

Justice Camp 2014--A Theological Resource:

1. What is Justice Camp?:

1.1 A gathering of the church:

Justice camp is a gathering of people from across the Canadian church (and beyond) and sponsored by the Anglican Church of Canada. Taking place in different dioceses across the country every two or three years, it focuses attention on the many dimensions of God's call to justice within particular local settings, and unified by a common theme. The last Justice Camp took place in Peterborough, Ontario (in the Diocese of Toronto). Its theme was "shalom." This year Justice Camp takes place in Edmonton, Alberta, with the theme "land." While Justice Camp is open to all traditions it has a strong Anglican shape, embodying the principle of the *via media* between confessionalism and sacramentalism, activism and prayer.

1.2 Rooted in scripture:

While western understandings of justice understand it as an impartial rendering to each individual his or her due, and is understood in the language of rights, the Biblical understanding self-consciously links it to the plight of the marginal: the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and is understood in the language of *shalom*. Shalom is a Hebrew term connoting "material, physical well-being within a social context of human relations" (Swartley, W. M., 2011, p. 583). Justice may be understood as the pursuit of such shalom. This makes it differ from the modern sense in a number of ways. First, it imagines life as a harmonious whole rather than divided into competing interests. Second, it argues that where one entity within that whole suffers injustice, there is no justice. Third, it refuses reduction to the language of competing rights, including the rights of humans against the non-human world. Finally, its imagination is against the background of the promise of a world set to rights in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus there is no separation between faithful pursuit of justice and justification by faith, between the healing of creation and the saving of one's soul, prayer and action for God's kingdom.

1.3 Shaped by sacraments:

The language of Justice Camp frames "issues" with the language of baptism and Eucharist. Each camp subdivides into explorations of particular contexts called "immersions." This is a deliberate invocation of the language of baptism, by which Christians are incorporated into the promise of transformation from death to life. Each immersion-context reveals specific

ways the powers of death are at work. But framing these with the language of baptism also invites participants to see the promise of resurrection there, and to imagine what that resurrection might look like. The camp is sacramental in a second way: it links the Christian practice of Eucharist (the mass, or *missa*) to the mission (*missio*) of the church. It does this through creating a common life among the participants within each immersion, and between immersions in common meals. It also extends the Eucharist into the contexts through sharing and receiving, including especially from the marginalized who represent Christ there (Matt 25).

2 The good land:

The City of Edmonton is the gateway to Canada's North. It is also the gateway to the largest industrial engineering project in the world today: the Fort MacMurray Tar/Oil Sands. With Calgary in the south, these form the three focal points of Alberta's oil industry. But there is more to Edmonton than its "Oil Country" moniker. While it is known for its severe winters, it is also host to a number of summer festivals, including one of the most prestigious folk music festivals in North America and the largest fringe theatre festival on the continent. At 48 km in length Edmonton boasts the longest continuous stretch of urban parkland in North America. It has significant First Nations and Metis populations, and was the final stopping point for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an event that is of immense significance for the theme of land.

2.1 Land and scripture:

The worldview of the Bible can be expressed in a triadic relationship between God, the creation (or land), and human beings (Wright, C. J. H., 2004, pp. 17-19). None of these is ever considered in isolation from the others. Thus God is always the Creator of all things (including humans), and humans are created in the divine image (Gen 1:26-28). The image of God means humans are given a divinely-ordered task to care for the creation. Humans (*adam*), who are created from and for the soil (*adamah*), are sustained from the fruit of the land, which is divine gift (2:7, 15-16). Another way of viewing this relation is to see humans as priests serving God in creation, which is the cosmic temple (Middleton, J. R., 2005, p. 90). Humans harvest the fruit of creation, offering it back to God in praise (Deut 26:1-11). Humans also unfold possibilities within creation: as cultivators we make culture--which includes agriculture (4:20), but other things as well. Culture includes the making of technologies (4:22) and the development of the arts (4:21). These are all "priestly" activities. However they are subject to distortion and sin, as we see in Lamech's boast (4:23-24)--one of the first examples of poetry in the Bible but one containing a celebration of injustice,

of disorder, of violence. Our priestly activity turns us against each other. It is not for nothing that the first account of sin outside the garden is a dispute over sacrifice (4:2b-8).

2.2 Land and sacraments:

The cultural act we call “Christian worship” also shows our priestly relation to the land. Worship involves the transformation of given elements into sacraments, mediations of meaning and bearers of the grace of God. In this act the “holy priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5) we call “church” comes into being. Water nurtures life through irrigation and connects us to other people through transportation. The waters of baptism represent water as refreshing, washing, and cleansing. They also represent water as the death and judgment that bring renewal (1 Pet 3:21). The Eucharist mingles water and wine. In the Eucharist we offer back to God not the things given (grain and grapes) but what we have made of them (bread and wine). This offering of the church to God becomes at the same time the offering of God to the world. As St. Augustine instructed his listeners at the Eucharist: “behold what you are, become what you see.” Thus the convergence of land, culture, and cult. In scripture wine is sometimes paired with oil (Ps 104:15), which “gladden[s] the human heart and makes the face shine.” Oil—the vegetable kind at least—is a balm for healing and a sign of anointing, of making the person who receives it supple and pliable. It has liturgical use both in baptism and in caring for the sick. Finally, fire is evident in the paschal candle lit in the midst of the darkness of Holy Saturday, from which the light of Christ is passed among the baptized. Thus the sacraments also point to the human transformation of the four basic elements: water, earth (wine, bread, and oil are products of the soil), fire, and air (the breath with which we praise).

2.3 The land of Edmonton:

2.3.1 Links:

The sacraments celebrate the goodness of the land, and point to its right “use” in sharing and sustaining, nurturing and healing life. The ultimate end or purpose of the good land is to make an offering of praise as we eat [our] fill and bless the Lord [our] God for the good land that he has given [us]. (Deut 8:10) But life in the good land of Edmonton is not uniformly good. The legacy of the displacement of indigenous peoples from the land is evident even to casual observers, and invites reflection about the legacies of colonialism. The questions about proper land use animate discussions about urbanization and the preservation of habitats. The exploitation of the land for natural resources calls forth the debate about the environmental costs of

our lifestyle. The land fills up with monuments to our contemporary gods: gods of athleticism, gods of leisure, gods of consumption.

2.3.2 Legacies:

The arts, which represent the life of culture through transforming materials of the land, are marshalled toward selling products. Living spaces mark class differences, as neighbourhoods campaign to block the development of affordable housing. Farmland is sacrificed for highways, pipelines, and shopping malls—things we need to sustain a lifestyle very different from that of our forebears. The air and water are polluted, as the land is appropriated and exploited by industry. The technological fire that has made the lifestyle of the average North American more than an ancient ruler could have imagined creates anomie and restlessness. Our landscape becomes barren with human activity, while we throw up our hands and ask, resignedly, “what else can we do”? The thorns and thistles of modernity choke-off our human flourishing.

2.3.3 Death and resurrection:

But we do not despair. Our immersions into these multiple forms of death carry the message of resurrection. And so we enter with hope-giving questions. Can there be a responsible use of the gifts of creation, including the oil and gas industry? Can the setting aside of parklands point us to a way of preserving our identity alongside other creatures? Are there alternatives to reliance on mass-produced and factory-farmed consumer goods, marketed in climate-controlled supermarkets? Need people live in perpetual poverty, the objects of compassionate concern rather than participants in the common good? Do aboriginal people have to live as strangers in the land of their ancestors? How do the arts signal (and facilitate) social change? What do other religious perspectives have to contribute to our understanding of being human in creation? Taken together, can the convergence of oil and gas developments, parks and preserves, urban farms and farmers’ markets, community kitchens and affordable housing projects, aboriginal cultural practices, artistic installations, and synagogues, temples, and mosques point us beyond the city of Edmonton to that city “whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10)?

3 Being good in the good land:

A particular focus for Justice Camp is on the question, “how do we become the kind of people capable of resisting distorted practices of land use and abuse?” This question differs from the simplistic question, “what are we to do?” and moves us to the question “who are we to become?” It assumes two additional things. First, it

assumes that there is a normative relationship connecting humans and the land. We cannot simply view the land as “resource” or as “property” to do with what we will. This is how land is rendered within the story of modernity. But this is not the Christian way of narrating our relationships. Secondly, it assumes that the task of living in the good land God has given us entails “becoming good” in the land. It assumes character formation in a community of virtue through a set of practices. These practices habituate us into a way of life called “good.” Identifying such practices is a key task within each immersion.

Brian Walsh and Steve Bouma-Prediger (Bouma-Prediger, S. & Walsh, B. J., 2008, pp. 208-224) have suggested four virtues for living on the land. Each of these links to the task of seeking shalom for the place or context where we find ourselves.

3.1 Peaceableness: [reflection for Sunday]

3.1.1 A biblical vision of peaceableness:

Peaceableness invokes the biblical vision of shalom, and is characterized by trust and harmony, intimacy and healing. This vision is captured in Ezekiel’s image of dwelling, belonging, and safety (34:25-31), Isaiah’s delight and joyful homecoming (65:17-25), and Micah’s transforming the implements of war into tools of agriculture (4:1-4). Luke’s story of Jesus begins with a reminder that shalom has been disrupted by Caesar’s decree [ref], and its climax has the triumph of the powers over the promise of peace in the cross. But Luke ends with the peaceable restoration of Jesus’ life in the resurrection, and his words “peace be with you” to the disciples on the Road to Emmaeus [ref]. Paul takes up the theme of peace in Ephesians, saying that now “Christ is our peace” [ref], having broken down the dividing walls that separate humanity into Jew and Gentile. Through this peace we have access to God, the church having become household, city, and temple [ref].

3.1.2 The virtue of peaceableness:

Peaceableness does not stand alone as a virtue. There is no true peace without justice and compassion, and the road to peace must be negotiated with wisdom. The companion virtues to peaceableness include honesty, truthfulness, and courage. A peaceable person is someone who would rather suffer than inflict suffering on others, meeting physical force with “soul force” (Gandhi). Peaceableness is countercultural. Its corresponding vice is contentiousness, malcontentment. Contentiousness delights in despoiling right relations, disrupting harmony, and driving people apart from each other and from the land.

3.1.3 Immersions in peaceableness:

In our immersion groups we might ask ourselves questions like these:

1. How is the power of death manifest in the vice of malcontent (disruption of relationships) in your immersion-context?
2. What dividing walls are there that separate God's people in Edmonton from each other, and from creation?
3. How is the church called to break down walls, to build bridges, to reconnect people and place?
4. Can you identify or imagine a tangible symbol of such a bridge in your immersion-context?
5. What picture can you hold forth of a land at peace?
6. What liturgical practices of the church inculcate and shape peaceableness?
7. How can your local church become a peaceable people?

3.2 Justice: [reflection for Monday]

3.2.1 A biblical vision of justice:

Justice invokes the liberation and freedom at the core of shalom. It is characterized by right rule, compassion and care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. The biblical vision of justice is captured by Psalm 72: "give the king your justice, O Lord!... May he defend the cause of the poor, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor." (1, 4) It is expressed in Amos' image of an "ever-flowing stream" (5:24). A person habituated to justice is someone who treats people with fairness and equity, but not detached impartiality. The latter point is because a biblical view of justice will recognize that people are not homogeneous and their situations are not on the same footing. Walsh and Bouma-Prediger call this "differential justice". Differential justice requires the wisdom to discern how to treat someone in healing ways—which means that justice is primarily restorative rather than retributive or distributive.

3.2.2 The virtue of justice:

Justice does not stand alone. It requires wisdom to discern and, though its pursuit may provoke conflict, peace as goal. Justice also requires compassion, lest it become empty administration. "Respect" is an important pairing with justice. To re-spect means to look back or look again, rather than over-look or look-over. To respect someone means to attend to them as a creature of value, as did Jesus at the Samaritan well. Justice and respect are countercultural in a society where people play favourites, where they manipulate systems to benefit themselves, where people are used as means rather than ends. The vice corresponding to justice is injustice. Opposing injustice requires the further virtue of courage.

3.2.3 Immersions in justice:

In our immersion groups we might ask ourselves questions like these:

1. How is the power of death manifest in the vice of disrespect in your immersion-context?
2. How in your immersion-context do you see people treated unfairly—and not just people.
3. How does an impartial approach perpetuate injustice?
4. How is the church called to act on behalf of those treated unfairly?
5. Can you identify or imagine a tangible symbol in your immersion-context of fairness?
6. What picture can you hold forth of land characterized by justice?
7. What liturgical practices of the church inculcate and shape justice?
8. How can your local church become a just people?

3.3 Wisdom: [reflection for Tuesday]

3.3.1 A biblical vision of wisdom:

Wisdom speaks to the discernment that guides the exercise of justice. It is also an integral feature of shalom. Wisdom sees the peaceable path to follow, guiding just action for shalom. Wisdom is characterized by sound judgment, keen discernment of the good and the true, and practical knowledge to achieve human flourishing. Biblical images of wisdom personify her wisdom as a woman building a house and inviting people to a rich meal (Prov 9:1-12). Wisdom is imagined as a town crier, calling to people to abandon the ways of foolishness. But wisdom can also be seen in less personified terms as adornment. Wisdom is “more precious than jewels” (Prov 3:5), and the fruit she yields “better even than fine gold” (Prov 8:19). The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10), and wisdom was with Yahweh at the beginning of all things (Prov. 8:22-31). Thus wisdom in biblical understanding is theo-centric.

3.3.2 The virtue of wisdom:

Walsh and Bouma-Prediger suggest that the grammar of wisdom connects it to gratitude: aware of the precariousness of life wisdom invites “appreciative use” of the creation. This is why wisdom is countercultural in a society characterized by the habitual absence of sound judgment. Our society confuses “the goods life” for “the good life”, acts as if the earth has no limits and the future doesn’t matter. Wisdom on the other hand resists the “siren song” of “more stuff”, understanding living well as living in praise of God and in service of neighbour. Thus while the virtue of wisdom may be contrasted

with the vice of foolishness, it may also be contrasted with mere technical proficiency, abstract intelligence, and knowledgeability. The technically proficient, the intelligent, the knowledgeable can be fools.

3.3.3 Immersions in wisdom:

In our immersion groups we might ask ourselves questions like these:

1. How is the power of death manifest in the vice of foolishness in your immersion-context?
2. Where in your context is wisdom taken for foolishness, and foolishness for wisdom?
3. How is the church called to be a “town-crier” for wisdom?
4. What examples of the wise use of resources can you identify? How might those examples suggest applications to other places?
5. How does the church garnish itself (or fail to garnish itself) with wisdom?
6. What in your immersion-context is a tangible symbol of wisdom?
7. What picture can you hold forth of a wise land?
8. What liturgical practices of the church inculcate and shape wisdom?
9. How can your local church become a wise people?

3.4 Compassion: [reflection for Wednesday]

3.4.1 A biblical vision of compassion:

Compassion is often confused with romanticism and sentimentality. Compassion means “suffering-with” another. Allan Verhey defines it as “a visceral response to the suffering of another that moves us to want to do something to alleviate the other’s suffering.” In the Old Testament, compassion is a divine attribute. (Ps 85:8-11) The Greek word translated “compassion” means to feel in the guts, as when Jesus was moved with compassion at the aimless wandering of the people: “When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matt 9:36) This was not Jesus “feeling sorry” for the crowds—that would be passivity rather than compassion. It moved Jesus to take action: “ask the Lord of the harvest that he would send labourers into his harvest.” (37)

The link between vision and compassion is profound: much of our lack of compassion is rooted in not seeing, in refusing to see. But there is also the “not seeing” that comes from being shaped in ways that teach us not to look in certain places.

3.4.2 The virtue of compassion:

Walsh and Bouma-Prediger suggest that compassion is counter-cultural in a society where everyone seems either angry or cynical. It is also counter-cultural in a society where we look for technologies to relieve suffering, and apply those without the wisdom to know when suffering requires empathy rather than elimination. Stanley Hauerwas once spoken of “the compassion that kills” rather than make us uncomfortable when suffering interrupts our lives. The vice corresponding to compassion is apathy—literally to “not suffer” or to be “indifferent to suffering.” This includes the suffering of the creation, lamenting for the water and the air. Compassion invites us to open ourselves up to the woundedness of the world. It calls us to address injustice with applied wisdom for a world of shalom.

3.4.3 Immersions in compassion:

In our immersion groups we might ask ourselves questions like these:

1. How is the power of death manifest in the vice of indifference in your immersion-context?
2. Where is compassion present in your immersion-context? Where is it absent?
3. What might be examples of a compassionate policies and practices? How might these suggest applications in other places?
4. How does the church see (or fail to see) with compassion?
5. Can you identify or imagine a tangible symbol of compassion in your immersion-context?
6. What picture can you hold forth of a compassionate land?
7. What liturgical practices of the church inculcate and shape compassion?
8. How can your local church become a compassionate people?

References

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