

## “Together For Justice”

Rev. David Gregory

May 6, 2018

Sixth Sunday of Easter



### **Scripture readings**

*Jeremiah 22:3, 13*

(New Revised Standard Bible)

*Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.*

*Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages.*

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*Proverbs 31:8,9 05-06–18*

(New Revised Standard Bible)

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute.  
Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

### **Reading**

from *Stitch by Stitch* by Anne Lamott

Most of us have figured out that we have to do what's in front of us and keep doing it. We clean up beaches after oil spills. We rebuild whole towns after hurricanes and tornadoes. We return calls and library books. We get people water. Some of us even pray. Every time we choose the good action or response, the decent, the valuable, it builds, incrementally, to renewal, resurrection, the place of newness, freedom, justice. The equation is: life, death, resurrection, hope. The horror is real, and so you make casseroles for your neighbor, organize an overseas clothing drive, and do your laundry. You can also offer to do other people's laundry, if they have recently had any random babies or surgeries. We live stitch by stitch, when we're lucky.

We continue to make our way through this Easter season with an ever-deepening sense of who we are together. This is broader than our identity as members of a church, or purveyors of an institution. It is the deepening emotional understanding of ourselves as spiritual community, and it is spiritual community that we will physically demonstrate in the communion table later in this service.

So far we have seen that we share a deep sense of compassion for people and for the earth. We see and hear the people around us, as well as the earth beneath us, and the world around us. We have strong sensations around their vulnerabilities and we reach out — together. This is who we are.

We seek to live in and to radiate light, the force of life itself, knowing that life is both light and shadow. We do not ignore the shadow in favor of light, but we honor the presence of both. In this way we live forthrightly, honestly, and truthfully — together.

Last Sunday we talked about the fact that we are a deeply contemplative people, and in this past week, I have been reminded of how prayer, meditation, and mindfulness is in the DNA of this place. I am often up here in my early morning quiet times, coming out of a period of meditation, opening my eyes to the labyrinth outside my office window, and sometimes it calls me from my chair to complete my day's beginning in a moving meditation. Besides feeling like I'm the wealthiest person on earth to have such a beautiful space in which to work, I can just feel the shared energy, the sacred Spirit that courses freely in this place and its people. And again, I am grateful to have found my way to a community that matches my frequency. I've had many experiences serving in places where I had to invite people to tune in to the same channel. You folks, by contrast, were already there.

As today's readings suggest, another piece of our identity is that we are together for justice. "Well, *DUH!*" you might be saying. After all, we're part of a progressive Christian denomination that is deeply and historically rooted in the social gospel, and if you go to [ucc.org](http://ucc.org) and search for "justice and peace witness," you'll be flooded with more material and resources than you ever knew existed.

This week I met with Lizzy Gore from the Marin Organizing Committee, and over the last month or two, I've been speaking with many of you within this congregation about your passions toward social justice. These experiences often feel like I'm drinking from a fire hose. The needs are so great and the opportunities so numerous, but it's hard to take in more than one piece at a time. As an individual within this congregation, I'm at times bewildered over what to do first, when there are twenty things worthy of time and attention.

To begin with, it's essential that we acknowledge the organic relationship between contemplative spirituality and social justice. I've never met a contemplative person who wasn't also committed to equality and social justice. This is due to the fact that our

connection to the Divine is also a connection with universal human consciousness. In the “Namaste” we are saying, *“The Divine in me recognizes and greets the Divine in you.”* Likewise, John the Apostle says that we cannot claim to love God and at the same time hate our sisters and brothers. We cannot spend time in Divine Presence and fail to care for the rights, the well-being, and the dignity of others. It’s not possible.

Activism fueled only by anger and outrage will easily cause us to burn out, because our collective outrage only attracts more things to be outraged about. The more we think about the latest headlines screaming at us from the morning paper, the more incensed we become, the more smoke that pours from our ears, and the more we are prompted to “do something.” And we should be. But I would like to suggest that there is a deeper, quieter, more sustainable energy for what we do. Anger begets anger. Contemplation begets love and compassion. And compassion begets activism. I call it “activism with ease,” because it isn’t something I have to do. It’s something to get in the flow of: to paddle with the current, to move with the energy and find that we’ll get to where we need to be with much less effort than we thought we had to generate.

Our last house in the Hudson Valley was on a waterfront property, on the Esopus Creek, which is a major tributary of the Hudson River. Last spring at about this time I put my kayak in the water and started to paddle upstream a little, because I wanted to see if I could spot the bald eagles that flew high above us every now and then. It was a lot of work, just getting to a bridge about a quarter of a mile up the creek, and I didn’t realize just how hard I was working until I turned around and started back toward the house. The ease of going with the flow was stunning to me, and I had to be careful not to enjoy it too much and go too far past the house, knowing how hard I’d have to work to get back home.

Many of you have individual projects about which you are passionate. I hear you speak of the rights of immigrants, the prospects of becoming a sanctuary, the fight for decent education, affordable housing. I hear you speak of the plight of the homeless and the hungry, the disparities of race in regard to incarceration, the alarming rate of teen suicide in our county. I hear you speak of the widening economic gap, and how our younger generations will never live long enough to pay for their higher education. I hear you speak of the plight of those pushed to the margins because of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental challenges; and the list goes on and on. For the last ten years our skin in the social justice game has been the REST program. We seem reluctant to deflate these mattresses stacked behind you, and I think I know why. It’s that together we must find the next place to put our energy for social justice.

For thousands of years, people have searched for ways of determining the “will of God” in any particular situation. There’s a story in the Book of Judges where Gideon put out the fleece as a means of determining whether he should do battle with the Midianites. If the fleece was dry in the midst of the dewy ground, then Gideon would know what to do. I am

not suggesting that we throw a towel out on the lawn to help us know what to do, for we have intuitive ways of answering our questions. *The Course in Miracles* asks, “What would you have me do? Where would you have me go? What would you have me say, and to whom?” This is a good place to start. Or perhaps we start by asking this question: “What are we passionate about?” In regard to social justice, what are you most passionate about, individually? Then, what are we most passionate about together? To what might we give our attention, energy and focus. If the REST program is no longer in our purview, then what is it? This is our question for discernment right now. Would you join me in this quest? Would you reach deeply in your contemplative journey for what that gentle whisper of Spirit might be?

Anne Lamott says, “Every time we choose the good action or response, the decent, the valuable, it builds incrementally to renewal, resurrection, the place of newness, freedom, justice.” The newness and renewal of this congregation is not about getting people through the door and keeping them. It is about the incremental building blocks of our meaningful identity in this world. This is not merely a reactionary form of activism, but a deeply-rooted, co-creative energy that flows from us, to us, and through us. It is who we are. Then it becomes what we do. Let’s do this.

Amen.