

Justice Work as Spiritual Practice:
Articulating a Spirituality in Action
for persons who lead busy, active lives
April 17, 2024

Restorative Justice vs. Retributive

- Restorative justice seeks to understand the harmful impact of an injustice, and then seeks to repair the harm/restore the right relationship in the context of relationship.
- Retributive justice seeks to apply a “price” of consequence for the harm done by the injustice.

Why do we do justice work?

- not about “fixing” the world’s problems
- not a “noblesse oblige” that relies on our skills, power, position, resources to make the world a better place
- not about meeting some metric of “success”—not outcome-oriented, focuses on the offering as vocation
- it is bound up in the spiritual life of contemplation that leads to action

James Finley:

“Contemplative practice is ... a way of awakening, deepening, and sustaining an experience of the inherent holiness of the present moment . . . The critical factor is not so much what the practice is ... as the extent to which the practice incarnates an utterly sincere stance of awakening and surrendering to the Godly nature of the present moment.” (The Contemplative Heart, 2000).

Justice work as spiritual work is:

- Incarnational (embodied, practical, contextual, local)
- Tangible connection to the Holy and to others (relational)
- An antidote to despair, cynicism, nihilism
- Prioritizes the offering (not the outcome) as faithful expression of contemplative life
- Engenders our own transformation through God’s mercy and grace and love
- An act of hope—not outcome-oriented, but simply the well of spirit that arises from deep within that gives us a capacity to be present and strong in the face of a broken and hurting world

Hope is not some wispy yearning for a better future. Not based on our passion, skills, or problem-solving capacity; rather, it is a gift of the primordial spirit welling up within us that enables us to see God in the present, and God’s reign of peace as a now-and-not-yet reality. Hope invites us into God’s story...

Living into the Story: Matthew 25

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Parker Palmer. *The Active Life: Wisdom for Work, Creativity, and Caring*. Harper SF, 1990.

Fostering a spirituality that “takes us down and into the vitality and wisdom of our own experience, into the deep place where self and world and spirit intersect and transformation can begin.”