



Just Living

*A liturgical guide
to everyday justice
from Sacredise.com*

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A liturgical guide to everyday justice

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Sacredise
Johannesburg



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A liturgical guide to everyday justice

The Challenge of Doing Justice

As I write this, the world is still grappling with the global COVID-19 pandemic which has so far plagued our planet for a year and a half. The end is not yet in sight, although vaccines have given us hope and a glimpse of a time when this struggle will be over.

Yet, even as we have navigated this most threatening global health crisis in history, the injustices and inequalities in our world have been brought into stark relief.

- We have watched how power games played by political and religious leaders have either helped or hindered the efforts to contain the virus and produce vaccines.
- We have seen how the wealthy have been far less affected than the poor, and how the poorest nations have suffered the greatest losses of income and of human lives.
- We have witnessed black people falling ill and dying at a far greater rate than white people and we have heard the cries of "Black Lives Matter" in response to the unnecessary deaths of black people through police brutality.
- We have read that rates of violence against women have increased during lockdowns and we have seen some politicians use the pandemic to villainise and persecute LGBTQIA+ people.
- And through it all the damage done to our planet and the changes in the global climate have continued, even as we've caught a glimpse of what a restored world could look like when, for a few months, the world was in lockdown.

All of these realities have shown us that it is as important as ever for followers of Jesus the Christ to make whatever contribution we can to building the world of love and justice that Jesus called the Reign of God. But what we have witnessed has also shown us how big the challenges are in our quest to bring justice into our world. For many of us the size of the problems are overwhelming and we are tempted to give up in despair.

And that's why I feel compelled to offer this liturgical guide: **Just Living**. This seven week journey of worship and preaching explores the major issues of justice in our world (power, money, race, sexuality, and climate change) and offers simple, practical guidelines for living justly in our daily lives. Used in congregational worship, this guide will empower your community to make a significant difference in each of these areas in your corner of the world.

Just Living is not specific to any particular season in the Liturgical Calendar and is designed to fit it into any period in your church's journey where it is appropriate to address justice as a shaper of our daily living. The theological foundations are progressive and the approach to justice in this guide is inclusive and affirming of all people.

For Small Groups

I have not created separate small group notes for each chapter because, in my experience, the best format for a small group is to engage more deeply with what has happened in the larger worship gathering. I believe that congregational worship forms the fountainhead of spiritual practice and personal and small group worship should flow from it.

I recommend that small groups begin with a kind of 'accountability' moment, in which members share how they are each following the response and integration practices for the week in their own personal



devotional times. They can share any struggles or questions, and also encourage each other in their practice.

The group can then 'replay' the worship from Sunday, in the sense that they can use the same prayers, hymns, and readings, but in a more participatory, conversational way. In reflecting on the Scriptures, each one can bring what they heard in the sermon, and what they have been learning as they have reflected through the week so far. This can then lead to a conversation in which members can encourage each other and learn together. The following questions can be helpful to guide these conversations and can be applied to every week:

- What stood out for you in this week's reading, and in the message that was preached? Why do you think this particularly caught your attention?
- What does this 'word' mean to you for your spiritual walk in the next week, month, and year?
- How are you working to integrate this 'word' into your daily living?

Finally, members of the group can pray and encourage each other, and close with any prayers and hymns from Sunday that they haven't yet shared. In this way, the communal, small group, and devotional worship all works together to lead people into a deeper discipleship.

For Personal Spiritual Practice

The best devotional practice is inseparably connected with both corporate worship and small group reflection. Instead of following a completely different resource, or having to wade through even more words, it is more effective for us to return to the words that we have already heard and received in our communal worship and reflect more deeply on them. And then we can engage with what we are learning practically by repeating the response practices from our Sunday worship, and by being intentional about integrating our learning into our lives in practical ways through the integration practices that are offered at the close of each week's worship. This is the approach that is embraced in *Just Living*.

In order to facilitate this devotional approach in your congregation, I recommend that you give people some way to remember the message they have heard in the preaching—by encouraging them to take their own notes, or by handing out pre-printed summary notes. In addition, it can be helpful to ensure that the response and integration practices are available for easy reference so that people can engage with them during the week. This can either be included in the handouts, or people can be invited to write the practices down before they leave the worship.

Alternatively, social media can also be used to engage people more deeply with these practices in their own time, and video or audio recordings of the sermon can be included as well. I hope that *Just Living* will empower you to create a meaningful and transforming spiritual journey for your community. I hope that you and your community will find, as a result of this journey, that you are more able to include practical responses to the justice issues of our time in your daily living as followers of Christ.

May *Just Living* be exactly what you need to 'do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8) in this challenging time.

John

A Simple Truth About Justice

Chapter One

PREPARING

CALL TO WORSHIP

Begin with a moment of stillness and centring. After a few moments of silence invite the people to picture themselves as they are when they look in a mirror. You could even invite them to use the selfie camera on their phones to look at themselves in this moment of reflection. Encourage them not to judge what they see, but just to sit with themselves and try to express kindness and love toward themselves for a few moments. You may also want to invite them to consider what they feel and think about the word 'justice'. Encourage them to consider the extent to which they feel that they live in a just world.

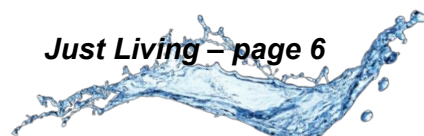
Isaiah 2:2-5 may be used as part of this call to worship:

There's a day coming
when the mountain of GOD's House
Will be The Mountain—
solid, towering over all mountains.
**All nations will river toward it,
people from all over set out for it.**
They'll say, "Come,
let's climb GOD's Mountain,
go to the House of the God of Jacob.
He'll show us the way he works
so we can live the way we're made."
**Zion's the source of the revelation.
GOD's Message comes from Jerusalem.**
He'll settle things fairly between nations.
He'll make things right between many peoples.
**They'll turn their swords into shovels,
their spears into hoes.**
No more will nation fight nation;
they won't play war anymore.
**Come, family of Jacob,
let's live in the light of GOD.**
(The Message)

*And now invite everyone to check in with themselves as they answer this one question:
How are you feeling about yourself in this moment?*

PRAISE AND CONFESSION

How easily we forget, God, that you are love;
within your Triune self love is shared and celebrated,
and all of creation is filled with your loving presence.



Yet we too easily believe that love is limited and weak,
that hatred, violence, and injustice
are the most powerful forces in our universe;
and we too easily forget that we are beloved,
worthy of love and capable of loving greatly.

***Forgive us when we allow love to be hidden in our society,
and when we justify our lack of love
for one another and for ourselves.***

Thank you that your Divine Love never ceases,
never runs out and is never overcome
by evil or lovelessness.

Thank you for filling us with love,
for empowering us to share love,
and for showing us how to live in love.

***We praise you, God of Love,
and we open ourselves to receive and experience
your infinite love once again.***

Amen.

LISTENING

HEARING THE SACRED TEXT

Micah 6:8

REFLECTING

If caterpillars knew what lay ahead, I wonder if butterflies would even exist. Apparently, new *imaginal cells* begin to emerge in the caterpillar's body shortly after it enters the chrysalis. At first the caterpillar's immune system views them as invaders, and sets out to destroy them. But in time, the imaginal cells overpower this immune response, and the caterpillar is reduced to a kind of goo which then feeds the cells so that they can create the butterfly which is to emerge.

This awe-inspiring metamorphosis offers a striking metaphor for human transformation. Both societies and individuals experience radical change first as a kind of disintegration and only later as an improved reality. The disintegration feels just like a battle between imaginal cells, that carry the image of the new reality, and the old cells that seek to maintain the status quo, and it leaves us feeling rather like that amorphous goo that was once a caterpillar.

Why You Matter

One of the most important imaginal cells that can emerge within our personal and collective consciousness is the one that tells us that *we matter*. Too many of us go through life with total blindness to our own value—a blindness that is reinforced by religions that make feeling worthless a spiritual virtue. Yet every one of us has a deep and basic need to feel seen, known, and appreciated. When this need is met, we become more whole, peaceful, and resilient in the face of life's challenges. When it remains unmet, we become increasingly unhealthy, broken, and even destructive to ourselves and those around us.

One of the primary tasks of spirituality is to convince us that we *do* matter and have dignity simply because we are. There's the famous story of the little black boy who was told by an arrogant white man that he was worthless. He stood as tall as he could, looked the man in the eye, and proudly stated, "I know I'm somebody because God don't make no junk!"



When the realisation that we matter sinks into our souls, we can often find ourselves responding in two ways: firstly, we recognise that other people have to matter as much as we do and secondly, we recognise that the world does not value all people equally. The result of these insights is that we may be moved to join the effort to make our world more just and equitable for all. This, of course, is exactly what our spiritual practice is designed to do and it leads to another level of understanding about our value.

Why Else You Matter

It's a strange truth that for most of us, it is not enough to know that we matter simply because we exist. We also need to know that we will be missed and remembered because our lives have mattered *to someone*. It is when we believe that our lives make no difference to anyone that we doubt our worth and fall into despair.

This is immensely important, because nothing can change in the world without people who seek to change it—even if only for the sake of one other person. And this is the purpose of our spirituality. It convinces us of our value and then of the value of all others. Then, using our need to matter to someone, it moves us to live a life of justice by making some contribution to the betterment of the world. If we are ever to create a just, compassionate, and peaceful society every such small contribution matters.

Another famous story tells of a boy on the beach where a whole shoal of starfish had come aground. A man watched as the boy picked up a starfish and threw it back into the sea, then picked up another, and another. Finally the man said to the boy, "There are too many. You're not going to make any difference." To which the boy replied, holding up the starfish in his hand, "It will make a difference to this one!"

It Matters To Matter

If our lives are to be fulfilled, meaningful, connected, and whole we need to know that we matter, that we are intrinsically valuable, and that we make a difference to the world. If our world is ever to become more unified and equal then we need to know that we all matter and that our contribution helps toward the healing of our society.

Spirituality that makes us feel worthless is not just unhelpful. It is evil. Spirituality that is only about individuals gaining entry to some future heaven is not just selfish. It is cruel. Authentic spirituality always connects us ever more deeply with the divine energy and human dignity within us and all people (and also in non-human beings) and with our unique capacity to leave the world a little better off—because it matters that we matter, and it matters that we know that we matter. That is what will ultimately motivate us to live justly in whatever small ways we can each day. In a time such as the one in which we now live, this simple but profound truth makes all the difference.

RESPONDING

Allow a moment for this reflection to sink into the hearts of the people. The following questions may be used to help people reflect on what they've heard:

- What is your relationship with justice-making, and how have you engaged with justice-making in your life, if at all?
- What resistances can you identify to being involved in justice-making in your life?

After a moment of silence invite everyone to engage in a 'personal stock-take' by writing two lists. The first is for anything that makes them feel valuable, that gives them a sense of dignity and meaning, and that confirms that they matter just as they are. In the second list people can put all the abilities, resources, and aptitudes they have that make it possible for them to make a contribution, however small, to your world. Encourage them to keep working with these lists through the week.



PRAYER

We live in a universe that was brought into being by Love,
that is sustained by Love,
and in which Love connects all things.
But in our forgetfulness we have allowed Love to be hidden,
we have allowed injustice to fill our world,
and we have allowed fear to divide us
from ourselves and one another,
from the earth,
and from the Divine Spirit of Love.

And so we pray that we may remember Love again;

May we remember to love ourselves

as the beloved children of God that we are;

May we remember to love one another

and acknowledge the Divine image within each other;

May we remember to love across the boundaries

of race and ethnicity,
gender and sexuality,
education and economic level,
religion and ideology,
nationality and political affiliation;

May we remember to love our earth

and all the creatures and organisms that live here;

May we remember to love the Divine presence

and the Life that fills it all.

***And may we love enough that our presence
may help to bring justice and healing
wherever we may go.***

Amen.

INTEGRATING

As the service ends, invite everyone to explore possibilities through the week to engage in some small way in justice-making. They could find a cause that they believe in and research how to be involved in helping that cause. Then encourage them to make time to journal what they discover and make a note of any commitments they may feel moved to make.

End the service by sending the people out with the following words:

Go in the knowledge that you matter to make whatever positive difference you can in the lives of those around you.

