



# ransforming Times



**Justice**  
*February 2011*

*The Journal of the  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson*

Justice: small word, big concept – so big that we embrace it as a religious principle. Ghandi noted, “Justice that love gives is a surrender, justice that law gives is a punishment.” The justice we seek is rooted in love. It seeks to heal what has been harmed and to restore what has been broken.

**Retributive justice** is the justice of law and the theory that punishment proportionate to the offense, is a moral response to wrong-doing. “An eye for an eye” is a form of retributive justice. If a crime results in the loss of an eye, the punishment is the loss of an eye – not an arm or a leg or a life, but an eye. A retributive system of justice punishes severe crime more harshly than less serious offenses.

One philosophy of punishment is utilitarianism, the idea that punishment serves a future social good by reducing crime. Retribution is backward-looking; punishment for the sake of punishment – the settling of a score.

**Restorative justice** seeks to repair what has been damaged by wrong-doing. It considers the needs of both victims and offenders. It involves victims in the process and encourages offenders to take responsibility for their actions. It considers wrong-doing to be an offense to individuals and communities, not the state. It is a peaceful approach to harm and violations of legal and human rights. It seeks to restore human worth and dignity to both victim and offender.

The South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission used restorative justice processes in the wake of apartheid. Through forgiveness, victims are released from burdens of anger, resentment, and bitterness. Offenders are given the opportunity to redeem themselves by taking responsibility for their actions, being relieved of burdens of regret, guilt, and shame. Right relations and community wholeness are restored.

**Distributive justice** has to do with the allocation of resources within a society. It is linked to the concept of human rights. It upholds an ideal of the common good. Theories of distributive justice argue that society has a responsibility to individuals to meet basic needs and alleviate suffering, and that individuals have a responsibility to help others in need.

The current debate about health care reform is a debate about distributive justice. It raises the question of societal responsibility to individuals who need access to health care. The immigration debate is about distributive justice, too. Conditions of extreme poverty cause people to take great risks for survival of their families.

Justice is deeply embedded within Unitarian Universalist history and heritage. Our second principle affirms justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. We seek not vengeance or retribution, but the kind of justice that heals, restores, and serves the common good.

Our religious forbear, Theodore Parker, worked for the abolition of slavery. He observed that the moral arc of the universe is long, and it bends toward justice. Let us keep the arc bending.

Yours, Diane

*Transforming Times* is organized around theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church's offerings are by no means limited to the themes. They do provide common ground for Community conversation, a way to gain more meaning and depth. We want to hear many perspectives on each theme. You are invited to submit your original poetry or short essays of 400 words or less. Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September: Vision  
October: Trust  
November: Community  
December: Grace  
January: Stewardship

February: Justice  
March: Hope  
April: Credo  
May: Ritual  
June: Beauty

## Music and Justice

When I first thought of how music and justice relate, I quickly thought of the African American spirituals. I found myself humming a lesser known, but truly powerful spiritual from the region of the Georgia sea islands, whose refrain is:

John brought the letter, and laid it on the table.  
No one can read 'em like ol' John.  
Read em, let em go.

The lyric speaks of John the Revelator, or John from the book of Revelations in the bible, who as detailed in the Bible, ascended into Heaven and read scrolls near the throne of God. Revelations (along with the Song of Solomon) provide two of the most difficult books of the bible to interpret within the framework of any religion.

One reason that this story might have been compelling to those in bondage comes from an understanding of what John read. The writings that John read in his vision have been interpreted often as a list of those that will be welcomed into heaven. In singing about John, the slaves were drawing attention to the idea that justice will eventually happen, or that someone somewhere is keeping a tally of right and wrong, and it will all work out in the end. I imagine the context for this song. Envision a group of slaves forced to work, and choosing to sing this song in the presence of one of their drivers. It has the feel for me of them singing "Master's going to hell" with a glee that comes from knowing that an oppressor is listening but has no idea of the meaning behind the song.

What a remarkable notion! A song's meaning can be about justice, the singing of the song can decry injustice, and almost no one outside of the culture of the singers can hear these meanings without an explanation. I am not certain that a nice, succinct morale stems from this song's story that applies it to our modern UU lives. However, the song's meaning, and the complexity of its message has always moved me. It reminds me to have ears to hear, and to listen openly to the songs and stories of others, because I might not always recognize injustice when I hear it.

*Brian Moon*

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*"Compassion Quotes." Find the Famous Quotes You Need, ThinkExist.com Quotations. 2011. Web. 19 Jan. 2011. <<http://thinkexist.com/quotations/compassion/>>.*

*Fallon, Dan. "Inspirational Quote Author | Dan Fallon | Values - Pass It On." Inspirational Quotes - Motivational Quotes - Inspirational Stories | Values - Pass It On. Web. 19 Jan. 2011. <<http://sp.values.com/inspirational-quote-authors/1207-Dan-Fallon>>.*

*"Justice - Definition of Justice by the Free Online Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia." Dictionary, Encyclopedia and Thesaurus - The Free Dictionary. Web. 18 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/justice>>.*

## A Community of Justice

*Submitted by Kathleen Hogue- Lifespan Faith Development Director*

Did you notice that the word justice is mentioned twice in our Unitarian Universalist Principles? Principle 2 states, we affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations, and principle 6 states, we affirm and promote the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. This speaks to the importance of this word in our lives. Justice is defined as "Conformity to moral rightness in action or attitude; righteousness." (Justice, 2011) The structural component to justice addresses how relationships among members of society are ordered. But justice from the Unitarian Universalist viewpoint is made up of more than just laws or rules.

What are the components then for justice as a Unitarian Universalist? As UUs we share a deep acknowledgement of the shared humanity of others. We have a moral expectation concerning how others should be treated. This is a direct link to our first principle of believing in the inherent worth and dignity of every person. A church community, much like a family, is made up of individuals with differing needs, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and of course opinions. At times staff, church leadership, and members will disagree. How do we handle these differences in a just manner? I would like to suggest that justice in our congregation needs to include equity, compassion, and empathy.

Let us remember to be equitable. Each of us needs to be able to grow, learn, express opinions and even make mistakes. When we react to others in an equitable way we are acting with fairness and respect for individual differences. We need not think alike to love alike.

Let us remember to be compassionate. Before we act in word or in deed, let us remember that others may be hurting and we can choose to hurt them further or we can choose to ease their pain. Arthur H Stainback writes, "The value of compassion cannot be over-emphasized. Anyone can criticize. It takes a true believer to be compassionate. No greater burden can be borne by an individual than to know no one cares or understands." (Compassion, 2010)

Finally, let us remember to be empathetic. "You don't have to accept the invitation to get angry. Instead, practice forgiveness, empathy and encouragement." (Fallon, 2011) If every time we have a disagreement with another we consider each other's feelings and humanity, and we try to determine where each is coming from, then we can begin to solve conflict in a just manner.

Let us not forget the work of this church. According to our mission statement "we envision a world where justice and compassion cross all borders. We pledge energy and resources to transform ourselves, our community, and the world around us." In order to promote world community and transform our world we must begin with ourselves.