

Justice and Mercy

Covenant Group Theme for January 2010, Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson, The Community Church of Chapel Hill (NC), Unitarian Universalist

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

"Come into the circle of love and justice.
Come into the community of mercy, holiness, and health.
Come and you shall know peace and joy."
—Israel Zangwill, adapted (in our hymnal)

CHECK IN –

For the one hour drop-in groups: A brief check in such as “how is it with your spirit today?”

For the two hour covenant groups: What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing. Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted for approximately ____ minutes. (*let people know that comfort and care can be offered after the group session*).

Introduction to the topic

This month’s topic is justice and mercy. Justice is basically defined as doing what is right and fair.

Mercy is defined as: Kindness in excess of what may be expected or demanded by fairness; kind or compassionate treatment.

Reading:

A family living on a farm in the Midwest has two children. One of the parents dies and the remaining parent is left to raise the two kids. When they reach 18 each of the two kids inherits an equal amount of money which the deceased parent had left in a trust for them.

One of the “kids” takes all her money and runs off for a life of adventure. The lone parent grieves the loss and fears the child is dead. Meanwhile the kid is off in NYC partying, buying nice clothing, has a cool apartment in Soho, and tools around in a new BMW convertible. But after a couple of years s/he is broke, has crashed the car, and is homeless. S/he decides to return to the farm but wonders what reception s/he will find.

Meanwhile the other child has invested his inheritance in the family farm. He has worked side by side with his dad growing corn and raising animals, working hard every day in a culture and an economy that is not kind on family farmers.

When the runaway kid comes home the father is full of joy. He calls all the neighbors, and all the members of his local church, rejoicing that his child is alive and has returned. He invites them all to a huge party he is throwing for her that weekend.

The other sibling goes to the father and says: “I don’t understand this. She told me she’s spent everything she was given. She blew it all on alcohol, drugs and clothes. This isn’t fair. I’ve been

good. I put all my money back into the land. I've helped you out for years, why are you throwing her a party? You've never thrown one for me."

QUESTIONS: Choose the one that resonates with you at this moment, in your own life. If none of them do, perhaps something from the story did. In any case, though we are using a reading, and some questions, to bring focus to the topic, the real text is always our own lives. So the underlying question always is something like: How does this speak to my own life, and how I want to live my life in the world?

Q. How would you answer his questions if you were the father?

Q. Or, if you were the sibling that stayed on the farm what would your reaction have been to your father throwing the party?

Guidelines for Sharing – (leader reads these guidelines, or has another person do it, then can repeat the questions again)

We'll each speak for roughly _____ minutes, with no cross talk or interruptions. Cross talk means advice giving, blaming or trying to fix another person. It is wise to speak in the first person, "I think, I feel..."

When we are listening: Try to listen to each other as if you were listening to, or watching, your own thoughts. Let others' words simply fall down into your heart. It is not necessary to give the person reassurances that they are being heard, such as nodding or eye contact. By simply listening together we create a holding space for each speaker. That is enough.

When it is your turn to speak it is not necessary to respond to the persons who have gone before you, though you may find yourself building on what has been shared already. Find out what your own inner wisdom wants to say. Together we create a quilt of wisdom, the design is a surprise.

(Leader can re-read the questions here)

Sharing around the circle

After everyone has shared (some groups go around twice, or more)...

Likes and Wishes – What did you like about this session? What would you wish to be different if anything?

Closing words - *"Rats and roaches live by competition under the laws of supply and demand. It is the privilege of human beings to live under the laws of justice and mercy."*

-- *Wendell Berry*

Extinguishing the chalice We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.