave differently than when safety and compassion is the window through which we gaze. When a perception or reality of lack or being invisible is how we see ourselves or those we love, we make choices that differ widely than if we feel seen, empowered or valued.

Jesus implored those he sought to teach to take a long, hard look at the lens with which they saw the world. Telling the story of the person robbed, beaten and left for dead along the side of the road, he offers three ways of response. The priest, fearful and judgmental, passes by without helping. The Levite also turns their eyes from the one who needed care. Only the Samaritan allowed his lens to see a wider view, bending to offer compassion and kindness.

What is the lens with which you see the world? What is the view you have of neighbor, of friend, of enemy? How might your lens be adjusted to offer justice those who are in desperate need of help and healing?

For the one on the side of the road, the Samaritan was the only hope. Whose hope might you be?

**Justice-Making God, nudge me this day to a fuller knowing of the limitations with which I see the world. Open my lens to see as you see and do as you would have me do. Amen**



# The Paradox of Justice

Kristin Zinsmaster

In her book, *Braving the Wilderness*, Brené Brown offers the following maxim: “Strong back. Soft front. Wild heart.” She credits Buddhist teacher Roshi Joan Halifax with the concept—one that speaks to my sense of justice like no other.

*Justice is speaking and living from a seat of fierce kindness.* And this fierce kindness is especially important in the physical, emotional, and overwhelmingly electronic world that we inhabit. Fierce kindness—intense, tenacious, devoted grace shown to self and others—is a concept I’ve been wrestling with. The words seem paradoxical. They’re not.

Brown explains, “The mark of a wild heart is living out the paradox of love in our lives. It’s the ability to be tough and tender, excited and scared, brave and afraid—all in the same moment.”

*Justice is observing that all God’s creation is deserving of our fierce kindness.* Every person we encounter is deserving of our grace, devotion, and protection. Intensity borne of this kind of love is beautiful.

But just as words and tweets and hashtags and likes are not enough, fierce love and kindness are not enough. Not today. Today we need strong backs and wild hearts, too. We need fronts made of love and backs built of courage.

Brown concludes *Braving the Wilderness* by reminding us that her call for true belonging is “not a call to stop advocating, resisting, or fighting.” I’m reminded of powerful words spoken in the wake of the divisive 2016 election:

“My feelings aren’t fragile. My heart isn’t bleeding. . . . My toughness is tenderness. My strength is in the service of others. There is nothing more fierce than formidable, unconditional love. There is not a thing more courageous than compassion.”

Justice is a paradox. It’s fierce, and it’s kind. It’s needed now more than ever.

**In our daily lives, O God, help us to be tough and soft,  
strong and wild, fiercely kind. Amen**

# FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

## When, Exactly?

Elizabeth Bennett



How could you not love this baby?  
Of course, he cries.  
And fills so many diapers.  
And drools and spits up and throws food everywhere.  
And makes it impossible for his parents to sleep or have any “adult”  
time ever again.

But he also smiles.  
And laughs and shrieks with delight.  
And claps and rolls over.  
And “kisses” me and falls asleep next to me in bed.

He is so sweet and wonderful and amazing and all of the things that  
new parents say.  
The only possible response is to love him unconditionally.  
Anything else is unthinkable.

Sometimes I remember that all of us began as babies.  
And then I think, oh no. ALL of us.

Even the thoughtless neighbors who make no attempt to shovel the snow

or sprinkle sand over the ice on their sidewalks.

Even the internet service salesman who was not at all forthcoming about the additional fees that would appear on our bill.

Even the people on the bus who argue and use profanity with voices at full volume.

Even the former students and supervisors who tore apart the lessons on which I had worked so hard over so many early mornings, late nights, and weekends.

Even the careless driver who made my heart stop as his vehicle sped much too close to ours on the freeway.

Even my ex-boyfriend.

Even—even though as I write this I grit my teeth—even a certain elected official

whose words fill me with horror and despair and often make me want to spew profanity of my own.

Even him.

At what moment, precisely, did we stop being babies who deserved only unconditional love?

When did we stop seeing ourselves as beloved children of God?

When do we become worthy of hate, fear, contempt?

May we keep reminding ourselves that we all began as the sweetest of babies.

May we all receive the care we need.

May we all be loved.

May we all experience peace.

**We love because you first loved us, Mother and Father of Us All. You reveal your mark of love upon all of your children, and all means all. May this be the truth that shapes our relationships. Amen**

# What It Is

Evelyn Lillemoe

9th Grader, St. Paul Academy

Every day you hear another story about someone acting in the name of God,  
Killing in the name of God,  
Telling others what they can and cannot do,  
Condemning others just for being who they are.  
Bringing justice.  
But that is not justice.  
We live in an unjust society.  
But we can change that.  
We can change that if we remember the true message of God,  
If we remember to love all people.

**As we listen to your word, help us to hear the true message.**

**A message of justice.**

**A message of love.**

**A message of change.**

**Amen**

# Let's Start with Listening

Nancy Gunderson

No 250-word limit can do this topic justice, but it's "just us" here at Hennepin wrestling with the Big Questions, as usual.

The smallest step toward justice is listening. Really listening. To Spirit, to Love, to one another with love.

Not just to the stories we already know so well - maybe to stories of different life experiences or opposing political views? We'd have more respect for one another, more compassion and a more nuanced understanding of our differences. Simple, but not easy. If we get quiet, we open to the voice of Creation. These are seeds of justice.

So many years, so many experiences, so many voices telling variations of the same story, drops of water growing into a torrent of #MeToo and #TimesUp. Finally there are meaningful consequences for lawbreakers. What changed? Someone listened. Did not deny, minimize or dismiss; listened with love. Believed. Took new actions.

So many voices telling variations of another story, and the Court compelling the convicted Dr. Nassar to listen to the testimonies of scores of his victims. He protested that this would be too emotionally taxing for him; he was unchanged. Unrepentant. (The judge dismissed his request.)

Fourteen years after a complaint about Dr. Nassar was filed, the manager of Meridian Township, Michigan, said publicly to the victim, "we failed you." Frank Walsh apologized to the woman. He changed the way these incidents will be handled. He accepted that it was "just us" who had to correct the process. Simple, but never easy.

As Christians, justice doesn't end with #MeToo or #TimesUp. We have a process for healing, for restoring relationships, for rebuilding trust, for making change. Sometimes we get the idea that it's "just us" without God, that we are lost and powerless. Turning away from God is called sin, but this needn't be permanent. Turning back toward God (and toward right relationship with one another) is called repentance. Simple, but not easy.

It starts with listening.

**Holy God, help us to listen deeply and listen well—  
that we might be restorers of right relationships,  
with others and with you. Amen**

# God's Amazing Sense of Justice

Larry Schedin

I was thinking about this quote from William Shakespeare:

*The quality of mercy is not strained.  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed:  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.*

What an amazing sense of justice God must have to bless us so unconditionally.

**Our lives are filled to overflowing  
with your grace and compassion, Holy God.  
We accept and celebrate these gifts of Love.  
May we use our bounty to bless others  
as richly as you have blessed us.  
Amen**

# Opening Our Hearts, Minds, and Arms

Susan Dunlop

There was no justice when our forebears wrest land away from Native Americans because they did not speak our language, have our skin color, nor “legally” own their homelands in our purview. Yet individual tribes knew their territory and revered the land, which provided their spiritual health, and community well-being. There was no justice when our forebears forced Native Americans onto reservations, which held none of the richness in plants, herbs, and ores that they needed for their well-being.

There was no justice when our forebears hunted and captured young, beautiful, strong, intelligent, African young men and women to slave on their plantations and in their homes and bedrooms--giving them minimal essentials in return.

There was no justice when our African American brothers and sisters immigrated north and our forebears rented poor housing to them for inflated costs, provided jobs with low pay, and through devious means segregated their “neighborhoods” into ghettos.

Today, we can promote justice when we open our arms, minds and hearts to those who are another race and religion as part of God’s family.

Today, we can promote justice when we invite, welcome and encourage those seeking peace and well-being into our country, schools, seminaries, and workplaces.

God has many faces and names. God is love. God gave us a rich, amazing world in which to live and love.

Our heritage of overwhelming injustice may weigh heavily on our souls, but we still can open our hearts, minds, and arms to be the best we can be, and do to embrace the entire Family of God as brothers and sisters.

**Sacred and Holy God, we recognize our participation  
in grave injustices committed in our name.**

**Help us to restore relationships of harmony and love  
among all humankind and with all of Creation. Amen**

# The Power of a Smile

Bobbie Keller

The song, “Let There be Peace on Earth and Let It Begin With Me,” says a lot. While protest events draw attention, there are things we all can do more quietly but persistently and every day to make this world a better place. A simple smile to a stranger can go far in breaking down barriers. So can welcoming everyone—not just certain people—into a circle.

Somehow we humans have divided ourselves into groups according to characteristics such as race, ethnic background, religion and sexual preference. No matter which group or groups we may belong to, we are all individuals with basic human needs, hopes, and dreams. I for one would rather focus on what we have in common rather than our differences—although differences do make the world more interesting and give us opportunities to learn from each other. How dull this world would be if we were all exactly alike....

When I first visited Russia in the early 1990s, the fact that people around the world are basically the same jumped out at me. After growing up in the Cold War era, I was struck but not really surprised that the people we were taught long ago to question or even fear were very much like us, despite the difference in background and language. People we met on our tour were gracious, hospitable, and eager to make friends with Americans.

So it’s up to all of us to live lives of compassion and inclusion. Peace on earth can begin with “justus.”

**Holy One, may your eternal love smile upon your children  
all of our days, and may that lift the muscles in our faces  
and brighten our eyes as we greet one another. Amen**



# Smile

Ali Alden Pope

8th Grader, Highland Park Middle School

Justice is absent in the ways of equality and equity. People around the world are being treated differently based on race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, and so many other things. I believe that we as a people can change that. God's word can start spreading.

But what is that, exactly? There are so many ways to see it and interpret its meaning. But equity and equality must spread and become the new normal. It's time for just us to build justice in small ways. When you see someone who needs help, simply help them out! Maybe a homeless person on the side of the road, there are packet to hand out in preparation for Minnesota weather. Or visit a grandparent. The simplest ways to bring justice into the world is to help people. It doesn't have to be a huge act, but the small things that can make a big change. Make someone smile. Do no harm. Do good. Help others.

**Your ways are mysterious, Holy Spirit, and your reach is long.  
In the absence of wholeness, in the presence of brokenness,  
break in with the clear Way. Amen**

# SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

## God Moments

Ann Carlson

Thirty-four years ago God disrupted my life!

I was part of a HAUMC spirituality group that was exploring a variety of aspects of spiritual experiences. One meeting we invited a Christian psychic to our meeting. I was intrigued by what this person told us. So I decided to visit her to see what she would reveal about my life. I sat down and listened. I did not tell her anything about my family or my life. Eve told me that she knew that I had two sons. Then she told me, "I see a daughter in your life." I replied that she was mistaken because we had all the children that we were planning on having. Eve persisted and repeated, "I see a daughter in your life!" I left the meeting feeling puzzled.

Lee and I were friends with a HAUMC member, Erma Craven, an older woman and the guardian for her brother's eight-year-old daughter, Felicia. Felicia had a tough early childhood. She was born in a drug treatment treatment facility where both of her parents were court-ordered. Her mother abandoned her when she was two months old. Erma brought her brother and Felicia back to Minneapolis and set them up in an apartment. Within a few years, Felicia's father became terminally ill and died. Felicia was then placed in several foster homes and ultimately ended up living with Erma.

Erma then became seriously ill and was hospitalized. We learned about Erma and also that there was no place for Felicia to go. Lee and I discussed the situation and decided to offer to take care of Felicia while Erma was hospitalized. A short time earlier, we had attended a memorial service for my father where John 21:17, "Feed my Sheep," was the Scripture reading. Lee later told me that he thought that Scripture reading was directly related to us and Felicia. We subsequently discussed Felicia's situation and concluded that we had the capacity to provide for another child. Lee then went to see Erma and offer to care for Felicia. Erma was grateful and relieved.

Erma's health continued to decline to the point that her death seemed near. Lee and I did some soul-searching and decided to offer to adopt Felicia if Erma died. Again, Lee visited Erma and asked if she had made arrangements for Felicia's care in the event of her death. Erma said she had not done so. Lee then extended our offer to adopt Felicia which Erma accepted with great relief. The fact that we were a white family adopting a biracial child was less important to Erma than that Felicia would be part of a stable two-parent family. Six months later, Felicia's adoption was finalized.

Fortunately, Erma lived for another ten years. Erma became our "in town" Grandmother for all three of our children.

The adjustment to having another child in the family was extremely difficult for everyone. Felicia had experienced so many bad things in her life that she was rageful. She did a significant amount of acting out that caused a lot of stress for everyone. Through it all, we found the therapeutic help that we needed. Lee and I became a skillful parenting team in the art of providing love and limits. I went back to graduate school and became a child therapist specializing in working with abused children, adopted kids, and coaching parents on child management techniques.

The situation I have described above is the most significant "God moment" we have had in our lives, in which we both felt like God had chosen "just us" to do an important job. Our daughter is now 42 years old, full of love instead of rage. She has apologized to each person in the family for the trouble she caused them when she was a kid. We now have loving family relationships, forged through many years of hard work and therapy.

**Holy One, you surprise us at every turn with your call  
on our lives. Help us to hear. Help us to listen.  
Help us to know your voice as true and clear and pure gift.  
And give us courage to follow its sweet sound. Amen**

# Just Us Sharing

Nate Melcher

Our family recently had a long weekend that saw Kelly out of town while our daughters and me remained here in Minneapolis. We were glad she would get a little rest and relaxation, and excited for a shared adventure for our trio, “just us” together.

That Saturday, I dropped off Bea at a classmate’s birthday party then took Gertie out to run errands and talk about life over hot cocoa at Caribou. She said how much she liked our “just us” time. When we picked up Bea, they both rushed to share their experiences with each other: painting and pizza stories from Bea and cocoa delight from Gertie.

We shared a meal, then it was time to swap! I dropped off Gertie at Girl Scouts and then I took Bea out to run errands and talk about life over ice cream at Izzy’s. She said she had a lot of fun just “me and Papa” together. When we picked up Gertie, they both rushed to share their experiences with each other: picking up cookies to sell for the first time from Gertie and bubble gum ice cream delight from Bea.

After a few days, when we picked up Kelly from the airport, everyone rushed to share their experiences with each other: Scouts and errands and pizza and worship and crafts and friends and the ocean and Hennepin Kids and bubble gum ice cream delight and on and on. We were together again, “just us,” our family, sharing.

Between each “just us” time that separated us, we gathered back together to share our “just us” experiences with one another. Our stories are linked, and no story is just for us. Stories are best when shared and in that sharing, the “us” of “just us” grows as big as the love of God, and that is a love that is with us when we are “just us” separate or together, and it is a love that lasts all of our days.

**God, be with us during our “just us” times,  
from the times when the groupings of “just us” are small  
to the times when they enlarge and incorporate more.  
May we see every time as sacred. Amen**

# There Is Just Us for Justice

Donna Long

As we sometimes say in Sacred Journey, “we are the ones we have been waiting for.” It is up to us to do something about the overwhelming injustice in our world today. That would seem like an overwhelming task, but we need only do that which is near us. Hopefully someone else will be doing it for the people near them.

I like to think of this through the lens of radical hospitality—one of the chief focuses of Hennepin in becoming the church we want to be.

To me, this means that I help where I perceive a need. Twice now in my life, I have taken in people who are homeless, sheltering and nurturing them until they are ready to move on. The first time was about twenty years ago and I took in a woman who was fighting a heroin addiction. She stayed with me for two years. During that time she first got on a methadone program and then got herself weaned off of it. After about a year she was able to work part-time and before she left me, she had a full-time job and was able to support herself. The second one is still with me and the outcome is still in question. I just do what I can do and set some boundaries when I have to.

Radical hospitality does not need to be that radical. One time in Sam’s Club I was checking out behind a young Muslim couple who were having trouble with English, but were hearing the message that they didn’t have enough money to pay. I stepped forward and paid it for them. This was at a time that there was a lot of negative talk about keeping Muslims out of the country. I thought I should show them that we didn’t all feel that way.

I have a personal policy of not giving money to people who are standing on the street asking for help. One day I drove by a young couple with two young children and a cardboard sign. Because of my personal policy, I passed them by. Later, I started to feel guilty, so I promised myself I would stop if I saw them again. The next day, they were standing there again, so I told them I would not give them money, but I would take them grocery shopping.

At the store, I immediately saw that they were hesitant to load up their cart. So I took over and started adding food. I heard the kids whispering, wondering if I would put cookies in too, so of course, I did. They left with enough fresh food for more than a week and some staples that would hold them for a while longer. This was my act of justice—meeting the need of this family.

Radical hospitality does not need to be grand gestures. All the little things make a person feel seen too, including greeting all people in a friendly way. Sometimes all that’s needed is to acknowledge the humanity in each of us.

As they saying goes, “Think globally and act locally.”

**God who sets up many rooms in the home, your love is no guest,  
but a permanent resident in our hearts. May this local love  
turn global, from one heart to many hearts around us. Amen**

# Adding Sweetness for Others

Kathleen McDowell

Our current world state of affairs calls for greater kindness all around. Offering kindness may change someone's life even when we don't understand why they are the way they are. Sharing a spark of the divine can alter lives, especially when it is in the darkness of times. It is definitely needed when people have soured in their interactions with others and are losing faith. There is plenty of pain and hurt out there. It is played out in the news with violence--that pain spilling out in our homes, workplaces and our streets.

When we climb the hill, zigzagging through the smooth trails and rocky terrain, how we get there matters. Do we get so myopic we do not see the plight of others? Is it "Just Us" looking out for number 1? Or do we stop along the way offering a hand and our heart? Do we look back to see where we were? Do we use what we have learned to extend kindness that can help lift someone else up?

Instead of giving up chocolate or sugar, how about adding sweetness for others by becoming consciously civil and kind? Maybe set a goal of saying "please," "thank you," and "you are welcome" eight times a day. Extend the kindness wherever you can, whenever you can.

This past year, I was navigating a very rocky and perilous path around edges of cliffs. Donna extended so much kindness and love without judgment or expectation for me that I felt I wasn't traveling a lonesome road. Even though I was walking my own path, she continued to walk beside me. She understood. She didn't try to fix; she held my spirit lovingly in her palm.

It could be the best gift we offer by starting to be kinder to just us, being less harsh on ourselves. Offer the same and spread it out for others. When you toss that pebble in the water, see how far those kindness ripples touch others.

**Morning, noon, and night, there is no time we are without you.**

**In places well-known and corners mysterious,**

**there is no place we are without you.**

**Aid us in our seeking. Shape our path. Harness our energy. Amen**

# God's Call

Jenna Holden

8th Grader, Hopkins West Jr. High

When I hear of justice I think of all the people all over the world who are without it. It's up to Justus to help change that. We can educate everyone on what's going on in the world. We can teach them what we call can do to help. Soon all will have justice because we heard God's call to bring justice to the whole world. It's up to just us to bring good to everyone.



# "Just Us" Will Be Justice

Anna Jensen

9th Grader, St. Louis Park High School

If a tiny mustard seed can grow into a luscious bush, I believe that "just us" can spread God's love, compassion, and justice for all. One congregation can reach many through worship, prayer, ministry, and service. One person can spread God's kindness, mercy, and Spirit through each person they meet with a smile, an open mind, and a helping hand.

If someone is lonely, sit by them at lunch.

If someone is cold, offer them a hat.

"Just us" will be justice.

**Spark of Life, fan your flame of kindness and mercy  
by my hands, my lips, and my soul. Amen**

# A Profile in Courage

Denny Smith

Long ago, in a galaxy far, far away, I taught English and American Literature to five classes of high school juniors—two designated as “Remedial English.” Before my first remedial class, my department chair declared in a hallway exchange, “Oh, and don’t worry about them...they can’t do anything.”

Well then. There they were: twenty-five adult-looking 16 and 17-year-olds with bored/anxious/belligerent/blank expressions. And a fourth-grade reading level. Couldn’t name a vowel or a consonant; thought they were probably musical instruments. When asked why they were in the class, they replied, “we’re the dummies...we’re stupid...we flunked out.”

And there I was, clutching my teaching certificate like it was the Hippocratic oath of knowledge. The district must have gotten a deal on their literature textbook. It included excerpts from Madison’s *Federalist Papers* and John Kennedy’s *Profiles in Courage*.

The year was difficult but we persevered. I replaced my linear unit methods with a more organic approach and we made our way through, reading and writing to many levels of competency.

I remember Bob best of all. He had trouble staying awake in class. His written work was OK but his attention was challenged. After meeting with him, I learned that he was 17 and in a work-study program. He left school every day to go to work—first at a gas station and later in the evening to a bowling alley where he washed dishes until midnight. He was a primary wage earner for himself and his mother. We arranged for him to be in my office during conference time for tutoring and study. As a result he turned things around and earned a “B” for the semester.

That “B” made him eligible to move into a “regular” classroom. I made the request for the move and asked that it be into one of my classes for a smoother transition. My request was granted. However, I was ordered to never do that again. “A remedial student can never earn more than a ‘C,’” I was told.

I have little idea what the other 59 students got from our time together. I do know that the administration wasn’t satisfied. I was not invited to renew my teaching contract.

But “just us” still won. Bob wrote his own profile in courage and I got to grade it. On the last day of class, he left a note on my desk. It read, “Thank you for teaching me. No one else has ever listened to me.”

**May we see the sacred potential inherent in every life, Holy God—  
and honor these natural gifts with our Presence and our Love.**

**Amen**



# Justice Starts with Us

Judy Zabel

Just us. Justice. Just saying!

People often ask me why it is that I travel to Sierra Leone in West Africa to build hospitals, schools, fund schools and expand feeding programs. "Why do you spend so much money going so far away to help those people when there is need right here in Minneapolis?" Good question. Why not hunker down and fight for an end to homelessness right here in Minnesota? Why is there a multi-generational team planning to go to Henderson Settlement this summer? Why do we open the doors to Community Meals? Why is Dignity Center in the Ministry House? Why are there Minnesota Intern Center (MNIC) students here in our building? Why do we send our youth on summer mission trips? Why do we support meals on wheels? Why are we providing money to people coming out of prison and jail through the Compass 180 program? Why are we involved with Russia Partnership? Why are we partnering with St. Thomas University on a sorghum project? Why do we support Mozart Adevu in his efforts to work on sustainable agriculture in several different countries in West Africa? Why have we supported missions in India? Why did we build a breadfruit extruder for people in Haiti? Why do we support Emma Norton Services? Why are Hennepin United Methodist Women investing funds to send a young woman with promise to college? Why do our children and parents pack meals at Feed My Starving Children? Why are we challenging the Blaisdell YMCA to a food drive challenge during March for Minnesota FoodShare?

The short answer is this: Jesus told us to do these things. "Love your neighbors and feed my sheep." And so we do. We mean what we say when we say that we will strive for excellence in the practice of risk-taking mission and service. We are serious about passionate worship that isn't merely flowery words and empty promises. We are compelled to heal a broken world.

One. Life. At. A. Time. Because justice starts with just us. We just can't wait for someone else to lead the charge. We will lead the charge and we won't quit. Just say'n. Just get started. Justus.

And God will be delighted.

**Lead us, O God of Justice, along the path of compassion.**

**May we be healers. Builders. Restorers.**

**Bringers of Life. Carriers of Love.**

**For the creation of your kin-dom on Earth. Amen**

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

### On the Way to Justice. . .

Ingrid Bloom

God's justice, loving-kindness, generosity, mercy, and unending love towards us, gives us these amazing bodies, breath, a beautiful earth that sustains us, endless ingenuity, creativity, and resources to share.

thank you to the woman who won't give up advocating for refugees, and being a prophet to rouse others to care.

thank you to the teacher who makes himself humble, so new questions can be found that open our mind, and stir our hearts to seek God.

thank you to the man that loves the earth so much he dedicates years of planning, organizing, and advocating to lead the people of the congregation and the people of the community to use renewable energy.

thank you to the ones in the background, planning and organizing meals and communal space that welcome the stranger, encourage the people to sit and talk to each other, and hear each other with welcome hearts, and feed the hungry in body and soul.

thank you to those who clean up and recycle and put things away.

I remember visiting a small village in Guatemala where there was no garbage pickup, and everyone just threw their garbage and empty bottles where ever they stood. During my visit all I could think of was how could we organize garbage pickup and the advantages of not littering. It had evolved into severe injustice to the environment, to peoples' health, and becoming indifferent to the beauty obscured by garbage.

thank you to the filmmakers, writers, photographers, artists, who raise our awareness, sometimes at great risk, so we know what injustice and justice-making is going on. They inspire us to join in, enable us to know where to join in, and how to participate.

thank you to the healer who is present and committed to strangers, those seeking refuge, children, the poor, the vulnerable, the suffering, and is available where there is need.

thank you to those with grateful hearts, who help us to turn to the source of blessings,  
allowing us to experience together reverence and awe and praise.

in this we are the ones acting with justice towards God.

**Compassionate God, we offer our thanks  
to all of the saints and justice-builders in our midst.  
We honor the sacred presence within them and within us.  
Amen**



## **Let Justice Roll**

- 21 “I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,  
I will not look upon them.  
23 Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
24 But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

# The Sacredness of Pacing

## Jolene Roehlkepartain

“Now this?”

That’s what one of my colleagues said recently. Actually, it’s a phrase I’ve heard a lot in the past few years, whether I’m talking to someone advocating for socioeconomic and racial equities, those reducing their carbon footprint, people working for voting rights, leaders dealing with extreme funding cuts to their nonprofit organizations, or those fighting for fair-housing practices.

Every day there’s a new injustice or hardship that rears its head.

And it’s exhausting.

One person compared it to working in the midst of an avalanche. Just when we think we’ve found our path and our footing, we get caught in a bunch of rubble that knocks us off our feet and tries to bury us.

If we’re not careful in our sacred work of creating social change, we can develop compassion fatigue. I’ve met some people who have developed compassion chronic fatigue.

That’s because the needs are so great, and the resources are few.

In our important work of advocating for social justice, it’s key that we pace and renew ourselves. Advocating for justice isn’t effective if we wear down, wear out, and burnout.

Last week, when I learned our company was working with a group of tribal women who lived 250% below the poverty line, the first thing I did was turn on some classical music and look at pictures of nature.

I needed the music and the natural beauty to help me with the shock of that statistic—and to fill my soul with goodness before I began trying to tackle this unfathomable injustice.

If we want to try to save the world, we also need to savor it. Finding the beauty, the kindness, and the joy can help fulfill us with the strength, courage, and stamina we need to tackle the difficulties before us.

**When the world threatens to overwhelm, O God, show me the beauty of a sunrise. When exhaustion for the brokenness in our community seems more than I can bear, remind me of the bulb that pushes through dark earth to become a flower. God of New Life, jar me from the shadows of despair and offer resurrection. Amen**

## Responsibility

Jacy Demcisak

8th Grader

When I hear the word “justice,” I usually think of the negative associations, like getting justice for a crime, usually taking something away from someone. But in “Justus,” it is no longer about punishment. It becomes the idea that we can only provide consequence, good or bad. “Just us” can be responsible for our own actions. We can help with the healing of those consequences. We can help with healing. “Just us” to get ready to recover the world. We can get bigger.



## We the People

Sarah Walz

9th Grader, Richfield High School

We the people are everything. We may look to a higher power for hope, love, and support but for the most part it's just us. We rely on one another to be the strength for those who are weak. We rely on one another to be the shoulder to cry on when someone is sad. We rely on one another to bring food to the hungry. We rely on each other to be the best we can be because for the most part, it's just us. Many believe in this vast universe because sometimes we aren't enough. Myself included. Sometimes, we need the extra support that a higher power can give us. But for the most part, it's just us. So we need to be enough.

**Where can we run from you, blessed Jesus? Where is a place we might hide? You are the pursuant Christ, hungry to put a hand on our shoulder, turn us toward each other, and reveal to us how you see us. Thank you for relying on us to see each one of your tiny, tiny children in this vast universe. Amen**

# SDK

Jim McChesney

Justice. Our ancient Hebrew friends used the word SDK pronounced sedek, for our latin-based English word *justice*.

When we consider justice, we may be thinking about some penalty for one who has violated a law or another person. We may think about someone who cheated on a transaction or did harm to another.

Civilization has moved us forward to organize courts for judges and juries to decide matters of justice. Justice can vary greatly from nation to nation, and sometimes town to town, state to state.

Can we connect these matters to what we believe is the will of the heavenly Father, God, Creator? Our greatest leap of faith is that our sins have been forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus. And, just there, we may have a consequence, something to repay, time to serve, broken relationships to mend, etc.

One of the greatest victories we can have during Lent is to work at one of the justice issues of our personal lives. It is hard work, important work, and worth every bit of time and energy it takes. Let us work for justice in the everyday levels of living. This works both ways: to accept others who may need our help for their justice issues, and to work hard to get others to work with us on ours.

God is with us in this.

Praise God.

**Help me to accept what is hard to accept,  
admit what is hard to admit,  
repent of what needs repentance,  
and step boldly into what needs bold steps. Amen**

# I Believe and I Know

Evie Kemper

8th Grader, Hopkins West Jr. High

I believe that just us does not need to be something that is given.  
Maybe a feeling that is given, a mindset.

I believe that just us can begin from just being there, sending  
hope and welcoming all.

I believe that stepping forward is all that's needed.

I believe that a hand reaching is enough.

I believe that just us is spreading hope that there is a place for all.

I believe that anyone can spread the word.

I believe that age, gender, sexuality, anything does not matter;  
everyone needs a feeling of acceptance.

I know I do.

I know my friends do.

I know many people need acceptance,

Hope,

and love.

**In moments of doubt, O God—doubt in ourselves and each other—  
help us to believe what you know about us:  
we are loved, we are capable, and we are in this together.  
May we know you are in this with us too,  
with divine urgency and grace. Amen**

# Mercy

Nate Melcher

As the Confirmation Class prepared to lead the Ash Wednesday worship service, we took in each of the spiritual practice stations so we'd all be familiar with them. One that moved me, particularly, was Images of God. Using the word cloud we created in January and February of life-giving images of God from the congregation, we were to gaze on the word cloud and choose one image of God we will carry with us in Lent. Then, we wrote that image on a small stone to carry with us in Lent.

I chose "Merciful." It's not what I wrote during the original word cloud exercise. And yet it still stood out to me from in-between the larger words around it.

This is a time of low mercy, an absence of relenting – a relentless barrage of mercilessness. I pray that as we seek God in Lent, we sense God's mercy, a mercy to all people. May that mercy granted to us become the mercy we grant to others. I'm reminded of a favorite definition of love: giving someone the power to destroy you and trusting them not to do it. There is mercy in this form of love, one that acquiesced power and embraces the fragility of those most in need.

Sometimes, that's even me.

**God, in these times of low mercy,  
open our hearts and lives to deep love, to deep compassion.  
Amen**



# Red Brocade

by Naomi Shihab Nye

The Arabs used to say,  
When a stranger appears at your door,  
feed him for three days  
before asking who he is,  
where he's come from,  
where he's headed.  
That way, he'll have strength  
enough to answer.  
Or, by then you'll be  
such good friends  
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.  
Rice? Pine nuts?  
Here, take the red brocade pillow.  
My child will serve water  
to your horse.

No, I was not busy when you came!  
I was not preparing to be busy.  
That's the armor everyone put on  
to pretend they had a purpose  
in the world.

I refuse to be claimed.  
Your plate is waiting.  
We will snip fresh mint  
into your tea.

**God, widen our hearts for hospitality, open our hands for service,  
open our eyes to see who stands before us, longing to connect.**

**Amen**

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

## A Just Woman

Kathleen Chesney

United Methodist Women (UMW) sponsored a national justice seminar at HAUMC on January 27 that explored sexual trafficking. It was open to all persons but only about 20 attended. For seven hours we listened to national and local speakers, many of whom represented groups that partner with UMW to identify, liberate and nurture victims of sexual slavery.

Our presenters spoke about programs built on the 2014 Safe Harbor law that redefined underage sex providers as victims instead of criminals. This allows the young people who escape or are rescued to get the housing and services they need to ease back into or learn for the first time how to lead free and healthy lives.

Cindy Saufferer of Faribault opened the seminar with a meditation based on Isaiah 59:14-16. She spoke of her early experiences as a UMW Director and Secretary. Upon request, she sent her text to me:

Six years ago something happened that was out of the realm of possibility for me and it placed me in situations that I could never imagine. I was elected as a Director to UMW.

*How could this happen? I am just a farmer.*

The work and responsibilities began and I found myself sitting in a room listening to indigenous women leaders from all over the world discuss the plight of their communities and working together for solutions.

*Do they know I'm just a grandma?*

There I was, sitting on the floor of the General Assembly Hall at the United Nations for the Commission of the Status of Women.

*Seriously, what am I doing here? Do they know what they have done? I'm just a small town girl.*

Then one day a friend said, "Stop. Don't say 'just' anymore." By using 'just' in this manner it diminished who I was and dismissed my power. It absolved me of responsibility.

Suddenly I noticed what happened when, instead of saying “just a,” I reversed the word order to “a just.” I became a just farmer, grandma and small town girl. I claimed my power and became effective.

At this time, I know of two groups who are looking for supplies and volunteers to aid the recovery process. The Link serves persons aged 10-17. Beth Holger-Ambrose, Director, can be reached at bholger-ambrose@thelinkmn.org or 612-636-4260. *Breaking Free* aids women 18 and older. Executive Director Terry Forliti is at tforliti@breakingfree.net or 612 203-7119.

Volunteers are also needed to report vulnerable persons. The Minneapolis Police Department and Hennepin County provide training and backup. The police contact person is Grant Snyder.

I am looking for my niche by researching several agencies. To get an update, please call me at 763-561-2512 or 763-229-8657 (cell).

Now, please fast forward one week after the UMW seminar to when I reviewed my thoughts. As a daughter of rural Minnesota I asked the question, what is just farming and how does the lack of it seem to relate to sex slavery?

Our universities, government policies and commercial agribusinesses favor the growth of farming operations based on poisonous chemicals, animal cruelty, and soil tillage practices that extract nutrients and cause erosion. Fossil fuel usage has risen exponentially since I was a little girl riding the tractor with my Dad on his 360-acre farm. Dad owned one ordinary truck to deliver harvested crops to the buyer. Now, my nephew owns several semi-tractor-trailer vehicles to collect and deliver his crops.

It seems to me that in our society the land, water, air, animals, and other parts of nature are enslaved in the same exploitive manner as sex-trafficked children and adult females and males. All are in and of God's Body, which is being greedily assaulted and in many cases murdered. How can people of a just church respond in a loving, healing, Christ-like manner?

**God of Creation, empower each of us to think of ourselves as just individuals. Move us to work toward the emancipation of Your Body. Bless us to live upon Earth in Christ-like mercy. Amen**

## Not Just Us

David and Ann Smith

*We must have no illusions. We must not be naïve. If we listen to the voice of God, we make our choice, get out of ourselves and fight nonviolently for a better world. We must not expect to find it easy; we shall not walk on roses, people will not throng to hear us and applaud, and we shall not always be aware of divine protection. If we are to be pilgrims of justice and peace, we must expect the desert.*

—Peacemaking Day by Day<sup>1</sup>

In our attempt to work for justice, it was with others that we:

- invited migrant workers from Barbados to come to church for worship in the 1950s;
- taught elementary students in inner city public schools;
- cared for the sick at a county hospital that accepted ALL no matter what their finances;
- purchased houses in an integrated neighborhood and sent children to integrated schools;
- traveled with church groups on mission projects in the U.S. and Central America; and
- worked with church groups for inclusion of LGBTQ persons.

We and others did not find it easy. With others we understood the risks. People did not throng to hear us or the others. The applause we all heard was seeing that there are some improvements in areas of integration, education, economics, health care, and acceptance in this world. Our real desert along with others is to know that there is much further to go and that maybe we could have done more.

Our journey has not ended.

<sup>1</sup> Helder Pessoa Camara, in Peacemaking Day by Day (Erie, Pa.: Pax Christi USA, 1989), p. 17

**You have promised, O God, that we are never alone.**

**In the desert places of our lives and our work,  
be a beacon that shows the Way. Our journey is long.**

**Offer us comfort, we pray, so we might not weary along the path.**

**In hope and humility, Amen**

# I Celebrate Me

submitted by Marcene Johnson

I am worth celebrating. I am worth everything.  
I am unique. In this whole world, there is only one me,  
There is no one person with my talents, experiences, gifts.  
No one may take my place.

God created only one me, precious in His sight.  
I have immense potential to love, care, create, grow, sacrifice,  
if I believe in myself.

It doesn't matter my age, or color, or whether my parents  
Loved me or not.  
(Maybe they wanted to but couldn't.)

It doesn't matter what I have been, the things I've done,  
Mistakes I've made, people I've hurt.  
I am forgiven.

I am accepted. I am okay I am loved in spite of everything. So I  
love myself and nourish seeds within me.

I celebrate me. I begin now. I start anew.  
I give myself new birth today.  
I am me, and that's all I need to be.

Today is a new beginning. A new life, given freely.  
So I celebrate the miracle, and I celebrate me.

-Anonymous

**Holy One, I give thanks that you have created me  
as a unique child of God.  
I celebrate life. I celebrate love. I celebrate me. Amen**

# Voting Rights

Dennis Behl

Comparing justice with righteousness, Marcus Borg writes, “Distributive justice does not ask kings and emperors to increase their charitable giving. Rather, it asks about the way the system is structured. How is it shaped and whom does it benefit? Does it benefit some inordinately?” (pg. 138)

Let’s ask ourselves—who does our system place at a disadvantage?

Consider voting rights.

“Our ability to choose our government without unnecessary restriction is fundamental to our democracy,” right? According to facts presented by ACLU Restore the Vote and League of Women Voters:

In many states, individuals with prior convictions are deprived of the right to vote, and while options may exist to restore their voting rights, those procedures and eligibility requirements may be often onerous. Many of these rights deprivations originated in the Jim Crow era to disenfranchise African-Americans... Today more than 6 million US citizens lack voting rights due to prior convictions—more than a third are black. Most of this population is no longer incarcerated. These people, our families, friends, neighbors, are living, working (paying taxes) and raising families in our communities, yet lack access to the ballot. Thirty-eight states, allow returning citizens to vote after completing their sentences AND only after probation/supervision or conditional release. These periods vary, determined by the court and may last, in some cases 15-20 years. In Minnesota, 51,000 individuals and their families living in our communities are unable to vote due to a felony conviction, and yet remain unable to participate in one of the most fundamental parts of our democracy.

- Where do these persons reside? An estimated 64% live in Greater Minnesota
- Race /Ethnicity? 35,700 are White,12,240 are African American,3,060 are Latinx and 3,060 are Native American.
- African-American Minnesotans are seven times more likely to be disenfranchised than white Minnesotans.”

Why Change?...Voting is an indicator of one’s stake in the community. We need to remove barriers to former offenders re-joining the community, and living productive crime-free lives. Public safety organizations like the Minnesota County Attorneys Association support this.

A broad cross-section of faith groups, valuing compassion and forgiveness, believe that our criminal justice system should be not only about punishment, but also justice.

Consider what Borg writes on distributive justice; where are you on this voting rights issue? Hear that prophetic question ring down the millennium: *What does the Lord require of you... do justice, and love kindness and walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8)

For more information visit [www.restorethevotemn.org](http://www.restorethevotemn.org)

**In the face of rampant injustice, show us the way, O God.  
Give us a voice to advocate for change,  
to advocate for a more just world. Amen**

# Relationship and Compassion

Dwight Haberman

JUST US. Obviously the focus is on the us. But to whom does the “us” refer? We are very strong on justice at Hennepin. You can recognize the Dignity Center, refugee ministry, reconciling ministry, community meals, etc. The list could go on and on. The word “justice” in the Bible has to do with right, just, and upright. All of that seem to refer to the heart--first to our motive, being pure and not fake.

The creation story tells us that we are made in the image of God. Adam and Eve knew good from evil. Noah is called a righteous man, but he must have let those mosquitos onto the ark. Pilate calls Jesus a righteous man. The suggestion is that justice is not just what we do. We are called to be just PEOPLE out of whose just lives come just actions...just daily behaviors. Justice can be who we are. It is just-us. We are called to be just/righteous persons who act justly to do what God would do in the world. In what might seem controversial is this observation by Thomas Merton: “Contemplation is out of the question for anyone who doesn’t try to cultivate compassion for others”--a necessary connection between our heart/soul and our actions for justice. As Marcus Borg, whom we are reading these days, says, “It is to love God and then to love what/who God loves.” To repeat, inspiration and energy for justice come from a deep relationship with God and compassion for neighbor.

One person who did justice that way was Alice Lynch, a friend who recently died. She spent her life loving God in the people of the “north side.” She led over 1000 trainings on domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and restorative justice, and she lived what she trained. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and received numerous awards. She was a wonderful example of an “us.” We may not be able to be the “us” that Alice was. We can be the “us” God created us to be.

**You call us from the sidelines, God, and ask us to step into the  
Light of your Love. Quiet us this day**

**so we may hear the still, small voice of your Spirit.  
Give us the ears to hear that voice calling us to love  
all that you love.**

**Connect our heart and our actions this day. Amen**

## More than Just Us

Bruce Ario

Through a series of mishaps, misunderstandings, compromising situations, bad chemistry, bad decisions, and a stroke of luck, I ended up on a psych ward in June 1979. By way of acute psychosis, I had almost become estranged from the world as a whole. I say “almost” because there were those who just didn’t give up on me, including Jesus.

There was an especially poignant time when I looked out my hospital window, and it was “just us”: me and Jesus. At least that’s what I thought at the time.

But I think I was wrong. There was Diane, a very challenged co-patient, with whom I was able to share humor. There was my psychiatrist and team of staff who kept probing my brain, who just wouldn’t let me be. And there was my family and friends who sought to understand me and find new ways to love me.

I accept that there are people who think it’s just them and God. God is great, and no one loves you more. But I challenge people to look around to see others. God intends us to be social creatures. I personally think He revels in our joys and suffers in our defeats in our dealings with others. He takes pleasure when people gather in His name such as at church. And, yes, He likes the times of solitude when you seek Him.

You may have been misunderstood or someone may have hurt you. You may be facing a great injustice or coming to terms with big lies. You may be feeling quite lonely. But don’t give up on others. As a friend once told me, “There’s always someone.” Keep looking until you find him or her or them. They are out there just like you. It really is “just us” in this life.

**God, help us to see the people around us who want to connect,  
who want to help, who create a community that includes  
everyone, especially those who feel alone. Amen**



# ST. PATRICK'S DAY

## Turning Inward, Turning Outward

Elizabeth Bennett

Dear Friends,

I have not been feeling very subversive lately. No marching, no letter-writing, no overturning tables, not even a yard sign. Each time I turn on the radio or ride the bus, I am painfully reminded of the astonishing inequality among neighbors in my community, country, and world. I know it's my responsibility to use my position of privilege to help dismantle oppressive systems, to speak up for "the least of these," to befriend those who are lonely and forgotten. I know, I know. But unless you count shopping at the co-op or clicking "Like" on Facebook, I have to confess that I've done very little. I am feeling overwhelmed. This does not absolve me of my responsibility, although I imagine that many of you can relate.

In this season of my life, I have mostly turned inward, focusing on "just" my new baby, my spouse, and myself. The days are full with diaper changes, outfit changes, laundry, cooking, baby toys, baby books, baby songs, baby yoga, discussions of developmental milestones, drinking too much coffee, and, yes, watching too much *Grey's Anatomy* while my baby nurses and naps in my arms. And my life is full of so much joy! I delight in my baby's coos and gurgles, in his increasing gymnastic skills, in his giggles when I hold him up and help him "dance" or simply touch his nose and say, "Beep!" My heart melts when I watch my husband play with him or comfort him when he cries. I love our new family of three so, so, so indescribably much. I sometimes feel guilty, but I don't regret any of this.

And yet. The outside world, with its injustices and pain, won't go away. I pray that in the seasons to come, I will have more energy to turn outward. I hope to teach my baby by my example how to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

**Jesus, our brother, you lean in and call us in the midst of strength and pain, contentment and restlessness, certainty and doubt. May we hear your call this season. Amen**

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### Standing Up in Each Moment

Betsy Barnum

“We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” The Hopi elders said it, and Sweet Honey in the Rock sang it in their haunting acapella harmonies. So deeply moving, so true, so scary—and so much the message we need to hear.

And hearing this message, we need to act on it, because it is truer every day. No one is coming from the sky or from some unknown birthplace to save us. No technological breakthrough is around the corner to solve the problems. Waiting for someone or something else to step forward and lead us out of the mess we are in is no longer even a vain hope. We are it.

The times we are living through are calling us, ever more clearly and loudly, to uphold the values we say are those of Christ and the God of the Universe, the God who is love, and among these values is justice—justice for the poor and the oppressed, justice for those unable to defend themselves, justice for water and air and ecosystems and for the future generations of all living things. For the future of the planet.

But what does it mean to “do justice?” What are we being called to?

The answer is different for everyone. And even asking the question brings out the part of me that is scared by the enormity of what I might be called to do, and wants to wait for someone else to do it.

Sometimes when I am in that place I read Ephesians 6, Paul’s message of encouragement to the Ephesians for facing “the evil day.” He metaphorically describes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and God’s teaching as protective pieces of armor, and advises them, “Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

I have found this passage profoundly supportive when I don't know what to do and want to run away. Simply standing may not sound like action but, I assure you, it is. Standing up, standing for justice, standing in the face of the evil of this day, is an act of great courage when the forces of injustice are lined up against you.

Whether in this place you find the strength to speak your truth to power, offer your hand to someone who is struggling, or simply not turn away from what is in front of you even though it feels terrifying and overwhelming, standing is a way to be “the ones we've been waiting for.” Feel it in your bones.

Standing up in each moment for what is right and just in a world that is full of injustice is an act of incalculable courage and value. And it is enough.

**God, lead me in the ways of my calling.  
Help me discern my path and the way I'm called to live. Amen**

# Stepping Forward for Justice

Carol Michalicek

There are many faces and elements of “Justice.” I think this is why I struggle with this concept. It feels so big in its construct and implications.

I wonder about the stories we hear about Jesus. We see just a glimpse of Jesus’s work towards Justice: righting wrongs, modeling new ways of being, speaking with clarity to help others understand. We do not yet have any way of knowing how he got to where his ministry began. A lot could have happened in those approximately 18 years before we hear about his life as an adult. What triggered his actions? What brought him to a place where he was so clear about the way he chose? As a youth, I was curious about “How did Jesus heal?” Yet we do not always equate ‘healing’ as an act of justice. Justice is often seen as something that we do, act on, radically taking up a position against something. I think that this is what I feel uncomfortable about with the notion of Justice. It is so often out of our hands. So then what?

To be honest, I am comfortable about ‘stepping forward for justice’ through Kindness, sometimes smiling with eye contact to the person who seems to be struggling, cheerfully thanking those who serve me, listening, offering help to someone ‘moving through the door.’ This is just a matter of being awake to those around and noticing what their needs are. Yet I believe in Community, and the combined gifts of people with a shared vision, can bring power and purpose for change and good like no other.

In 2017, the imperative “To Act” for larger issues became louder than usual. It felt like a year where the ground kept shifting, the established guidelines kept changing, and the uncertainties amplified. I did not know what to do or how to be, and found myself doing what I love, and developed a practice of daily creativity...creating new designs, with new interpretations of form and color, mostly through the form of Mandalas. I was drawn to recreate what inspired my thoughts and feelings into a visual image reflecting beauty. This began to feel like an act of resistance to the advancing divisiveness and the removal of support structures for inclusiveness.... Then I heard the line from the musical “Rent.” The opposite of war is not peace, it is creativity. I understood this. We do need to find our own voice in order to practice a passion for justice. We strengthen this voice through practice. Our voice can be as varied as there are people on this earth. So ‘Just Us’ might mean we contribute to the cause of Justice if we can share ourselves and our gifts from that inner place of love and knowing—where it springs from something larger than ourselves, through us.

Jan Richardson speaks of “Stability,” a vow known to those who become monastics. She said that “Stability is not just about physically remaining in one place. The practice of Stability compels us to find something worth giving ourselves to for a long, long time—a place, a community, a person, a path—and in that, to grow deeper with the God who dwells there.... then we come to know regions of our souls that we could never enter otherwise.” I would venture to say that this is the place from which we can act with integrity for justice, from within to without. It may take a lifetime to learn how to work towards Justice.

**God, may we get in closer contact with our gifts  
and the ways we can share ourselves.  
Help us to be generous in our sharing. Amen**

# FIRST DAY OF SPRING

## Variations on a Theme by Rilke

submitted by Mary L. Honstead

A certain day became a presence to me;  
there it was, confronting me—a sky, air, light:  
a being. And before it started to descend  
from the height of noon, it leaned over  
and struck my shoulder as if with  
the flat of a sword, granting me  
honor and a task. The day's blow  
rang out, metallic—or it was I, a bell awakened,  
and what I heard was my whole self  
saying and singing what it knew: I can.

—Denise Levertov

**Creator God, you make all things new and draw us into the light  
that brings life. Empower me this day to see your presence  
shining into all the shadows that might surround and bring me to  
the light of a new day, full of promise, brimming with hope. Amen**

# Spreading Views

Dana Kenney-Lillejord

9th Grader, Robbinsdale-Cooper High School

Teenagers are uniquely equipped to bring justice because we have the world at our fingertips. We are old enough to be forming our own opinions and have the ability to spread our newly-formed views on the world, around the world. For example, through social media and other forms of online communication, I can talk to my penpal from the Philippines every day. If teenagers spread their views of justice, grow up, and act on those views, we will see serious change. Not only in the opinions of the world but the actions of the world. Anything is possible if we can come together and act.

**In our youthful spirit we find you ready, God of Celebration,  
connecting us and spreading out your arc of justice.  
Keep our youthful zest alive, a pilot light of the soul,  
our imagination sparked by your Divine Spark.  
With you, all things are possible. Amen**

# A Hunger for Justice

submitted by Steve Blons

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice: they shall have their fill.*

—Matthew 5:6

This Beatitude is surely both spiritual and social. . . . To live a just life in this world is to identify with the longings and hungers of the poor, the meek, and those who weep. This identification and solidarity is in itself a profound form of social justice.

Righteousness is not just the private practice of doing good; it sums up the global responsibility of the human community to make sure every human being has what they need. . . and that everyone lives in right relationship with one another, creation, and God.

Jesus instructs us to be passionate for social, economic, and racial justice. . . . Resist systemic, structured, institutionalized injustice with every bone in your body, with all your might, with your very soul, he teaches. Seek justice as if it were your food and drink, your bread and water, as if it were a matter of life and death, which it is . . . .

. . . . This Beatitude requires us to join a grassroots movement that fights one or two issues of injustice and to get deeply involved in the struggle. Since all issues of injustice are connected, fighting one injustice puts us squarely in the struggle against every injustice.”

. . . . Befriend the victims of systemic injustice, side with them, listen to their stories, let their pain break your heart, join the movements to end injustice, tithe your money to the cause, and commit yourself to the struggle.

. . . . Truth is on our side; God is on the side of justice.

—from Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation, Friday, February 2, 2018

**Holy One, give us fortitude. Give us perseverance.  
May we commit our whole selves  
to your holy work of justice-building. Amen**

# Carrying On the Tradition of Justice

Evelyn Ahlberg

“Hank” Garwick was a long-time member of Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church.

He recently passed away, following the death of his wife, “Dottie,” just a few years ago.

They remain alive in the memory of many in the Hennepin community today.

Together they exemplified for me not only being “hearers” of the Word, but “doers” of the Word also.

They were involved with others in spearheading projects—both locally and in foreign countries—that cried out for “Justice.”

Again and again, they responded to a world of need by saying, “Why not ‘Just-Us?’”

Bless you, Hank and Dottie. And thank you.

May we as a church carry on your tradition of service, love, and justice-making.

**God of All Time, you have surrounded us with companions for our journey. For those with whom we have walked who know find their home with you, we give our thanks. For those with whom we travel now, we offer our thanks. For the wisdom and the grace we have been offered by all, we offer our humility. Amen**



# Love

## Kent Peterson

“Justice is what love looks like in public.”

—Cornel West

Jesus awakened to the Essence and nature of God—the unknowable and indescribable Source and Great Mystery—and he proclaimed it to the world and embodied it as Love.

“Love” is a short, simple word, and it permeates our culture. Our novels and films tell stories about it, our poetry tries to illuminate it, and it’s surely an overused word in our popular songs.

But as Jesus revealed and demonstrated in his own life, love is not sentimental. Or simple. Or easy. Love is not just a feeling.

Love is proclaiming a year of Jubilee (Luke 4:18): an every 50-year occasion of restoring balance and equanimity to society. All debts are forgiven, and all land is redistributed to those who have become landless and homeless since the last Jubilee.

Love is putting ourselves in uncomfortable places. And returning to them again and again.

Love is welcoming the stranger: offering hospitality to the Somali immigrant... embracing the homosexual... feeding the poor. Love is favoring the unfavored and lifting those who are powerless.

Love is seeing through the scars of those who have been wounded and reflecting their own beauty and worth back to them.

Love is the slog of dismantling long-entrenched, unfair systems of oppression. Love is persisting. Persevering.

Love is honoring the sacredness of our planet in the individual and communal decisions we make about the use of fossil fuels.

Love is awakening to the sacredness of one’s own life and recognizing that same divine presence in all life forms. Love is seeing the inseparableness of all that is.

Love is creating the Beloved Community on earth—“building the Kin-dom”—day by day, moment by moment.

**God of Love, you long to open us each and every moment to the movement of your love in our very beings. May I be a channel of your love this day to all I meet and may my life be a reflection of your generous love in the world. Amen**

# PALM SUNDAY

## A Prayer for Global Restoration

Pax Christi, USA

Good and Gracious God,  
Source of all life,  
all creation is charged with your Divine Energy.

Infinite your Spark within us,  
that we may know ourselves  
as truly human and holy,  
irrevocably part of the Web of life.

All creation  
each star and every flower,  
each drop of water and every person,  
each and every atom, down to its very electrons,  
explodes with the revelation  
your Sacred Mystery.

Our minds alone cannot fathom such splendor.  
Our hearts can only respond in awe, praise and gratitude.

Forgive us, we pray, our ignorance  
and insecurities which  
blind us to your Thumbprint writ large  
deafen us to your sacred space  
between two heartbeats,  
prompt us in arrogance to demand and dominate  
numb us to the destruction we've caused,  
hold us hostage to "either-or" thinking and living.

May we always walk gently upon this earth,  
right relationship,  
nurtured by your Love,  
taking only what we need,  
giving back to the earth in gratitude  
sharing what we have,  
honoring all with reverence,  
reconciling and healing,  
mindful of those who will come after,  
recognizing our proper place as part of,  
not apart from, your creation.

Grant us the strength and courage, we pray,  
for such radical transformation into your Kin-Dom.

Then we, too, with the very stones will shout,  
“HOSANNA”

**God, we pray for healing, we pray for restoration,  
we pray the strength and courage  
to not only see the possibilities of transformation  
but also the steps toward it. Amen**

# And Hope

Nadia Miller

9th Grader, Washburn High School

Justus

Justus

Justus

Justus

Everyone should be able to give and get justice.

Some places in the world need or are crying out for justice.

Reaching hands out to grab people's attention.

Open your heart and help these places the best you can.

Be the kind who sees people and helps them get justice.

Take away their burdens.

Wash away their pains.

Cleanse them with love.

Acceptance.

Peace.

And hope.

**God, open our eyes to see what's around us.**

**Open our hearts to love more deeply.**

**Open our lives to create a just and hopeful world. Amen**

## Mindful Justice

Robert Brinkley

We see and hear daily about the countless injustices that occur at home and the world over. We are witnesses of injustice if we are sensitively alert. Human history, it seems, is mostly a history of injustices. Sad to say that Christianity has been a perpetrator of injustices.

But what are the root causes of injustice whose results are blatantly evident, as well as go unnoticed?

Shamefully, some popular forms of Christianity, particularly in the Western world, preach a gospel that is individualistic, exclusive, works- and right beliefs-oriented, judgmental, theologically about atonement, and focused on eternal rewards for “believers” and eternal punishment for “nonbelievers.”

If, as Christians, we are truly followers of the Way of Jesus and his Gospel, and have the mind and compassion of Christ, then how should we respond, act, in this matter? How should we be mindful in relating to our neighbor, to all those who inhabit this planet, toward all the beings of creation? How should we “love what God loves?” Jesus mirrors that love.

I often drive by the Lutheran Church of the Nativity in Saint Anthony Village. Currently on the church’s outdoor sign are these words: “Jesus has been overturning tables for 2000 years!”

Now it’s ours to do. Yes, in lovingkindness, to stand with the marginalized, the forgotten ones, the disadvantaged, the abused. It’s up to us to do acts of justice. It’s Just Us!

**Empower us, O God of Love, to be the bearers  
of your compassion throughout our world,  
following the Way of Jesus. Amen**

# Widening the Circles

Jolene Roehlkepartain

A few years ago, a group of young people who live in North Minneapolis decided to set up community gardens to combat the food desert issue facing their community. Since these young people also believed in empowering residents to get involved, they started talking with people about how to keep them engaged. I learned about this group by working with a Minneapolis nonprofit that advocates for racial and economic equality.

The North Minneapolis young people discovered that no matter how many community gardens they set up, people weren't going to use them. Why? Because they didn't want to leave their homes.

High crime wasn't the number-one reason. The real reason was because they were scared of the police.

Fifty-nine percent of community residents said they had been stopped by police in the past year. Of those who had been stopped, one out of four had been stopped seven times or more. They were getting late to work because of these police stops (and sometimes losing their jobs). Most were stopped for probable cause, saying they looked like someone else.

The young people compiled their findings. Only 12% of those interviewed felt protected by the police. The young people invited community members and the police to a presentation. Sixty people showed up, including the Minneapolis Chief of Police and six officers.

By talking together, they discovered everyone was scared. The community was terrified of the police, and the police were frightened of the community.

“We’re giving the community a platform, a voice,” says one of the young people. To advocate for justice, it’s important to speak, to listen, to widen our circles to connect.

**When fear is our daily bread, O God, wrap us in the arms of comfort. When all around us seems impossible, give us courage to see the hope that is woven through the gift of each breath. Bring us to the circle of goodness, we pray. Amen**

# Maundy Thursday

## Emergency Food Shelf

Tom Sopoci

It's Thursday night again for me  
To volunteer and brood  
About the steady stream of folks  
That come again for food

I check her list to verify  
Food stuffs to keep them fed  
Rice and soup and oil to cook  
Milk, meat, juice, fruit and bread

They check a list of staples  
Mark down just what they need  
3 days per person limited  
Is what the rules say feed

I fill the bags and boxes  
I check her list again  
Weigh it, give it, pass it on  
3 days of life, but then

A woman asks for diapers  
In voice accent impaired  
Her eyes speak more of hardship  
And worry, mood despaired

It all runs out and this they know  
It's once a month we give  
3 days of food, that's all they get  
To help their family live

"Formula, we have some here  
What size diaper baby wear?"  
She looks about and checks her list  
She wonders if we care

Thursday next, again I'll show  
Try serve those in my care  
To face a need, but should I ask  
What more I need to share?

Six children, three adults  
A fifteen pound each rule  
"Last egg I fix this morning for  
My boy go off to school"

**For those living on the edge--who are hungry  
and in constant fear of being without food,  
help us to pray with our hands and our feet, God of Love.  
Lead us into the places of greatest need. To do your holy work.**

**Amen**

# GOOD FRIDAY

## Within Our Reach

Sally Howell Johnson

“The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., quoting Theodore Parker

Long, lovely arc  
bend your beam  
this way.  
Our minds are numb from  
our original blessing,  
our hearts ache with forgetting.  
The world is hurting and  
brokenness threatens  
to undo us.

Pour your compassion  
into our clenched fists.  
Open our white-knuckled grip,  
loosen our fearful hearts.  
Remind us once again  
that the justice we seek  
is within our reach,  
is imprinted upon  
our palms,  
emblazoned on our lives.

It has always been so  
and will forever be.

**Gracious and loving God,  
stand me in the justice of your compassion and love this day.  
Open my hands. Open my heart.  
Open my breath. Open my very being.  
Help me to walk in the Way of Jesus wherever that may lead.  
Amen**



# Mother Earth and Justice

Robert Janssen

I am going to take a different direction on the theme justus for the Devotional. When I saw the word "justus" as the subject for Hennepin members to write about, my mind immediately went to the crisis facing all humanity. In my opinion, this crisis concerns the preservation of Mother Earth and Justice for the planet we live on.

Think, for just a minute, about the sight our astronauts had of this beautiful blue planet while they were on their way to the moon. It is a sight we are used to seeing when think about outer space. The thought that I have when visualizing the earth from outer space is this: what if this beautiful planet is the only one that exists in the Universe and that we humans are part of a great God-type experiment? Science has told us that there are, in all probability, millions if not billions of galaxies like our home galaxy, the Milky Way. What if it is justus, the sole conscious human type, in the whole universe?

To me, that is the most humbling idea I can ever hope to think about. We as humans are part of God's great experiment, which is: can humanity live in harmony with our home, the beautiful blue planet EARTH? As it looks now, we are slowly but surely destroying our home for future generations and the great experiment will come to an end.

To avoid this great tragedy we must find JUSTICE for not only ourselves but for the Earth. We must not set ourselves against the Creation any longer. As Thomas Berry comments in his book, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, "At present there is a devastating relationship between the human community and the Earth community. That humans, with all their intelligence, should be so destructive is something of an anomaly."

We need to find a remedy for this destructiveness and make are relationship with the Earth based on love. So when you next see the picture of the Earth from outer space think it may be "justus".

**God of All Creation, you formed us in your image and asked us to care for all your Creation. Remind us this day of our sacred connections to the Universe and to our Earth home.  
May each act this day be one of love and gratitude offered to Creator and to Creation. Amen**

# EASTER SUNDAY

## On Justice

Ingrid Bloom

When I think of God's justice I see mercy, loving-kindness, gentleness, and great love, transforming us all, and restoring all that is broken, polluted, and neglected. I like to think of God's justice as what is said in Isaiah 40: the crooked will be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together.

This is one of my favorite poems for Easter. It captures the spirit of Christ in us rising. To me it speaks of strength rising out of injustice, giving hope out of so much suffering. I think Jesus was amazing at inspiring hope in the midst of injustice. And I imagine Jesus being able to speak these words today, taking into account that the gold mines and oil wells the poet is referring to are inner riches and treasures.

### Still I Rise

*You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

*Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.*

*Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.*

*Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?*

*Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.*

*You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.*

*Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.*

*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.*

—Maya Angelou

**I rise with you, Holy and Faithful One, on this Easter Day.  
May all of Creation rise in the fullness  
of your all-embracing Love. Amen**

# Wage Peace

by Judyth Hill

Wage peace with your breath.  
Breathe in firemen and rubble,  
breathe out whole buildings and flocks of red wing blackbirds.  
Breathe in terrorists  
and breathe out sleeping children and freshly mown fields.  
Breathe in confusion and breathe out maple trees.  
Breathe in the fallen and breathe out lifelong friendships intact.  
Wage peace with your listening: hearing sirens, pray loud.  
Remember your tools: flower seeds, clothes pins, clean rivers.  
Make soup.  
Play music, memorize the words for thank you in three  
languages.  
Learn to knit, and make a hat.  
Think of chaos as dancing raspberries,  
imagine grief  
as the outbreath of beauty or the gesture of fish.  
Swim for the other side.  
Wage peace.  
Never has the world seemed so fresh and precious:  
Have a cup of tea and rejoice.  
Act as if armistice has already arrived.  
Celebrate today.

HENNEPIN  
avenue united methodist  
511 groveland avenue church.org  
minneapolis, mn 55403 phone 612-871-5303