**Justice Talk**

**April 11th 2015 - Ryan Andersen**

**Draft Talking Notes**

**Intro**

Thankyou for having me here and giving me the opportunity to share with you some of my passion for the justice work of the church, but also this chance to have a conversation with you. Instead of just having me stand up here and give you final answer, I figure that an opportunity such as today, is a chance to engage in a conversation together, where I share with you what is the leading edge of my though and ministry, and then I also get to hear from you both now if there is time and in our conversations afterwards and hopefully we all get to learn something.

**Heart Space**

One of the things that I have learned, is that when I hear someone speak, it is often not the words that are most important, but how what is communicated shapes and opens our heart. – What I mean by heart is the core of our being, our spiritual center. I want us to begin with our heart to get us into the right heart space

I want you to begin by closing your eyes and reflecting:

Who is someone in your life who loved you? What I mean by this is who is someone who valued you and respected you, that saw in you your goodness, your potential, your beauty and helped you grow into this?

Remember that person and what they did for you and how it has impacted you.

How does your heart feel when you remember this person? Allow your self to rest in this feeling.

I also want you to expand your vision a bit, reflect on what parts of our society treated you a valuable and allowed you to become who you have become – education, health system, that you are safe, healthy environment,

Who made these possible?

**Justice is what Love Looks Like in Public**

I am asking you to reflect on these things, not just to get you into the right heart space, but also because I want you to reflect on how you have been loved. Why, because what I am going to talk about can be summarized by two phrases. The first has been said in different way by a variety of Christian theologian, I will quote Cornel West, who simply says “Justice is what love looks like in public.” The Other key phrase is this – God is love.

**My Story – Question When we are at our strongest- Focus on Love and Justice – Fear, anger, beuracy – sacrifice both.**

I have been struggling with a question. Why does our church struggle so often with living out, what is a pretty clear call in scripture to the work for justice? A Rabbi friend of mine even goes so far as to say is that it is *The* central call of scripture.

I have had the privilege to live out my calling in a whole variety of expressions of the church. Internationally, at the national level, as a part of the synod staff, in a local parish, ecumenically, in interfaith contexts across Calgary and now provincially as a community organizer.

In all of these levels I have noticed a repeating pattern. When I have been in places where the Spirit seems most alive and thriving, there is a profound love expressed amongst the people and there is a passion for the work of justice. Often this has been a very conscious link. When I lived at the Taize ecumenical community in France, a place internationally famous for its worship and spirituality – they were pretty clear – As one brother said – Our worship, and what happens on this hill would have no integrity if it was not for our brothers who went out to share their lives with the poorest of the poor. That is pretty profound, imagined if that was what our worship debates and conferences were about – whether worship can be seen as having integrity, as determined by whether we living with the poorest of the poor. Taize is a place that is spiritually alive, a place that was by Pope John Paul II a place of springtime in the church.

Conversely I have also experienced the church dominated by fear, by a focus on beurocracey, on survival, just on finances, on personal status and personal kingdom making and political games. And in these cases I have seen these grow together, the loss of love, the loss of the spirit and spiritual life, and the abandonment of the call to justice. Usually the sacrificing of those who call the church to justice have gone with this. This is an old pattern, going back to the prophets. Or look at our own experiences. When we became focused on same sex blessing and having our side win, what ever side that was how loving were we to each other? During this time how freely did the Spirit flow? Guess what during this time a really rich and vibrant justice ministry of our church was largely wiped out, confined to a few rements, and few seemed to notice. During this time, if you look at the statistics, our church was in free fall.

In my experience these thee are connected – Love, Justice, the health of our spiritual life and the vibrancy of the church. Interestingly this is what our tradition teaches. It is a chorus of the mystics, who say the same thing, there is only one way you can judge the health of a person’s spiritual life, it is by their love of God and their love of their neighbor. Yet we seem to often forget this.

**What is Love – See what is of Infinite value – what is of God in another, work of honoring this and brining it out.**

 A big part of it is because we have forgotten what love is about. What is love? What does it mean to love, to be loved and most importantly what is this love of God? This should be easy, but it often isn’t.

We live in a culture where the dominant images of love come from Disney and Hallmark. This is love as a feeling that overwhelms someone when you find your prince or princess and once you find it you live happily ever after. Now some of you have lived a while, Is this a good description of love? No.

I also want to caution you against some of the ways that the church has expressed what love is about, at least the church as I have experienced it growing up Lutheran. When I grew up, Agape, Divine love was described as unconditional love. Which is a pretty good description, except when it then got pared up with a description of just how wretched of sinners we are, so intolerable that, it took God had to kills his son just to tolerate us.

Lets put this in context. Who here would like to marry someone who professed their love in terms of – I think you are a wretched person, but I promise to tolerate you. Oh and I will probably have to kill off our first born child so that I can stand to be in your wretched presence. I don’t know about you, but I think I would call the cops on someone who proposed to me like that.

This analogy might have made sense 2000 years ago, even 500 years ago, but it is no longer a story an analogy of love. In fact I am suspicious that this atonement theory may be one of the reasons why Christians struggle with love. So is there another biblical story of love?

One day I was listening to a course on cd and the professor referenced a Greek professor – who defined agape, that is divine love, in a way that opened my eyes to a whole new beauty in Scripture. He describe Agape not as unconditional divine tolerance, but rather as unconditionally seeing what is of infinite significance in another person. OR It is to unconditionally recognize the presence or image of God in another person.

The tolerance version can be found in scripture, but there is another version that is far more beautiful and make far more sense of the whole of Scripture.

 For in **Genesis 1:27it** is written

“ So God created humankind in his image, *in the image of God* he created them; male and female he created them.”

**Psalm 139**

“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (After the Fall)

 And when the Holy Spirit is given who dwells in us. God!

I belive that this is one of the most important and central messages of the Bible and the Christian story. God now dwells, not just up in heaven in some greek form, not just confined to some temple building, but God, has come down in Christ, in Christ God has overcome all barriers, all sin, to dwell with us and in us by the Holy Spirit. Where does God now dwell, in you, in your congregation, in your community Where is God’s image? You are? And this dwelling with and in God, even in this life, is what salvation, even heaven is really about. Which means heaven is all around us, of course for the time being hell is also here. We will get there in a moment.

First what does it mean for us to love then. It is to open our eyes, and dare to unconditionally see the very image and presence of God in each other. This includes our selves. Why is it hard for us to see this? It is because our own hearts are often such a mess. Jesus said blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. If you can’t see God in another, it is usually because our own hearts are a mess. How do you purify your heart? That is another talk. For now I want to root us in one part of that answer, an ancient form of prayer, Most people know it as the prayer that Thersia of Avila most often spoke about, called the prayer of recollection, which is a prayer that roots us in God’s love and presence in us.

***Experince – Prayer of Recollection***

Close your eyes,

Breath deeply,

Imagine your heart opening. By heart I don’t mean your physical heart, but rather the very core of your being, your spiritual center. Imagine, or dare to trust, have faith that Christ, is dwelling in you. Rest in this opening. When you get distracted simply return to this faith, Christ is dwelling in you.

**Justice**

Now you are in a space to begin to understand what Justice is about, remember justice and love are almost the same thing, and God is Love.

When we talk about justice, we must remember that the word for justice and the word for righteousness, in biblical greek is the same Word and the same thing. So when ever you read righteousness in the NT you are reading the world Justice. In Greek it is, dikaios, it is only a grave translation error, that reflect the modern fallacy of the separation of the individual form society, that has separated these two. So what does dikaios, justice and righteous mean.

When we talk about justice we often think about primarily it in a legal sense. Yes Paul used this as one way of explaining justice to the Roman world, but it seems to have been so overplayed that we have lost view of its larger sense in scripture.

The biblical story understands all of creation as being shaped by God’s Word, also known as God’s Wisdom or God’s Law. And it teaches that this wisdom exists, and we are to live according to this wisdom so that all of life can flourish in its fullness and in freedom. This is the sense of justice that comes out of the creation story and the exodus story with the giving of the 10 words or Decalogue, this is also rooted in proverbs and the prologue of the Gospel of John. – Technically it is called a deontological sense of justice – how do we order our lives so that life can flourish.

Another way of understanding justice is called the teological sense. A good illustration of it I got from Bishop Telmor, who talked about how when he was in Israel, their driver’s car broke down. He got out, opened up the hood, and got to work. A few minutes later he got it, and started it up and exclaimed – in Hebrew – it is just- basically it works it does what it is intended to do. This is the view of justice rooted in the tradition of sanctification, and the language of saints, and children of God, and people of God and in Jesus’ teaching before his crucifixion in the Gospel of John –in this sense justice or being righteous is to aim towards and become what God intended us to be.

 They are two sides of the same thing. For what are we made to be. Well what did you hopefully begin to grasp as we talked about what love means and as we prayed? God dwells in you. We are made to be the image of God in the world. We are the coming together of what is of the earth, dirt, and what is of God , God’s breath or Spirit. Latter Jesus will say you have to be born of water, a symbol of primordial creation and of the Spirit – that is of God. Of course who is the fullness of this coming together of the earth, that is what is human and God? It is Jesus, who is fully human and fully divine, who reveals both who God is and what humanity is to become.

 This is what it means to be a Christian, it is to become a little Christ. This is the purpose, the intended end of our life. Mystics call it union with God. The apostle Paul calls it being formed into the image of Christ or to have the same mind in you as Christ. As far as following the Word, the wisdom, the law of God, when we allow Christ’s dwelling in us to grow, it simply becomes natural, because that is who we are, and in this wisdom, we find the fullness of life. Conversely, following this wisdom is also a part of how we clear the way for the Spirit to flow. All of this is what it means to be righteous to live justly.

Still all of it is a gift of Grace. What God intends for us is so wonderful, if we think we can do it on our own, or earn it, we simply haven’t grasped what God desires to give us yet. There is no way that I can make my self become the dwelling place of God, or the expression of God’s love in the world, or be invited to become a part of the life of the trinity. Which is what Salvation is really about.

Since I cannot earn it, neither can you, or anyone else. God’s dwelling in us is an act of Grace. Which means that God is free to dwell in everyone. Which means that all people hold the same potential, the same purpose in their life, to have their life be the image of Christ in the world..

[**Romans 8:29**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8%3A29&version=ESV)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among *many brothers (and sisters)*

Oh yea, what is love again it is to unconditionaly perceive the presence of God in others

**Lets go back to our prayer practice.**

Once again I would like you to close your eyes

Imagine your heart opening.

Now turn inwards, and have faith that Christ, that the Holy Spirit dwells in you.

Now I want to expand you vision a bit.

I want you to think of someone you easily love. What is it, in that person that reveals or reflects a piece of who God is? How do perceive God’s presence in them?

I want you to bring to mind someone from your congregation. Pick someone specific. Think about that person. How do they reflect God’s presence. How do you perceive God’s presence in them?

Now I want you to open your eyes. These Children are children in Sierra Leone – can you perceive God’s presence in them?

This where we begin to talk about Justice and this is what social justice ministry about.

**Justice/Righteousness – The work of Justice**

Justice begins when we look at someone, like these children, and realize that because who we are made to be is a gift of grace, they have also received this grace. Which means that justice begins when we love them and see this marvelous potential and value in them. Each of these children have been made to embody God’s presence and love in the world. This is what justification by grace really means.

There is also a challenge in this. There is a very dangerous heresy, called quietism, which says that we then have no role to play at all. The reality is that because by God’s grace God created us, and has come to dwell in us, we have been given both the gift and the responsibility of playing a role in how we live into this great gift. For we can block this great gift, in effect create a dam to block God’s love and presence or we can share it and allow it to flow; We can help people overcome what is blocking them from becoming what God has intended them to become or we can become one more hurdle

You see there is also another part of love. That person that loved you that you reflected on at the beginning. They didn’t just love you by how they saw you? Rather by their words and deeds they helped you see, discover and live into who God intended you to become.

By Grace God has come down to us, and thus we are surround by heaven, but God also knows that we were surrounded by hell, that sin threatens to drown out God’s presence in us, that while the Holy Spirit acts in us and amongst us to help us become what God desires us to become, there is also the powers and principalities that will do everything in their power to drag us down.

So God rolled up his sleaves and came down in Jesus, What did Jesus do?

He taught, he healed, by his action he challenged the divisions of his society that denied the humanity of some, and he challenged a religious and political and empires to the point that they crucified him. This is our story too. We are called to teach, to heal, to challenge division and injustice, and yes there will be those who will want to crucify you for this. The gift though is that by this work we become spiritually freed to become who God intended us to become.

This is where the story of these children comes in again. The powers and principalities that Paul speaks about, are not just disembodies spiritual realities, rather they are spiritual realities that become embodied by how we shape our world, our politics and economics.

This picture, are children who are in a child sponsorship program of CAUSE Canada which is a development agency who’s board I am on. To have this picture make sense you have to know the injustice behind this picture. We really need to ask why a development agency based in Canmore, is providing an education to Children in Sierra Leone, especially since Sierra Leone once has a decent education system. There were two things.

First of all, Sirra Leone supported the Liberian government against Charles Taylor when he launched a civil war to gain power. Then when he gained power, as an act of revenge he exported a civil war into Sierra Leone, which was made possible three primary things, a corrupt political system, the selling of diamonds to us, the ability to purchase abundant and cheap small arms. These were then combined to create child soldiers. These child soldier were then trained to kill any professionals, including teachers.

That is only a part of the story. What was equally devastating was something called structural adjustment policies. Basically Sierra Leone, had debt, in part due to their civil war caused by Charles Taylor. Now instead of using Sierra Leones vast mineral or agricultural wealth to pay off these loans, by collecting reasonable royalities or taxes on western resource companies, because this might hurt powerful western profits, the western government through the World Bank instead demanded that Sierra Leone cut its public funding, for things like health care and education. Now the results of the cuts to health care are now being clearly seen with Eboala. The cuts to education included not only cutting teachers salaries but the imposition of school fees to pay the rest, When people live at a subsistence level, what this means is that there is no money left over that they can use to send their children to school, there is simply no money to pay even $25. And if there is it goes to the oldest son, so no girls in school. If you can’t collect school fees from desperately poor families, you can’t pay teachers. Now put your self in the position of a teacher, you are not getting paid, and you face possible execution from drug filled child soldier? Will you show up for work? The result was almost predictable, the entire education system was almost wiped out. Why, because of powers and principalities, the spiritual evils of greed and the lust for power, expressed in the concrete realities of the World Bank, mining companies, and arms manufactures greed for profits combined with local politics that was nothing short of evil. The infinite value, God’s presence in these kids were denied, by ambition, pride and the greed of the powerful.

 The image I like to use is that each of us are like children, tied down by many ropes and nets, keeping us from getting up and becoming whom God intended us to becomes. Imagine all of the ropes that hold all of us down, all of the things you may have had to overcome in your life, now add living through a war, having your teachers killed, your mothers die, being mal nourished regularly for months at a time. That is what people in Sierra Leone face and more.

**The Work of Justice**

What does the work of justice look like? It looks like people, like you and me, looking at these children and saying, that they are more valuable then us having a little more money. So valuable that they deserve to be educated so that they can become who God intended them to become. What do they need for this. They need to be fed, they need to have teachers, who are trained and they need to not pay school fees.

This is just a part of justice. For all of this counts for nothing if the roots of injustice are not also addressed. This is why the churches campaigned for the World Bank and IMF to abandon structural adjustment programs and instead forgive the depts of the poorest countries. This is why the churches have worked for a treaty to limit and even ban the sales of small arms. This is why all of us have a responsibility to ensure that our proposal of loves, or the bits on our drills are not using dimonds that are fueling a conflict some where in the word. This is also why CAUSE and other NGOs have advocated for the Sierra Leonian government to provide free education to all, and now the government has begun, to remove school fees.

When you do this this something wonderful begins to happen. This children turn into this (Picture of Young Women from Sierra Leone going into Medical School) In a country where there are very few doctors, In the entire district were we were in there was in fact only one. These three young women were finishing their preparation to go into Medical School, he was in Medical school and had come back to help them. They were becoming what God had desired them to become – like Jesus healers to the desperately poor. And do you know why they wanted to go to Medical school? What they told me was that it was because they were tired of watching their mothers die. Sierra Leone has one of the highest maternal motality rates in the world.

This is what Justice Looks Like, it is what love looks like in public, it is seeing the presence of God in someone, and then helping people grow into this, and removing what ever barriers are preventing them from receiving this grace.

**In a Congregation**

So what does this look like in a congregation?

We must begin, with faith. With faith that dares to be open to God’s presence in you. Enough talk about trying to survive, enough focus on beurocratic fixes, enough infighting, enough focus on how little we have. Enough.

We have to begin with prayer. We have to begin by learning to perceive God’s presence in us, and in others and then return again and again to allowing God to be present and work in, be transformed by the presence of God in you. Can’t you see, God dwells in you. God dwells amongst you, amongst us.

To see this though we will need to do some work. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God, is what jesus said. So what needs to be brought into the open, cleaned out and let go of so that our hearts might become purer, so that we might see again this incredible gift of God’s presence within us and amongst us? What is the junk that is blocking the flow of grace and love? You have to clean it out, make sure you get help from the Holy Spirit with this.

At the same time, begin to look for God’s presence among you.

Take a moment. Think about the people in your congregation. Who in your congregation, or what about your congregation, reflects an aspect of God? Where is there love? Who has vision? Who are the prophets among you? Who has faith?

To know this, you need to start with relationship. Not just the pastor, but all of you, sit down, visit with each other, and seek out in each other how God’s presence dwells in you and amongst you. What are your gifts?

Then begin looking around into your community. Sit down and visit. Visit with your MLA, your council person, with the police officers, with other churches, other faiths, with clubs and the people gathered for coffee. Where is God present and gifting your community?

As you talk with people in your congregation and beyond your congregation also listen, for people’s hurts and struggles. Who is being tied down in your community? Who’s dignity is being denied? Who is in need of a sip of water, who do you struggle to see God’s presence in? Who is it that needs to be loved?

Please don’t go out and help them right away. As a society, since the 1980’s we have move away from justice, to a charity model as a society and it is a failure. There was a project in Calgary called Poverty talks to actually listen to the voices of those who suffer from poverty. Do you know what the chours is, “Stop doing this to us.” Stop treating people like charity cases. Yes we need affordable housing, not shelters, we need income support, not food banks. People need dignity not charity. And if you get them off record, I know several ED of major charities who will agree, it doesn’t work, though it is better then nothing.

So before you go out to help someone, sit down and get to know them. Listen to them. Look for their dignity, their beauty. Yes, even in the midst of the most recent story they have had to make up to get some help, listen and watch for God’s presence. Then ask, what is needed to help this person grow into who God intended them to become?

Ask, what is it as a society that has kept this person down, from becoming who they were blessed to become? Ask what is the gift, what is the gift of vision that this person is giving you.

Then start asking of all these people you have developed a relationship with, in you congregation and beyond, those with resources and those without. What can we do together? What can we do so that all of us can live into the dignity we are made to embody?

Then try something. Treat it as an experiment. In other words take a risk and learn from it. Then try again and again.

I would be so bold as to place a bet, that it we tried this, we just might live into the renewal of the church that God seems to desire for us.

**Next Steps**

There are may forms of doing the work of Justice. The tradition that I believe embodies the form of Justice that scripture calls us to is Called Community organizing. This is what I now do as the Lead Organizer for the Greater Edmonton Alliance and the Metro Alliance for the Common Good in Calgary.

And if you want to learn more about this we have two trainings coming up.

**The Metro Alliance For the Common Good (MACG)** brings together faith communities, organizations and community organizations of Calgary to transform our city into a community which acts justly and respects all. On Wednesday May 20th 1:00 – 4:30 and Thursday May 21st 9:30 – 4:30 at Lutheran Church of the Cross 10620 Elbow Drive SW, Calgary MACG will be offering a community organizing leadership training institute. This will be led by Deborah Littman, the lead organizer for the Metro Vancouver Alliance. Come and experience what community organizing is about. Learn the core leadership skills of community organizing. Discover how you and your organization can join with others to transform our city. The cost is $50 or pay as you are able. To register or if you have any questions contact Ryan Andersen ryancandersen@yahoo.com or (403)993-7123 Please register before May 15th.

The Greater Edmonton Alliance has the same training on Friday April 23rd in the evening and on the 24th during the day and it is at Southminster Steinhauer United Church 10749-19 Ave. NW, The cost is $50 or pay as you are able. To register or if you have any questions contact Ryan Andersen ryancandersen@yahoo.com or (403)993-7123

If you are interested in the more contemplative aspects of this. I, along with Linda Gervais, and the Augustana Chaplancy is putting on a two day retreat. It is May 1st and 2nd at the Augustana Chaple in Camrose and it is $50 per person and you can register by e-mailing lindagervais@me.com

Why Do this?

What does the Lord require of us, but to do justice, walk tenderly and walk humbly with our God. Micah.

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Additional Texts

[**John 1:12-13**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A12-13&version=ESV)

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

[**Romans 8:29**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8%3A29&version=ESV)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[**Galatians 3:27**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+3%3A27&version=ESV)

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ

[**Philippians 2:5**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2%3A5&version=ESV)ESV / 35 helpful votes HelpfulNot Helpful

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

**1 Corinthians 6:17-19**

17But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 2[[1]](#footnote-1)

 Justice/Righteousness – is about us as individuals and as a society ordering our lives, our actions our relationships so that we might become what God intended us to become, and be what God has created us to be.

1. *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (1 Co 6:17–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)