

Streams of Living Water
The Social Justice Stream
September 29, 2019

Texts: Psalm 146:1-2, 6-9, Luke 4:14-21, James 2:1-9, Amos 5:21-24

At the inauguration of his ministry in his home synagogue, Jesus declared his calling to social justice (Luke 4:18-19). In both his message and his person, Jesus announced a Jubilee (the year of the Lord's favor) that could only be brought about in the power of the Spirit. His focus on **righteousness** (or right-relatedness with God and neighbor) through repentance was inextricably linked with his vision for **justice**. The concepts of righteousness and justice are closely related in Scripture, although the English terms communicate very different ideas.

Jesus ministry demonstrated God's redemptive love for all who were crushed and broken by the prevailing social and economic structures. In God's economy, social justice is the sweet spot of Jubilee where the emphasis of the Holiness Stream regarding pure love in the heart meets the needs and inequities of social life. It is the place where the power of the Holy Spirit as emphasized in the Charismatic Stream enables healing relationships between people, social structures, and the earth itself. It is the place where the Contemplative Stream provides the perspective and respite needed to swim against the tide of social injustice.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus demonstrated the power of love rather than the love of power. He taught the disciples that the kingdom community is the primary social structure that God uses to change the world. In the Upper Room, Jesus taught his disciples not to "lord it over" others, but rather to "wash one another's feet" in humility. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus turned his face toward the suffering of the cross rather than calling down angels to defeat the political structures.

The Christian vision for peace and justice is incomplete without speaking of God's grace, a uniquely Christian perspective on social advocacy and action. God's grace empowers us to carry out the gospel vision of putting things right in a broken world. Our goal is to bring about reconciliation with God and others. Yet true reconciliation comes as a gift from God, not as the result of our demands.

Like the other spiritual streams we have studied, the Social Justice Stream has both strengths and weaknesses. At its best, it provides a bridge of integrity between personal ethics and social ethics, bringing about a right ordering of society. It puts into practice Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves—to do for others what we would want them to do for us. Too often, when misused or abused, it approaches society with the same rigidity and judgmentalism as holiness advocates, seeking to bring about social change through political means and ends which do not reflect the spirit and love of Jesus Christ.

Questions to ponder:

- 1) To what extent do you identify with the Social Justice stream as set forth in this study?
- 2) What is your personal vision of for participating in God's Jubilee? Where have you sensed God's call to pray and work for God's reign in the social arena?