



Do Justice

"Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the April 2021 edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

Connecting beyond borders

The following appeared in the Micah Global March news update by Sami DiPasquale, Micah Global board member, and it illustrates some of the challenges of doing justice that we do not have to face in Aotearoa – or do we in other ways?

"I live in the desert. The high beautiful rugged Chihuahuan desert covering north central Mexico and the southwestern United States. My city lies on the shores of the Rio Grande river, or the Rio Bravo, depending which side you are on, a river meandering over 3,000 kilometres from the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico. As the river passes through our region, the sister cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, it abruptly becomes the dividing line between the United States and Mexico, and remains the dividing line for the rest of its journey, snaking another 2,000 kilometres to the south and east.

The river, a source of sustenance and beauty and rest and life in the desert, has been transformed into a wall of division. A wall defining specific boundaries and separating those who are in from those who are out and those who are out from those who are in. Until about 60 years ago the river would still meander when it flooded, changing its pathway, as if to defy efforts to control the line. Yet in more recent years it has become increasingly channelized and fortified.

Like so many places in the world, our region has been affected by waves of colonization. First the Spaniards swept through in the late 1500s, subjugating the many native tribes in the area. Then it became part of the newly formed nation of Mexico after independence from Spain. The United States wrested control of the area from Mexico in 1848 as part of its effort to expand westward in order to span from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. It is not uncommon to hear someone in these parts say "I didn't cross the border. The border crossed me." What once was connected is now divided. And the dividing wall keeps being built higher in an effort to emphasize this division.

And yet the twin cities of El Paso in the United States and Ciudad Juárez in Mexico are so intricately intertwined. There is a shared heritage, a mix of culture, of language, of music, of food, of

commerce, of humour. Family members live on both sides of the border, sometimes crossing daily for work or for school, or to visit their grandparents and shop. Many children in my neighbourhood spend their weekends on the other side of town, which happens to be in another country. We are so interconnected. And yet there is a wall dividing us, and the contrasts are stark.

The El Paso-Juárez metropolis represents a microcosm of so many of the issues facing our world today, and the issues facing so many of us as members of Micah Global. A world increasingly divided between those who have so much and those who have very little. A world where political, military, economic, and often religious interests combine to move forward in ways that make sense for the powerful but have dire consequences for the vulnerable. How do we respond to larger issues of power, injustice, religiously-sanctioned oppression, stark income inequality, nationalism, racial tensions, historical trauma, current trauma, and, in some instances, the marriage of Christianity and empire?

In our context, we struggle daily with what it means to live and walk in the way of Jesus in the midst of these forces. How do we act justly? How do we love mercy? How do we walk humbly with our God? How do we speak truth and bring to light that which is hidden? How do we love our neighbours? How do we embody a wholistic, integrated Gospel?

Many questions remain, and yet, along with the global family of Micah, we know that inspired ways forward emerge as we fall to our knees, develop friendships, listen deeply to our neighbours, draw close to the margins, elevate voices of the hurting, cry out in agony with those who suffer, leverage what we have, and open up opportunities for learning and encounters. And somewhere along the journey we regain a sense of our interconnectedness despite the barriers separating us."¹

Micah Global is a worldwide grouping of mainly evangelical Christians dedicated to social justice. It has been going for about 20 years.

COVID-19 long term impact

It is now a full year since the WHO declared that COVID-19 was a global pandemic and over 2.5 million people have died so far. Compared to the nearly 120 million people who are recorded as having been infected, a death rate of less than 2.5% does not

¹ Sami DiPasquale, 'Connecting Beyond Borders', Micah Global 8 March 2021, <https://www.micahnetwork.org/blog/>. Accessed 29 March 2021.

appear to be high but behind this is the assumption that those who do not die fully recover from the virus – an assumption which is increasingly being questioned.

A recent study in the Lancet researched 1,733 coronavirus patients discharged from a hospital in Wuhan, China, where COVID-19 is believed to have originated. *“The study found that more than 3/4s of these patients had at least one COVID symptom six months after they contract the disease.”*²

The report on it went on to explain that *“The average age of the patients in the study was 57 years. The most common, lasting symptom, in 65% of the people, was exhaustion caused by muscle weakness. One fourth of the patients complained of sleeping difficulty. And 23% had depression.”*

While the number of patients in this study is relatively small, the potential implication for the long-term health of the many millions who have been infected is of real concern. How much responsibility for the long-term health effects of COVID-19 will those national leaders who put the economy ahead of the health of their nation be prepared to accept? The more that becomes known about this virus, the clearer it becomes that the decision of our Government in New Zealand to put health first was the right one. Our Government followed the science as far as COVID-19 was concerned; now our Government must follow the science in facing up to the challenges of the climate crisis.

Choosing the way of peace

In an article reproduced for patheos.com, Jason Elam writes of the challenges of choosing peace over destruction.

“The Jewish people of Jesus’ day were living under the occupation of Rome. There were soldiers with weapons on every street corner of Jerusalem. There were whispers of a violent uprising to come in which Israel would purge their land of their Roman oppressors. Jesus comes into this culture with admonitions for people to love their enemies, turn the other cheek, and to carry their oppressor’s backpack two miles instead of the one mile required by law.

In a culture of fear and violence, Jesus preached a way of love and peace.

Jesus knew that a violent uprising against the most powerful empire on the face of the earth would result in Israel’s desolation (which it ultimately did in 70 A.D). He urged His followers not to be consumed with fear but to be led by love – even for their enemies.

The Way of Destruction

The way of fear is the broad path that leads to violence and destruction. They bomb us. We bomb them. They kill our soldiers. We kill their citizens. We repay evil for evil taking an eye for eye until the whole world goes blind. Following the way of fear will always and only lead us to pain.

The Way of Nonviolence

The way of love is the narrow path – taken by only a few – that leads to peace. To a world living in fear, Jesus teaches us to live out of peace within. The cycle of violence must end somewhere so

Jesus taught His followers to be that ending point. He taught them to be ready to absorb violence but to never return it. This is, of course, the philosophy that got Jesus Himself killed along with several of his followers as violence cannot stand the presence of one who owes it nothing.

Jesus suffered no delusions that everyone would join the movement to form some sort of utopian society built upon love and peace. He specifically warned that following the way of love would divide brother against brother and even parents against their own children. There is always a price to be paid for choosing peace in a world addicted to violence. Many—maybe even most—people will not understand. They will call it pacifism. They will quote Edmund Burke emphatically reminding us that all it takes for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing. They will remind you that Jesus told His followers to buy swords and swear that Jesus wouldn’t actually expect us to sacrifice our own lives to live non-violently—but that’s exactly the life He calls us to.

The Path to Peace

Following Jesus isn’t about saying a prayer so that we can live forever in a mansion in the sky after we die. It’s not even about following Biblical principles so we can have a successful, happy life here on earth. And it certainly isn’t even about being a patriotic citizen of whatever country we happen to be born into. Following Jesus is about loving God, our neighbors (including our enemies), and all of creation. It’s a new way to be human. It’s about living together in peace. It’s about choosing to see the image of God in every member of the human family. It’s about choosing love over fear and finding peace within no matter what is happening around us.

Every person—and every generation—must choose its own path.

Humanity has generally chosen the way of fear and destruction for most of the last century. But it’s never too late to plot a different course. The choice remains ours to make. We can choose the narrow way of Jesus or the broad, bloody path of empire.

Which will you choose?³

As we approach Easter, let us carefully think again about the heart of Jesus’ message. Will we – can we – choose peace?



²COVID-19 Can Produce Lasting Effects | Kermit Zarley (patheos.com)

³Choosing the Way of Peace | Messy Spirituality-Choosing the Way of Peace (patheos.com)