

MUSKEGON COUNTY COOPERATING CHURCHES
SEPTEMBER 2022 PEACE AND JUSTICE BLOG



Dear friends,

When I volunteered to write a few words for this Peace and Justice blog, I was not aware that it would be coming to you just before what my denomination, the United Church of Christ, has designated as Just Peace Sunday. I thought you might be interested in what the UCC website has to say about the reason for that designation.

Just Peace isn't a destination, but the path to the prophet's envisioned "Beloved Community". The challenge is to faithfully examine ourselves, our community and our culture for the thorns of racial inequity and economic injustice that choke off the sprouting harvest of God's Spirit. We need to sort the seed from the thistle. Our need for justice and peace is as urgent today as in the Pharaoh's brick yards of Exodus. (<https://www.ucc.org/a-just-world-calendar/>)

That brought to mind something I have shared from the pulpit from time to time. Many years ago, my mom sent a clipping of a newspaper comic strip. It was so long ago it has been lost to several moves, and I can't remember the name of the strip or the artist to give proper credit. But the gist of it goes like this. Two guys are kicking back at the base of a tree, looking up at the sky, and one says to the other, "Seems like something's bothering you; what's up?" The second one replies, "Oh, I am sort of wondering how a God who claims to be just, and loving could allow so much pain and suffering and injustice to go on in the world without doing anything about it!" So, the first guy says, "Well, why don't you just ask God that?" And the second guy replies, "That's what's bothering me; I'm afraid God will ask me the same question."

The thing is, that is exactly what God is asking of us who claim to be followers of Christ. I don't have the room here to even begin to catalogue the things Scripture tells us about that, but Matthew 25 comes to mind immediately. You know that bit about "the Judgment of the Nations", starting at verse 31. Now I know, we often turn this into a judgment day at the end of time scenario. Even used that way, it has always bothered me. I mean, I was raised on "faith, not works, call on the Name of Jesus and be saved", and so on, and here is Jesus saying the blessed of his Father are those who have fed the hungry and given the thirsty something to drink, who welcomed the stranger, cared for the sick, and visited those in prison.

And those who have not done these things, he calls, "you who are accursed."
Sounds disturbingly contemporary to me.

The thing is, the good news part of the Gospel is that, in God's grace, it is not too late to change. So let us ask ourselves, "What do I, and we collectively as church and society, need to do differently?" And get on with it.

Blessings to each of you on that journey.

The Reverend Tim VanderHaar is the Senior pastor at First Congregational UCC, Muskegon. He is also a Board Member/Treasurer and Member of Peace and Justice Committee of Muskegon County Cooperating Churches.