

Arvada
United Methodist Church

June 14, 2009
Reconciling Sunday

“The Evolution of Justice”
Isaiah 40: 3-5; Mark 4: 26-34

Rev. Valerie Oden

Note: Two lay people shared their personal stories prior to this reflection.

“Let my people go!” Moses cried to Pharaoh in the 1400’s BCE. He was speaking freedom to those in power, on behalf of those left out of it, controlled by it.

“Let justice roll down like an ever flowing stream!” proclaimed the prophet Amos 700 years later, echoed by Isaiah, “Let the valleys be exalted and the mountains made low.”

They were speaking to those who were *in*—those on top, those in power. They were speaking on behalf of those who were left out, outside the circle, outside of opportunity, outside of life.

The call for justice resounds throughout our Scriptural stories.

700 years after Amos and Isaiah, Jesus befriended a Samaritan at the well, a woman no less. He ate with tax collectors, touched lepers, stood up for those outside the circle of life.

And in the end, he died—unbending-- for his message of love for all, a revolutionary who stood alone against the cultural powers, on behalf of those on the margins, against life killing forces on behalf of internal and external freedom for all.

It was a freedom to be fully human before God that Jesus proclaimed-- and died for-- a freedom he yearned to be extended to all God’s children.

We humans continue to grow in that freedom—internally and externally. We continue to evolve in the wake of those who have proclaimed justice.

Countless soldiers died for it during the revolutionary war as our nation labored for its freedom from tyranny. More died for it during the civil war as we fought over whether the slavery of Black people was right or wrong—a question that seems unfathomable to us today.

The 1900’s saw us asking who could vote—women? People of color? Were they too included in the full circle of life? Or were they something less than that?

Recent decades have called us to explore how we treat animals, and the earth—are they too part of the circle of life? Does the call for respect and justice extend to them?

These questions have not been asked without pain. Justice is not deepened and widened without struggle. Each moment of the story of justice involves those who cannot comprehend what is being asked of them. It goes against every fiber of their being, at

303 421 5135 6750 Carr Street 80004 arvadaumc.org

A church where science, religion and life are compatible

Arvada
United Methodist Church

first. They feel their sense of righteousness betrayed, their own moral code violated. Such, I suspect, was the case for Pharaoh in the face of Moses' cry for freedom. Such, I suspect, was the case for the kings berated by the calls of Amos and Isaiah on behalf of the oppressed. Surely those who died in the south to protect their lifestyle felt betrayed by their nation. And the men in power who believed a woman's place was in the home must have had many a conversation about the request "those women" to be included in the full circle of life.

I know from experience that farmers were hit hard with new regulations about the treatment of their cattle, and industry today balks at laws that guide them in protecting the environment.

If justice moves always through history towards the respect of life, it does so never without struggle. Each new call begins with a tiny whisper in someone's heart. A tiny whisper that is then spoken aloud, described, defended, proclaimed. That tiny whisper may be spoken in a hospital to the medical staff, or on a couch talking to a friend. It may be spoken to a neighbor, a parent, a nation.

That tiny whisper is like the mustard seed Jesus talks about. Someone takes it and plants it and nourishes it as it grows and grows and grows. We as a congregation of those who call themselves justice-oriented Christians have a mustard seed in our hands with regard to the evolution of justice and its clarion call. We have already begun preparing the soil. But we still stand by, unsure of what it would mean to plant it with confidence. Some years ago, we voted to become a reconciling congregation—a community of faith who consciously and explicitly extends the call of justice to gay and lesbian persons. Some among us may still find this difficult. That is understandable, for justice has never moved without a struggle in the hearts of humans.

But, to use this year's theme for Reconciling ministries, all means all. As justice rolls on through history to its next edge, to my mind, there is no choice but for each of us to take part in the planting of that seed, standing up for those left out of the full circle of life, every single chance we get. The time for silence is behind us. The time for open, explicit love for all is now. And it begins with each of us, and that tiny seed in our hands. All simply means all.