

SETTING THINGS RIGHT  
Luke 24:44-53  
Ascension of the Lord, 2016  
Sunrise Presbyterian Church  
Martha Murchison

It's Mother's Day! It seems right and good that as we round out our Easter focus on virtues with justice - that today is Mother's Day. Mothers are often our first school of justice. Justice is the "legal or philosophical theory by which fairness is administered."<sup>i</sup> Moms are the ultimate arbiters of fairness! What mom has not painstakingly divided the last slice of pie into three very equal portions - so that no child gets 1/8 of an inch more than the others? What mom has not pulled her hair out attempting to teach kids to share? What mom has not insisted that the child who was nasty and rude - apologize to his brother? Justice matters - and we learn it very early - most often from the hands of our mothers.

And yet, one of the very early lessons moms find they must teach children is that life is not fair. As much as we attempt to divide our time and our pies equally - as hard as we try to divide chores and allowance exactly the same - there are times it's simply not possible. Sometimes other kids get the bigger slice. Sometimes we have to do a great deal more work than our friend. Over and over I've told children - my own and others - that "Life's just not fair." It's not fair that Sammy gets to go to Disney World and I don't. It's not fair that Mary fell off the slide and broke her arm and missed the trip to the zoo. It really isn't fair that Lucy won't invite Sally to her birthday party. It's tough to learn such a hard lesson. Moms are pretty good at setting things right after they've been broken - perhaps a special treat for the child who is left out of the party - a big kiss on the bump from a fall - or a hug to ward off the great sadness from not getting what one really wanted. It's important to set things right after they fall apart.

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall and had a great fall. There was no power or force which could put Humpty Dumpty back together again. He was in pieces which could not be mended. Brokenness abounds in our lives, and sometimes, it seems that our lives are full broken pieces - sickness, divorce, death, crime -- How do we make things right again? How do we put the pieces back together? How do we mend the tears?

Often we want to hide our brokenness - we don't want others to see our wounds and scars. If a pot or vessel breaks, we throw it away. Yet Japanese potters developed a method of filling the broken spaces in a bowl or pot with gold -

turning a cracked and useless pot - into a work of art and beauty - setting things right by making it whole and beautiful.

Justice seeks such wholeness and beauty by restoring order and fairness to the world. "Let justice roll on like a river" the prophet Amos cries! Micah reminds us that God desires that we "act justly and love mercy as we walk with God." Isaiah pleads that we "Learn to do right: seek justice, defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow." Over and over all of the prophets proclaim that God is a God of justice - God is about restoration of what has been broken and lost. The hope of God's kingdom is the hope that things will be set right.

We yearn for God's kingdom of love and justice every time we pray the Lord's prayer - thy kingdom come - thy will be done. Praying this intention makes us active participants in the search for justice. It helps us imagine this kingdom as we recall the people Jesus healed and welcomed. We think about what it would look like as we envision the first act of the early church was to care for widows and orphans. Jesus invites us to join him in setting things right - to participate in making a difference.

Yet - it's very easy to let someone else take over "making a difference" or "setting things right." Perhaps we want to avoid potential controversy - or we are busy. We admire those who seek justice - Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero, Cesar Chavez - but we often don't see making justice as something *we* do. We - like so many other people may worry and fret about people in our world who lack justice - we may disagree with laws we consider unjust - we may be very concerned about youth in our community --- and yet, we don't know what or how we can help. We don't know what would set things right. We can't imagine how to make things whole again.

Thinking about justice - particularly restorative justice - helps us envision how we might help. Restorative justice is an approach to justice that "focuses on the needs of the victims and the offenders, as well as the involved community. This contrasts to more punitive approaches where the main aim is to punish the offender, or satisfy abstract legal principles. In restorative justice, victims take an active role in the process. Meanwhile, offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, "to repair the harm they've done - by apologizing, returning stolen money, or community service".<sup>ii</sup>

Ann Zimmerman has done a wonderful service to Salina in helping raise awareness and participation in restorative justice through the program SIRJ - Salina Initiative for Restorative Justice - which offers a better alternative to the juvenile court system to low risk offenders. SIRJ involves the community - and

the parlor Sunday School class is offering a presentation on SIRJ next Sunday - so, instead of saying more about the program, I encourage everyone to attend and learn about Salina Initiative for Restorative Justice and what we each can do to help set things right in Salina.

Tracey King Ortega , the PCUSA liaison for Central America, visited us a few weeks ago. Tracey has a degree in restorative justice which has led her to seek ways her work with Presbyterian missions can set things right in Central American communities. Often she works with people dispirited by constant violence or war. She's worked in impoverished communities in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua where people have lost will to make changes for that would better their lives. Over lunch, she told me about a program in a community of Managua, Nicaragua which is literally built on the edge of a garbage dump. Kids there have little power over their lives. They can't imagine how things might change or how they could gain the skills to improve their lives. A member of the community organized a program -- Podcasts for Peace - which taught digital media skills to youth - encouraged them to tell and record their stories - and then to teach those skills to others in the community. The very act of telling and recording stories empowers the youth - and they in turn empower others. The program expanded to teach crafts, reading, gardening - community organizing and justice began to be restored. Some things were set right.

God calls us to help set things right. Perhaps we do that in our families - or our work. It may be that we help set things right by volunteering in schools - or with our children and youth at Sunrise. Perhaps we help with CIRCLES - or other ministries which help people learn to empower themselves. There are many, many opportunities to join the work of restoring justice right here in Salina.

It's so easy to blame others when we see the need for justice in our community. We complain about politicians, lawyers, the system, the economy - we complain - yet we also pray that God's kingdom will come - and with that prayer, God calls us to do more than complain - God calls US to join the effort to help set things right. God calls us to help pick up the broken pieces around us and help make them whole again. Alleluia! Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Wikipedia

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.