

Needed: Justice In Addition to Love

Political considerations aside, I assume that most of us gathered here tonight are somewhat amazed and absolutely delighted that Barack Hussein Obama is President-elect of the United States! All of a sudden, much of a country facing two wars, a sinking economy, a warming planet, a problematic health care system, and major energy needs is again optimistic and upbeat. *The New York Times* has noted, "A new era has arrived in a country where just 143 years ago, Mr. Obama, as a black man, could have been owned as a slave." It was just over 50 years ago that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus; about forty years ago Martin Luther King, Jr. and others risked their lives in the march for civil rights and the right to vote. I recall a lecture in the 1970s by a black Yale professor, who startled an audience with his observation that the major issue which black movements toward justice have to deal with is that black people are indeed human beings! **Nonetheless, full justice for black citizens here and globally remains a work in progress.**

If you will, please consider another United States justice issue, that of female citizens. According to "The National Women's History Project website," some early stages of this continuing revolution have included: **1769** - American colonies based their laws on the English common law, which included the notion that by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in the law; the very being and legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated into that of her husband under whose wing and protection she performs everything.

1777 - All states pass laws which take away women's right to vote.

1789 - United States Constitution ratified. The terms "persons," "people" and "electors" are used, allowing the interpretation of those beings to include men and women.

1839 - The first state (Mississippi) grants women the right to hold property in their own name, with their husbands' permission.

1848 - The first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York. After 2 days of discussion and debate, 68 women and 32 men sign a "Declaration of Sentiments," which outlines grievances and sets the agenda for the women's rights movement. A set of 12 resolutions was adopted calling for equal treatment of women and men under the law and voting rights for women.

Full justice for female citizens of the United States and elsewhere remains a work in progress.

Of additional interest to many worshipping here this evening is the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual & Transgender movement. The nation's origins of this group of citizens working for change may be traced to 1924 with the establishment in Chicago of "The Society for Human Rights" - the country's earliest known gay rights organization. And, in June of 1969 the Stonewall riots transformed the gay rights movement from one limited to a small number of activists into a widespread protest for equal rights and acceptance. Patrons of a gay bar in New York's Greenwich Village, the Stonewall Inn, fight back during a police raid, sparking three days of riots. And, in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association's Board of Trustees removed homosexuality from its official diagnostic manual; that is just 35 years ago.

In 1999 at Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford, I was in conversation with Canon Clinton Jones, a friend and colleague who died almost 3 years ago at age 89. We reminisced about his pioneering ministry to "sexual minorities" during his sixty years as a specially trained psychotherapist. In the 1970s he and I had participated in an unannounced Missouri meeting arranged by our House of Bishops dealing with gay Episcopal clergy. Louie Crew, the lay founder of Integrity, was there as was a mix of heterosexual and homosexual laypeople and clergy - numbering in all about twenty. After our reminiscing, I remarked to Canon Jones how love and understanding were more evident now than ever before in our Connecticut diocese, that significant progress was being made. Never one to become complacent, he responded by saying resolutely, "Yes, but now what is needed is *justice!*" Clearly, love and understanding are very important, but not a stopping point.

Justice: love in action. Justice: the distribution of *basic* economic, social, legal, and political rights to all deserving. Justice: providing what is fair and deserved in evenhanded ways. Justice: the exclusion of arbitrary power, favoritism, and discrimination on irrelevant differences. Justice: so inseparable from the love of God, neighbor and oneself that Amos the prophet chastised his people for its absence from religious practices and considerations. “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.” (Amos 5:18ff.) Justice, so inseparable from the love of God, neighbor and oneself that the prophet Micah proclaimed, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8) Both worship and justice were necessary for Israel’s life and well-being.

This past week’s approvals of “Amendment 2” in Florida and of “Proposition 8” in California are disappointing, symptomatic setbacks for many United States citizens. Without trivializing their effects, I would like to quote others’ wisdom and hopefulness.

NYU’s *Washington Square News* (Nov. 5) Nathaniel Frank, adjunct professor at NYU said support for California’s Proposition 8 ballot initiative is “indicative of the way social progress in the United States usually works — one step forward, two steps back.” ‘One thing it means is that the religious right was able to mobilize an enormous amount of money. The religious right has been a highly organized community for quite a bit of time now, and this is a reminder that they’re still a force to be reckoned with,’ Frank said. ‘It also implies that progress in this country is accompanied by some kind of backlash. It would also imply that Americans are still very ambivalent about gay rights and what to do about gays in this culture. California is a solid blue state, but even there, that ambivalence is obviously present.’”

From the Human Rights Campaign (Nov. 6) - “I vow to you today that the HRC will not give up, nor will we retreat. Moving forward, HRC will:

“Continue our efforts to win incremental victories for relationship recognition, so that legally married lesbian and gay couples in Massachusetts and Connecticut have full standing under federal law; the same holds true for civil unions and domestic partnerships in places like New Hampshire, Vermont and Oregon.

“Use amendments and other legislative vehicles in Congress to establish growing equality for LGBT Americans under federal tax, Social Security, pension, insurance and other laws – piecing together as many of the rights of marriage as we can until the full victory is achieved in years to come.”

Finally, from a letter in the *New York Times*, “It was especially heart-warming that President-elect Obama mentioned a united America that includes gay and straight people in his victory speech in Chicago. That is a major step forward toward ensuring rights for all people, regardless of their sexual orientation.”

Full justice for LGBT citizens, for people of color, and for women of the United States and elsewhere remains a work in progress. Discerning the will of God, the prophet Amos rightly demands it. We *are* on the way, however slowly. Full justice *is* evolving to the extent that human beings will respond and participate. Progressing toward fully loving God, one’s neighbor, and oneself entails moving ahead toward full justice. You and I will not see the end result in the distant future, but as one who has experienced justice unfolding in ways I never dreamed of in my youth, I remain hopeful and will not allow inevitable setbacks to defeat my optimism for the long haul. I urge you to ask for and accept God’s grace for courage, for strength to cope, and for the wisdom to know how, each in our own unique ways, to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”