

**“Keep Crying Out For Justice”
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October 16, 2016
Menifee United Church of Christ**

Texas is going to execute three prisoners in July. The warden has told the prisoners they have the right to their last meal. So what would they like? The first prisoner said, “I would like to eat a big ol’ juicy T-bone steak.” So the warden got the prisoner a big ol’ juicy T-bone steak, he ate it, and they executed him. The second prisoner said, “I would like to eat a big ol’ rack of ribs.” So the warden got the second prisoner a big ol’ rack of ribs, he ate ‘em, and they executed him. Then the third prisoner said, “I would like to eat a bowl of snow.” The warden said, “A bowl of snow? It’s the middle of July! Where are we going to get a bowl of snow? We won’t have snow here at the earliest for several months!” The third prisoner said, “That’s OK. I’ll wait.”

Hang ‘em high. That’s what some people mean by justice. The kind of justice they have in Texas and in other states where they have the death penalty. California has the death penalty. Although on November 8 people in California will vote whether they want to continue to have the death penalty in California. I hope California will vote to be different from Texas and Saudi Arabia. But we’ll see. That’s one type of justice, but that’s not the kind of justice I want to talk with you about today. I want to talk with you about a completely different kind of justice. God’s justice. God’s concern for the prisoners. God’s concern for the poor. God’s concern for the orphan and the widow.

Jesus told a story about a widow. According to the gospel of Luke, chapter 18, Jesus said there was a widow who went before the judge and demanded justice. But the judge essentially said to her, “Get lost!” But the widow kept coming to the judge, demanding justice, crying out for justice. And the judge kept saying, “Get lost!” Finally the widow came to the judge and demanded justice, cried out for justice, and the judge finally said, “I can’t take this anymore! This widow keeps bothering me.” So he granted her justice. Jesus said the moral of the story is, if we continually cry out to God for justice, day and night, God will grant us justice. What kind of justice should we cry out for? If we cry out for justice for those who are women who don’t make the same as men for doing the same job, when we cry out for justice for women to make the same as men make for doing the same job. If we cry out for justice for a raise in the minimum wage, so that the minimum wage is actually a living wage, I think Jesus is telling us to cry out for justice. Cry out for justice for those who don’t have justice, who need justice. That’s what the persistent widow did and that’s what God would have us do, to cry out for justice. To cry out for justice continually, persistently.

Holland, Michigan is where I cried out for justice a few years ago. I moved to the city of Holland from the city of Grand Rapids Michigan, where they’d had a gay rights ordinance for 25 years. I moved to the city of Holland and they didn’t have a gay rights ordinance. So I went to the City Council and I asked them to pass a gay rights ordinance. The city council gave it to their Human Resources Council to study. They studied it for a year. After a year, they came back and unanimously recommended that the City Council pass a gay rights ordinance. The city council voted 5 to 4 not to pass a gay rights ordinance. A gay rights ordinance would have meant no discrimination of gays and lesbians in housing, in education or in employment. The City Council 5 to 4 said no. This was at the end of June in 2011. On the 4th of July I held a news conference on the steps of City Hall. About a half-dozen media people came and a couple dozen people in support. I said, “Today we celebrate liberty and justice for all. But here in the city of Holland there is only liberty and justice for some.” I said that from here on until whenever I was going to attend City Council whenever they meet in public and I will ask the City Council to reconsider their vote, asking the five members of the City Council to change their no vote to a yes. And I did that for a couple months. And then one time at City Council one of the yes voters said, “Bill, you’ve got to change your tactics. This isn’t working.” So I said, OK. A couple of weeks later I came back and this was in October of 2011. Now in September of 2011 the Occupy Wall Street movement started. So I said, “I know what I’ll do. I’ll occupy City Hall! That’ll do it!” So I went to City Council that night and I told them I was going to occupy City Hall until they changed their mind and vote for the gay rights ordinance. So I did that. For about three hours. And then they arrested me for trespassing. And about a year later they convicted me for trespassing. You’d think that would cause me to stop crying out for justice, but it hasn’t. Now they didn’t change their minds in Holland, but moving from Michigan to California I still do my best to cry out for justice as the persistent widow did and as I believe Jesus would want us to.

Dr. King cried out for justice. Dr. King cried out for justice in the ‘50s and ‘60s. Until he was assassinated in 1968. But I think if we listen closely, we can still hear Dr. King crying out for justice. Dr. King cried out for justice when he said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere!” Dr. King cried out for justice when he said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” And Dr. King cried out for justice when he quoted the prophet Amos, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream!” Dr. King cried out for justice. And I believe you can still hear Dr. King crying out for justice.

God and humans heard and heeded Dr. King crying out for justice. I believe that’s why the Vietnam War ended in 1975. Because of people like Dr. King who cried out for justice. And I think we still need to hear and heed Dr. King

crying out for justice and maybe together a human solution and a divine solution can be found to end the wars that are happening in the Middle East and elsewhere. Dr. King cried out for justice and I believe the world heard Dr. King crying out for justice when Nelson Mandela was freed from prison in South Africa and they ended apartheid in South Africa and Nelson Mandela became the first black to be elected president of South Africa. I think the world continues to need to hear Dr. King crying out for justice. And maybe one day we'll have an end to terrorism around the world. I think we need a divine solution and a human solution. Dr. King cried out for justice in the sixties. And I believe that's why we had the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act. I believe that America needs to continue to hear and heed Dr. King crying out for justice. And then maybe we'll have an end to white police officers shooting and killing unarmed blacks. I believe the way to end that is through a divine solution and a human solution. However we hear God or we hear Martin Luther King crying out for justice, I think we need to do that. I believe he still cries out for justice and we need to hear and heed that.

Martin Niemoller cried out for justice during Nazi Germany. Martin Niemoller was a Protestant pastor. He cried out for justice, but maybe a little too late. You probably have heard this prophetic and profound quote by Martin Niemoller: First they came for the Socialists, but I was not a Socialist, so I did not speak out for justice. Then they came for the Trade Unionists. But I did not speak out for the Trade Unionists because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews. But I did not speak out for the Jews because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.

The 2016 election compels me to speak out for justice. We've heard some harsh, hateful and harmful things, particularly from one presidential candidate, that prompts me to cry out for justice in the same way that Martin Niemoller did. I'm just going to change his words slightly. First they came for the immigrants, but I was not an immigrant, so I did not speak out for the immigrants. Then they came for the Muslims, but I did not speak out for the Muslims because I was not a Muslim. Then they came for people who were transgender. But I did not speak out for people who were transgender because I was not transgender. Then they came for me, but no one was left to speak out for me. If we have a conscience, if we have a heart, if we have a soul, we have to cry out for justice, we have to speak out for justice, we have to work for justice as Jesus would want us to do. As God would want us to do.

David tells us about God in Psalm 121. David writes, "I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." And the Lord would want us to speak out for justice. The Lord, according to David, never sleeps. Never slumbers. And keeps us from evil. And God, I believe, wants us to speak out for justice, wants us to cry out for justice, and wants us to work for justice.

What about you? Do you feel compelled to cry out for justice? To speak out for justice? To work for justice? For whom do you want to work for justice? Do you want to work for justice for the helpless? Do you want to work for justice for the hopeless? Do you want to work for justice for the hurting? I believe Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit want us to cry out for justice, to speak out for justice, to work for justice. But we have to keep in mind that there are consequences when we cry out for justice. Dr. King was assassinated for crying out for justice. Martin Niemoller was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp for seven years for crying out for justice. And Jesus was crucified for crying out for justice. So we have to consider the consequences of crying out for justice. And then, hopefully, courageously, we'll cry out for justice anyway.

Let us pray:
God of love,
Help us to cry out for justice.
Help us to speak out for justice.
And help us to work for justice for everyone.
Now and forevermore
By the power of the Holy Spirit
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes,
and was transcribed from a tape recording of it.)*
