



## Justice

*The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, guided writing sessions and Wednesday evening programming; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities. The January theme is Justice.*

Ask anyone, of almost any stripe or leaning, if they believe in justice, and they will probably say yes. Ask them to define it, though, and you'll likely encounter a longer, deeper silence. For the concept of justice, embedded in the human heart as it seems to be and examined thoughtfully by the best minds in history, can be harder to catch hold of than a feather riding on the wind.

"There is nothing more instructive," noted the French philosopher Henri Bergson writing about justice almost a century ago, "than to see how the philosophers have skirted around it, touched it, and yet missed it."

Not just philosophers but human society itself circles around justice, codifying it into laws meant to preserve it. The legal system is often the first door we knock on when seeking justice, large or small; and it is an important and necessary one. But where there are laws there are loopholes. History repeatedly reveals the challenges of carving something as relational as justice into stone-like law.

### Worship Theme Resources

#### BOOKS

**2048: Humanity's Agreement to Live Together**, by J. Kirk Boyd, a visionary proposal for an enforceable international agreement protecting human rights.

**Love, Power and Justice**, by Paul Tillich, a theological analysis of the unity of love, power and justice.

**To Kill a Mockingbird**, by Harper Lee

Rigid rules lack both the power and the grace of a justice meant to roll down like water. And like all things written in stone or on tablets, they can be shattered in the heat of the moment, as Moses discovered with the first set of commandments broken at his feet before he'd even read them to the Israelites.

If not in laws, then, how and where can we find and keep justice?

Little is known about the specifics of ancient Egyptian law, but what has survived across the millennia is the spirit of justice or Ma'at on which Egyptian law and society were based. Ma'at was the goddess of Justice, Truth and Order. Ma'at was also reality itself, the right and reliable order of the cosmos that kept the sun rising every day and the seasons turning every year. Egyptian rulers were said to have "done Ma'at" when they ruled justly, aligning with this larger order. In addition, Ma'at judged the dead in the Egyptian underworld where, on a swinging balance, she weighed the heart of each arrival against a feather. Only those with hearts sufficiently lightened by "doing Ma'at" were permitted into the afterlife.

The Abrahamic religions, Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism all carry similar ideas of justice as the underlying order of the universe. It is the human gift of free will that has opened the hatch through which we keep slipping out of this larger relationship and order. Perhaps, then, before justice was carved into stone, first and foremost it was tucked more indelibly into the essence of all life, written into the fiber of being

itself, woven into all right relations. No wonder we keep missing it. It's been hidden inside the very fabric of relationship and love.

Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred says the Creator's intention of harmony provides the basis for universal justice and for the Great Law of Peace that once brought together five warring tribes. Under the Great Law of Peace, he explains, "We were instructed to carry a love for one another and to show a great respect for all the beings of this Earth. . . . In our ways, spiritual consciousness is the highest form of politics." Coming as close as anyone to catching Ma'at's feather in hand, he adds, "Justice is the process of healing relationships so that each element in relation can live its natural power and fulfill its responsibility."

So justice is more than a set of commandments, laws or procedures, although it requires these as well. It begins by knowing who we are, which in turn begins by naming whose we are. It is a road that we walk, a way that we live, a relationship that we grow into over time as we participate in healing our fractured world. As the poet Denise Levertov writes, *We have only begun to know / the power that is in us if we would join / our solitudes in the communion of struggle.*

Come let us join in that communion of struggle.

~ Karen Hering,  
Consulting Literary Minister