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A photograph capturing a moment of emotional support in a church. A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a vibrant red jacket, stands on the left, her hand gently resting on the shoulder of another woman. The second woman, with long dark hair tied back, wears a simple black t-shirt and a patterned skirt. She has her eyes closed and a pensive expression, suggesting she is in a state of prayer or deep reflection. In the foreground, the hands of another person, wearing a white shirt cuff and a ring, are visible, reaching towards the woman in black. The background is softly blurred, showing the warm, ambient lighting of a church interior with wooden paneling and recessed lights.

**KINGDOM JUSTICE
AND MERCY**

The American church's gospel witness in a secular age

by Jasmine Young

Justice engagement is part of the church's prophetic push in a post-church world, a spiritual weapon against secularism in today's Western culture. It is a gateway to our missional movement in America.

You might rebuff by saying, "Well, we focus on the unreached elsewhere because folks in the U.S. have access to the gospel." But I contend that most folks here have met Christian religion but don't necessarily know Jesus. Understanding and embracing the gospel is another element entirely, and the masses walking our streets do not know its superiority and freedom. When we think about the lost in our local communities, there is a striking similarity to the unreached in our overseas missional communities—we can't pastor them until we reach them. The truth is this: many of our closest neighbors may know about Jesus without ever having met Jesus.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance is not just an organization that crosses cultures by crossing oceans; we are also a church that crosses barriers by crossing our local streets.

ACT JUSTLY, LOVE MERCY, WALK HUMBLY

This is about evangelism and outreach into the hard places nearest to us. Yet I often sense that folks get anxious when they hear words like *justice*, concerned that the church is being asked to participate in an ulterior, worldly agenda. Not at all. We, the church, do have an agenda—but it is Jesus' agenda alone that we seek. And His agenda is not only for our eternal salvation but it's also that the world which groans for a Savior may actually meet Him.

Jesus' agenda for us is as expressed in Micah: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). God reveals Himself across the canon of Scripture as just and merciful—One who overlooks our offenses and rescues us anyway. A God who provides for us even when we reject His perfect provision for us (see Gen. 3:21). Yes, He has a heart for the stranger in our lands (see Lev. 19:33–34; Deut.

10:18); He demands that we care for those whom society has left without (see Deut. 24:19–21); He restores the outcast (see Mark 1:40–42). He has made us an example to the nations (see Acts 13:47), and Jesus has outright charged us to prioritize justice and mercy as much as our sacrifices (see Matt. 23:23).

God expects us to do something when we see injustice, and He allows us to hold our deepest challenges in tension before Him as He seeds restoration.

THE JESUS AGENDA

A chief challenge of our justice engagement as a church is remaining unified while recognizing that unity is not defined as *sameness* but as *oneness*. There is no better place for justice-making than in Jesus' Church—diverse yet unified, whole yet healing.

Biblical justice must never be reduced to a rhetorical volley of opposing philosophical ideas. In the gospel, justice is always personal. If ever we depersonalize sin, the root of injustice, we also inadvertently dismiss the symptoms of the oppressed and quench the power of justice-making in their lives. Demonstrating Kingdom justice and mercy is, in every respect, our gospel witness to our neighbors. It is the gospel personified—the heart of Jesus expressed through us—allowing us to not only share His heart, but to also become His hands

and feet. The invitational and culturally relevant connections made when Jesus' Church engages in Jesus' justice make room for His greater wonders to be seen while combatting the secularism that has taken hold in our communities.

Jesus' agenda of Kingdom justice and mercy is a prophetic one, pushing against our culture and reminding the world that justice belongs to Jesus. It's also

an eternal agenda because Jesus taught us to pray that God's will be done on Earth as it is in heaven. I don't blame the world for having tried to figure it out on its own. But worldly justice has missed the main idea, that the laws of our empires simply aren't good enough. And we can't have the Kingdom without the King. »

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Demonstrating the justice and mercy of Jesus is not simply about doing things. And it is not just *a* theology—it is *our* theology. It isn't about what we do so much as it is who we are: Jesus' representatives on Earth, diversely gifted to serve the Body in unity and called to show the world His goodness.

Our engagement in Kingdom justice will not be perfect. We are not perfect people; we are maturing people. We also need to accept that God's mouthpiece will sometimes be a donkey, so we must listen for His truth among the noise (see Num. 22:21–35). His Word will still go forth and will not return to Him empty. Justice engagement isn't exactly second nature for most of us. It's messy, and we can feel clumsy in its pursuit. But do it clumsily. Do it anyway.

THE FOUR LS

What are some practical ways to engage in Kingdom justice and mercy? In the Metropolitan District, we promote a framework, pioneered by Rev. Dr. Kelvin Walker, for individual and corporate justice engagement that involves four steps: listening, lamenting, learning, and launching.

We *listen* intently, to understand rather than just to reply. And in justice-making, it's important to recognize that we're listening to those who aren't accustomed to being heard. Listen carefully to what is said and what is unsaid.

We *lament* the wrongdoing in their lives and suffer with them in the same way our compassionate Christ enters the pain of those He meets. This is shepherding, making space for the poor and oppressed to experience the freedom of surrendering their pain for hope.

We *learn*. We are likely to feel distanced from the pain of their experience because it can be hard to understand another's troubles. Learning is a self-directed effort to catch up to their lived experience without requiring them to relive it for our education. Listening and lamenting are cyclical with learning, layered like an onion.

Finally, after we have become closer to our neighbors' felt needs, having understood their risks and inspired by Spirit-led action, we're ready to *launch*. Being neither desensitized nor overzealous, we can strike a balance that promotes reconciliation and restoration to those whom we serve.

FAITH THAT DEMONSTRATES

Justice engagement is time consuming. But the truth is, the work of Kingdom justice and mercy is not a mere appendage to our faith but the natural outflow from our faith. In James' epistle, he strongly argues that faith alone isn't demonstration enough of the Christian life.

He asks, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?" (James 2:14). What good is it to possess faith and then not show forth any works that demonstrate our faith? James warns that inactive faith is a dead (unfruitful, impotent, not life-giving) faith. The Word is alive, and so we ought to be alive with the Word. Possessing faith without demonstrating it to others by being the hands and feet of Jesus is dead religion.

Friends, we know that Jesus didn't come down from heaven to our finite Earth to give us religion but to free us from it. We're not saved to simply wait for our second life but to work out this salvation here. And so, being free and free indeed, we ought to do so with all urgency and reverence. Why? Because "it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13, NKJV).

We can't act alone—we must be Spirit-led in justice-making. Kingdom justice and mercy isn't an act of our own strength. It promotes restitution where we may desire retribution, reconciliation where we can only muster protest. It's about restoration when our hurting hearts may demand reparation. It is about serving others when our pride prefers to be served. It's about embodying in our words and deeds a Spirit-led, Jesus-repping witness of reconciliation, restoration, and service—"just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).

We can both preach the gospel and live it. This is not only foundational to our faith, it is Simpsonian—in our DNA as the Alliance family for such a time as this. It is our apostolic calling, our prophetic bent. This must be our rhythm, our call and response. Our evangelism is in vain if our good news has a limit to its effect on our society.

The work of justice also transforms the worker. Through this work, we become blessed, better developed as individuals, better connected to others, more fulfilled, and more sensitive to the Holy Spirit—since it's His work in and through us. Justice and mercy engagement in our communities also spares us from the temptation of isolation; being confined to our contemporary cathedrals does not benefit a post-church, ever-secular Western society.

Jesus is reminding us today that we are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16, NKJV). Salt and light. In word and deed. ■



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