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### Personal Credo: Reconciliation Through Grace

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Emily Barton

Introduction to Social Justice

Dr. Houser

December 13, 2019

### Personal Credo: Reconciliation Through Grace

Human kind has been around for a long time, and since the beginning no one has been perfect. Mistakes have been made throughout history. It all stems from how we interact with one another. People form ideas around who they think someone else is, and gaps form between groups and form inequalities of all kinds. That is what social justice is all about finding the best, most fair ways of building a bridge and closing the gap. It is a way of correcting those behaviors of judgment and discernment that have caused people's division. Social justice is challenging, imaginative, pushes you out of your comfort zone and above all extends grace to those who need it. It forces one to reflect upon on own beliefs and challenges you to ask yourself why you believe in that. I do not claim to know everything nor do I know how to solve all the world's problems, but I do feel a sense of obligation to try my best. I want to try and be better every day, going into a situation with an open heart and an open mind willing to learn and change. The truth is there is always something you do not know, and can learn about.

Social justice is a community of people who feel lead to help others who have been hurt and beaten down by the way society is constructed. Extending an open invitation for anyone who needs a hand to pull them up. Social justice is not for one group of persons but for anyone of any community who feels oppressed or has experienced judgment for their situations, many of which are out of their controls. A justice seeker is anyone who has the compassion to help others. No matter their own status, they are ready to serve others whole heartedly.

The first step in seeking justice in any area, is maintaining mutual respect from all sides of an issue. There may be information about someone that we do not know. Instead of judging people, we need to have empathy and try to understand their side. Not everyone will be able to peacefully come together and set aside their differences. There are years of hurt and judgment that communities carry with them from long ago in history. Some prejudice is built into us at a young age, it is our responsibility to be aware of it and keep it in check and correct the behavior. Some people are so stuck in what they believe they will never be able to consider the other side. Considering all sides of an issue is very important in the role of seeking justice. Justice for one person may look a different way than another's idea of justice. Finding the common ground, where everyone will be happy is the goal. But the reality is, some people will be upset by finding common ground because it means they are losing their privileges. Someone in a more comfortable position in life may feel inconvenienced by a problem that they do not think affects them. Social justice is a problem for everyone and the only way for peace to be obtained is when everyone takes accountability for their actions and feels obligated to change their behavior to better everyone's life. Respect is a major part of being able to keep others accountable. We have to come from a place of love, not hate. We must not judge but help others and show them what they may not be aware of yet. Lorretta Ross, author of *I'm a Black Feminist. I Think Call-Out Culture Is Toxic*, discusses in her piece how calling people out for their behavior can do more harm and burn more bridges. "Call-outs make people fearful of being targeted. People avoid meaningful conversations," and "Calling-in engages in debates with words and actions of healing and restoration". (Ross, 2019). Ross believes calling people in and have conversations about the issues is the way social justice work should be done. We cannot force people to change, all we can do is show them the truth and hope they see what is right in front of them.

Social justice is a way for people to try and right all the wrongs that have occurred. It is not meant to be judgmental, there should be a safe way to respectfully keep each other accountable. No one should be afraid of constructive criticism. No one should feel like they cannot speak up about an issue either. Social justice is simply opening the eyes that have been closed or turned away for so long, to what is broken in society and coming up with ways to make things better. Ross discusses a sense of humanity as having respect for each other the way we all deserve. “We can build restorative justice processes to hold the stories of the accusers and the accused, and work together to ascertain harm and achieve justice without seeing anyone as disposable people and violating their human rights or right to due process.” (Ross, 2019). This is how to obtain justice and going about it in a genuine manner.

There are so many issues in today’s society that contribute to people not getting the fairness they deserve. When we stop seeing people as how they are different from us and start seeing them as what we have in common it will bring humanity back into situations when people had lost all respect. We have built up these walls around our selves and stick to only people that are similar to us in lifestyles or beliefs. Nothing will ever be accomplished if everyone does that. As humans we are meant to interact with one another. We all share this planet, so its about time we make it an equal partnership where there is no one persons at the top benefiting from everyone else’s loses. Justice seekers want to go into those groups, tear down the walls and bring several communities together. We can do that by being an active part of building relationships and having a variety of types of people so you can bring them all together in a genuine way. We all have a lot to learn from each other.

It takes a creative mind to find peace in the hardest places. Social justice is not an easy thing to accomplish. There are very dark and devastating truths that occur and we have to accept

them to be able to change them. Nothing will get done, by ignoring them. It takes a big imagination, immense strength and a big heart to look at a dark situation and have hope for a better future. Coming up with ways to make those changes happen, so everyone can experience the same fairness and quality of life is the role social justice takes up. Reaching for justice does not promise a perfect life, but it promises to try and find ways of pushing the box aside to do everything in its power to help others. Social justice is selfless and takes selfless people to accomplish.

I think it is important to know that everyone is trying their best in this world, and extended a little grace will go among way. It is inevitable that we will one day, (probably sooner than later) have an issue or disagreement with someone. I don't think of this as a bad thing, because those hard conversations need to be had. If no one has them then nothing will change. They need to be handled genuinely and from a mutual place of respect for each other. That is the only way we can ever grow is when we look at something from a different way, and we are able to empathize with how the other person feels. I think when people's security and comfort is threatened that they don't want to see a change, but it is something that has to be changed because there are a lot more people in the world that are not comfortable and cannot continue to live like they are now. Everyone deserves the same amount of respect and quality of human decency and when someone is mistreated it is our place as fellow humans to stick up for them and take care of them. Everyone should feel valued and listened to. Even when we may not all agree on something, we can still have love and respect for one another. I feel like truth no matter who you are is universal and it will prevail. Whether someone wants to accept it or not is up to them. The truth is that we are not all that different and when we tear down our assumptions and preconceived notions about people, we find that we have a lot more to relate to than we do

different. That is why when one person is down, the others should help them up instead of capitalizing on the gap created. All we want as humans is to be given the chance to be heard and respected. Across the board everyone deserves the same opportunities to get their voice and their truths out. In her piece Ross, describes how she wants all sides to come together and be able to have the important discussions. “We’re a polarized country, divided by white supremacy, patriarchy, racism against immigrants and increasingly vitriolic ways to disrespect one another. Are we evolving or devolving in our ability to handle conflicts? Frankly, I expect people of all political persuasions to call me out — productively and unproductively — for my critique of this culture. It’s not a partisan issue.” (Ross, 2019). When we start to listen to their stories sometimes that thing, we thought we believed in so deeply might just change at the end of the day. If you really want the truth you have to reject the stereotypes you created and look beyond them for what is really there.

If someone is comfortable, there is another group or persons that are sacrificing and going without. This privilege is selfish. If you have never had to worry about where your next meal is coming from or if the lights will stay on for another day, you have experienced a privilege that many people do not have. Food insecurity, housing crisis, sex trafficking, slavery are all ways in which our world is broken. Young children are being tried as adults and put on death row; innocent people are being convicted to long extensive sentences. There are a lot of deep pain felt by each person going through these situations. There are many problems going on in the world today that I am unaware of, but I am open to listening, learning and reflecting. People often get stereotyped into categories they would not describe themselves as. This affects how society functions and exactly what social justice is fighting against. There is no one less deserving of grace than another. Let’s take care of each other and when you see someone

hurting, instead of thinking about how blessed or grateful you are why don't we humble ourselves and get down to their level and try and help them in any way we can because they are more than likely very embarrassed they have to be helped. People don't want our pity, they want to be able to provide for their families for themselves so when we do help them, we need to come with no preconceived notions or judgments. Because whether we want to admit it or not, any of those hardships could happen to us at any point.

I am fighting the injustices of the world because I feel lead. A big part of why I am so passionate about this is my religion. I am not implying only Christians can be effective in resolving social issues. Social justice transcends all barriers, much like the love I have for every single person. Being a believer doesn't mean we will never experience pain, maybe even the opposite. It means that through the pain we are still able to feel God's love and have joy. We may face situations that challenge our faith but because we receive grace, we are called to have grace for others. We are called to share the love and stand up for the people Jesus would stand up for. Jesus Christ was the biggest justice seeker in history. The ones that are being overlooked, thought down about, or the poor souls that are victims to awful crimes such as sex trafficking. Social justice pushes us to face those hard moments so we can appreciate what we have accomplished and we can grow closer as a community of acceptance. We need each other to get through those challenging moments.

Throughout the past semester my eyes have been opened to a lot of circumstances I was not aware of, but I wasn't doing my part to seek them out. Social justice does not sit around and wait for someone to ask for help, it is constantly seeking new problems and ways to help shine a light on the issues to bring forth change.

Although realizing the issues is just step one, we must then do something about it. Our words are useless if not supported by actions. The more important step is how your heart changes for people. Being more willing to help other people get to the same place you are. We have to shine a huge spot light on this issue so more people are aware of it and cautious when they are approached. Have a heart for people and the actions to back it up. We need more empathy and understanding in these situations because it could honestly be anyone in this situation and you wouldn't want to be treated this way. Step one is to learn, no one can blame you for not knowing. But step two is to change from it and allowing yourself to grow.

The things we experienced as children stick with us forever and they can deeply affect how people perceive the world. I think children have a special place in my heart because of how innocent they are to how the world works. They are naïve to how harsh the world can be. I am making an emphasis on kids because I think they deserve second chances. They have their whole lives to experience and if we let one behavior define them forever, they will be denied the opportunity to grow into a mature person. By putting faith in younger people, we are giving them the chance to change their future. We need to believe in them so that they feel like they can believe in themselves. When we show them compassion, they will be restored with a new found confidence in themselves and start expecting more from themselves. Bryan Stevenson, author of Just Mercy, talks about the restoration of human potential and people's chances at redemption. "The bad things that happen to us don't define us." (Stevenson 201). Stevenson is a huge advocate for second chances, as well as doing what's right. He believes, "children are impaired by immature judgment, an underdeveloped capacity for self-regulation and responsibility." (Stevenson 267). There are so many kids that aren't being poured into and one wrong mistake changes their life forever. People just assume they are bad kids when there are a lot of things that



affect kids and acting out is the easiest way of not dealing with the pain or upset, they may be experiencing. They did the crime, they are doing the time, but they are still people who deserve a chance and the opportunity to learn how to better deal with their problems than breaking the law. All these kids need is stability in their life and someone they can learn from that will keep them accountable, they also need to learn how to be all those things for themselves. For many kids they need to know they are unique and have value because they have never been told that. For so long they have been wired to think they are worthless, because that's how some people see them.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by all the problems that need to be confronted. It is not just one person's job to take care of their fellow people, its everyone's responsibility. Many people ignore their calling or prioritize other things. People often times have a sense of hopelessness and think they could not possibly make a difference or help. I want everyone to be able to feel comfortable in who they are and confident so they can be the best version of themselves. A specific example is deaf people. As a community deaf people struggle with trying to feel normal in a world that honestly does not do a great job of helping them. They feel outcasted by society and it is our role to help them feel welcomed and like they belong because they do. Stevenson demands people deserve compassion. "The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned. We are all implicated when we allow other people to be mistreated. An absence of compassion can corrupt the decency of a community." (Stevenson 18). Our community is made up of people from every walk of life, and we need to appreciate the differences and embrace them.

Bryan Stevenson describes the injustice in our criminal justice system while having deep respect for the process, he also challenges it and wants to make it better. He uses his position as a lawyer to help the wrongfully convicted, and those who have been hurt by the system. "The

closer we get to mass incarceration and extreme levels of punishment, the more I believe its necessary to recognize that we all need mercy, we all need justice and perhaps we all need some measure of unmerited grace.” (Stevenson 18). We need to extend grace to all people, because although they may not have earned it, we understand that no one is perfect and yet we can forgive because we cherish them and love them dearly. This is how we see the respect needed for social justice mentioned earlier lived out. He also says, “each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.” (Stevenson 17). A problem we have is not forgiving people, we are so hard on them and judgmental. We label people as dangerous or lazy when they have had to face a lot of hard things in their life. Stevenson talks about how society as a whole plays a big role in this. “How easily we condemn people in this country and the injustice we create when we allow fear, anger, and distance to shape the way we treat the most vulnerable among us.” (Stevenson 14). We have been wired to think this way because that is how society perceived them. The criminal justice system should be a place for rehabilitation and helping people working through the very real problems they may have.

We are not meant to sit on the sidelines and let these things keep happening, but to stand up and help in any way we can. We all bring different talents and perspectives to the table, and they are all equally as important a valued. It takes a village to raise up generations of deep-rooted hate and ignorance. Shane Claiborne wrote about this in Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals, “Peacemaking doesn’t mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way is neither fight or flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressor free.” (Claiborne, 2010). People can claim to be Christian but have so much hatred or

discern for a group of people. My faith calls me to love everyone. I love the people who are different than me in every way. I love the people who may hate me. The point is, I am not called to judge anyone's actions because I am not perfect. We need to extend the same grace we receive to people who need it. That is what social justice is, understanding that no one is perfect and some systems and people are broken but we can extend grace and go about trying to restore them in a genuine manor. It may not be easy or comfortable, but it will not work if everyone is not doing their part to make a difference. Social justice can only be obtained when everyone takes up the responsibility and work together to forge the new paths to healing and reconciliation.

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