

Chris Murphy

October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Sermon Title: Mission to those on the Margins

Scripture: Luke 10: 25-37

Prayer...

Introduction- Social Justice Is A Christian Tradition- Not a Liberal Agenda

The article reminded a largely evangelical readership of this magazine that Jesus cared about the social issues of his day. Some Christians believe that to talk about social justice means you are automatically progressive in all of your beliefs.

I shared this on Facebook and put a short statement: "Social justice is at the heart of the Gospel." I had a good friend suggest to me that social justice grows out of the gospel, but is not at the heart of the gospel. I understood my friend's comment and thanked him for sharing his thoughts, but I realize that I hold to my initial statement. Social justice is at the heart of the gospel. I think my friend probably defined the message as the one many are taught in conservative, predominantly white evangelical churches. The gospel is the Jesus died for our sins on a cross and if you accept Jesus into your heart you have the free gift of eternal life in heaven. I grew up on this teaching as well and I believe the basic ideas of this statement, but I have a larger understanding of the gospel. For me the gospel refers to the good news of Jesus. The entire good news of Jesus, not only his death on a cross and resurrection from the dead but the good news of life in the kingdom of God, which is a life characterized by living like Jesus in our concern for the most vulnerable in the world. The good news of the Gospel is that through Jesus we learn a life of love to those on the margins. Social justice is at the heart of the gospel because we don't really know Jesus fully if we don't understand and follow his concern for the poor and oppressed. When you care about those who are oppressed in society, you begin to care more about social justice.

In the Presbyterian Church USA- which is the denomination of this church we have a long history of valuing social justice. You may not know today is Reformation Sunday and a couple years ago we celebrated the 500 year anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation when tradition has it that Martin Luther nailed 95 theses on the Wittenberg Castle Church challenging the injustices of the Catholic Church on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517.

The Presbyterian Church has its roots in the teaching of one of the key early reformers that joined Martin Luther in defying the Catholic Church. His name was John Calvin. There are many things people like to highlight about Calvin, but I want to remind you that Calvin cared about social justice.

Calvin was instrumental in implementing a fabric-weaving program as a way to reduce unemployment in Geneva Switzerland. As a result Genevan textiles soon became a major export and an economic boon for the city.

In addition to providing for the Hospital residents, the Hospital also distributed bread and wine on a weekly basis to poor families that were having trouble making ends meet. They gave out short-term, interest free loans to those who needed help purchasing essential items.

Calvin was also a French immigrant and refugee who worked to provide care for French refugees fleeing France to provide protection in Switzerland.

Good Samaritan Story...

The Good Samaritan story reminds us about social justice because it is a story about someone caring for a person who is vulnerable. The story goes like this... a man is walking on a dangerous road and is attacked by robbers. He is left to die and two religious leaders walk by him and ignore him. Thankfully, another man walks by who is a Samaritan. This man has compassion on the vulnerable man. Lifts him up and takes him to an inn.

There is a surprise in this story. The surprise is that the religious leaders who are expected to be good pastors and care for the vulnerable person walk on by, but the Samaritan who is an enemy to the Jews is the hero. The Samaritan, the one on the margins, is the one who shows compassion.

The fourth core value that we have as a church is to demonstrate our mission both locally and globally to those on the margins.

Recently, I heard two of my friends from seminary- Delonte Gholston and Justin Fung, interviewed by the President of my seminary Mark Labberton about their ministries as pastors in Washington DC. Both Delonte and Justin are doing wonderful ministry caring for people on the margins. Both have a strong value for social justice. Delonte works in a predominantly black community that is experiencing gentrification and major challenges due to gun violence and homicides. His church is called Peace Fellowship and is 50% black and 50% a mixture of Asian, Latinx, white, and Native American. Justin works also in an urban community in Washington DC, but he has mostly young people in his church, about 50% white and 50% multi-racial- some black, some asian, and some Latinx.

In the conversation I learned that both Justin and Delonte had a lot of good things to say, but that Delonte spoke more as a black man who had deep roots in the struggle of poverty and racism in Washington DC and therefore both Justin and President Mark Labberton took a posture of learning to listen rather than talking as experts about the challenges of gentrification and violence that is a more personal struggle for Delonte's church.

What I am learning is that if we wish to engage in social justice in the church, it is important to listen to people on the margins about what is really happening and then to seek guidance on how best we can support their work for justice.

There are so many groups we seek to support on the margins. Four that I will highlight today.

1. Immigrants and Refugees... Syrian refugees connected to Bob Ekblad our mission partner, Latinx asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees remain important.
2. People of color. Anyone who is a victim of racism. Important in Newberg, since this is a minority group.
3. Women. We always have to work for equal pay and equal opportunity for women and an end to sexist attitudes and actions in society.
4. LGBTQ- Allies for equal rights for LGBTQ. There is a PFLAG group in Newberg that is offering an opportunity to listen and learn more. Fliers next door in the Fellowship Hall.

Remember friends that social justice is at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that one of the key core values of our church involves our mission to those on the margins. Let us continue to follow Jesus Christ as we learn from the story of the Good Samaritan on what it really means to be a good neighbor.

AMEN