

“When Humans Unravel God’s Plans for Justice”  
Exodus 5:1-2; 7:8-23

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Part of this pandemic experience is having more extreme highs and lows, and never really being able to predict when your feelings are going to shift or what they will shift too. That alone is a little exhausting. I had a new low this week. I get the New York Times daily digest and to preserve my sanity for the rest of the day, that email is the only headlines I regularly read. It gives me a broad picture of what is going on in the world without overwhelming me with too many details. 90% of the daily digest is about covid-19, directly or indirectly, as it probably should be. But earlier this week there was an unexpected headline that grabbed my attention: *The U.S. Is Deporting Children.*

The blurb that followed explained that since the pandemic has broken out, the United States has started a surge of deporting unaccompanied minors at our Southwestern border - without notifying their families, without contacting a social worker, without allowing them to plead for asylum. The article said this new practice “is abandoning protections that both Democratic and Republican presidents have granted to young migrants for decades. Federal officials are justifying the practices under a 1944 law that grants the president broad power to prevent the “serious threat” of a dangerous disease.” In other words, federal officials are exploiting the corona virus in order to fulfill their agenda.

My stomach sank when I read this news and my eyes filled with tears. I felt angry at those who are abusing their power in this way, heartbroken for these children and their families, and increasingly worried about what other human rights abuses were ramping up that we are

unaware of. What other ways is this pandemic being used to exploit people? What other vulnerable populations are being victimized?

There is an old saying that you should preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, and it has never felt truer than this week. I found myself wondering how we are called to work for justice when the world around us is unraveling. When our access to our networks and resources feels complicated, when navigating this new virtual world is exhausting, when there are not just the issues we have always cared about but new ones on top of those, how do we respond? What does justice look like during a pandemic? How do we keep our focus and commitment to peacemaking and justice seeking from unraveling with everything else?

When I came across today's story from Exodus and heard it in relationship to all that is unraveling around us, it struck a chord. It was the chord of a gong clanging and saying, 'There is a hard truth in this ancient story that is still true today! This is the Bible story to match the newspaper headlines!"

This is a story of a ruler who is presented, again and again, with the opportunity to liberate people from their enslavement, and instead chooses to maintain control and power. Moses is appealing to Pharaoh to free the Israelites. He demonstrates God's power and pleads with him to side with a God of love instead of keeping the Israelites enslaved and cut off from their land. He shows Pharaoh that his actions will cause him to have blood on his hands, blood on his people, blood polluting their water sources. Pharaoh does not listen. His heart is hardened and he will only hear the words of people who confirm what he already believed. Because of this, the Israelites continue to suffer. The Egyptians who are under the power of Pharaoh suffer through their complicity, bystanders of the blood that sweeps through their land.

This story resonates with so much of my frustration and sorrow during this pandemic. The pandemic has changed a lot of things, and put a lot of plans on hold, but it has not stopped oppression. It has not put a pause on discrimination. It has not told racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism that they will need to reschedule their plans and wait until next year to spread. In fact, the pandemic has exacerbated these issues. It has created new manifestations of old injustices such as access to healthcare and protection of workers and care of vulnerable populations.

In the story, Moses persists even when the Pharaoh's heart is hardened. We know that he tries again, and again, and again, until his people are liberated. We know that the excerpt we read is not the full story, but that it unfolded over many years and had setbacks, losses, grief upon grief, and even when they were free, more challenges to face. And still they persisted. Still they fought for liberation. Still they tried to turn the Pharaoh's heart - to turn corruption into compassion, oppression into freedom.

There is a lot that has been taken from people during this pandemic, but we still have the strength of our spirits, and we still have our passion for justice. We need to hold on and sustain our strength and passion. We need to keep showing up and persisting in the face of injustice. Our actions look different these days. We're not called to march in the streets or go door to door but we can show up in other ways. We can share the stories we read. We can do the work of advocacy, calling and writing letters to our representatives who have the power to change corrupt policies. We can keep learning and unearthing the oppression that so many want to keep hidden.

The good news is if there is a justice issue you have been curious about or want to learn more on, this is the perfect time. Every advocacy agency or community organizing group is

offering free webinars and learning opportunities to engage the wider public in new ways and teach us how to mobilize.

There is a progressive Christian band called Lost and Found. One of their most popular songs is called “Lions.” It goes, “Oh them lions they can eat my body/but they can't swallow my soul.” The work of justice is soul feeding work.

The point isn’t to impress the Pharaoh. The point is to keep showing up for love, to keep advocating, to continue feeding our soul with our faith that transcends this season of life. Edgewood’s mission statement says that “Following the life, spirit and teaching of Jesus, we welcome all as we commit to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with God.” This mission does not depend on a building or committee meeting. This is the mission that follows us through every season, no matter how life unravels. We commit to do justice. We love kindness. And we walk humbly with God. Amen.