

## Sermon: Jesus in Gethsemane: The Brokenness of Abandonment

### Scripture: Luke 22:39-46

He'd lived with them for three years. They'd been through so much together. Running from angry mobs, to feeding thousands with just a few fish and some bread. They spoke to the rejected, touched the untouchables, and healed them from their demons. But now when he begins to face his most difficult challenge in his life, they are asleep. And he feels abandoned. I'm not talking about feeling lonely, like the woman at the well we spoke of last week, Jesus is abandoned. He is left to his own. Left on his own to face trial, to face crucifixion, left on his own to die. How can this be? It's not right, he would never abandon them, he has proved that time and time again. His only hope is that one day his disciples will learn and not abandon his Father's will.

We know they will learn, and set a precedent for us as the Church.

It is no coincidence that the scripture and window I am preaching on Peace with Justice Sunday is this text, because to me, justice is about *not* abandoning others in their time of need. In fact I prefer to call it Peace with Social Justice Sunday as I have come across this definition of social justice, that I shared with you before: "Social justice is achieved when one person comes alongside another to ensure mutual welfare and well-being. To come alongside another human being does not necessarily mean that we get to invite into our place of comfort. Rather, it means entering into another's suffering. We cannot experience a shared sense of justice until we have recognized where injustice occurs — until we have recognized where inequality exists because of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, education, legal status, economic background, and mental or physical ability". - Rev. Ryan Dunn Minister of Online Engagement for Rethink Church.<sup>1</sup>

As you can see, the opposite of abandonment. That is our calling as disciples of Jesus, that is our calling as United Methodists.

Now, you may or may not be familiar with John Wesley and the Methodist movement, but I would like to remind you why social justice defines us as a denomination. John Wesley was an Anglican priest, that is a pastor of the Church of England in the 1700's. However he saw that while the Church received its followers Sunday mornings, little was being done to assist those whom Jesus would have reached out to, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned. So Wesley wanted to "awaken and cultivate the faith of the masses in the Church of England"<sup>2</sup>. He did so by forming covenant groups that met weekly to pray for each other and to encourage one another in three general rules: doing no harm; by doing good; and stay in love with God by attending upon all the ordinances of God.<sup>3</sup> (meaning going to church, studying scripture, tithing, etc).

Further Wesley had hoped not only for a personal transformation for each Christian but Wesley also expected members "to model a pattern of holiness and love for the larger society".<sup>4</sup> This came out in ways that worked to set things right. For instance, John Wesley was adamantly opposed to slavery, and therefore encouraged the Methodists to support abolition, which they did, assisting in the changes of law in England. John Wesley and the Methodists also visited the sick and infirmed, as well as the imprisoned.

What really troubled Wesley was the debtors prison. Because if the husband of the house was in prison due to debt, the wife would not be able to care for her family, and this lead to families being separated and children forced into orphanages or worse child workhouses (which Wesley opposed as well). It had an awful effect on society at large, men, women, and children, being abandoned over debts.

So Wesley created credit unions with the Methodists. By doing so, families could seek assistance from the Methodists, who would loan the money to pay off debts, and would assist family in paying their loans off.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.umc.org/en/content/what-is-social-justice>

<sup>2</sup> Gonzalez, Justo L. The Story of Christianity: Volume 2 The Reformation to the Present Day. HarperSanFrancisco. 1985. P.213.

<sup>3</sup> Outler, Albert. John Wesley. Oxford University Press: New York. 1964. P.178-179.

<sup>4</sup> Outler, Albert. John Wesley. Oxford University Press: New York. 1964. P.178-179.

That's our origins, our beginning, working towards a social justice that is right, fair, and peaceful. And as you heard at the beginning of our service, today, we continue that ministry as The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society holds a non-governmental, consultative status with the United Nations. This status allows us to participate in UN meetings and conferences to open the doors of opportunity for all, to distribute resources more equitably, and to provide better care for persons in need.<sup>5</sup>

And the gifts we give to this offering for Peace with Justice Sunday live that goal out in places like the Philippines, where United Methodists address systemic poverty by providing a sustainable source of organic, healthy foods for the surrounding community by using a portion of their conference's land to develop bullfrog, tree orchard and range chicken production; duck, goat, hog and quail raising; inland fish ponds; mushroom culture and management; and organic vegetable farming.

Another way your gifts assist is they helped to establish an anti-violence program between Washington D.C.'s Hughes UMC and Howard University School of Law. They formed an after-school program to help at-risk children and youth who live in the community surrounding the church called C.A.P Community Anti-violence Project. The C.A.P. after-school program seeks to help the children who live around the church to dream big dreams and to achieve their dreams by preparing them holistically — physically, mentally, emotionally and intellectually.

And in Michigan your gifts support a program called HON, Helping Our Neighbors, a community engagement ministry in Kalamazoo. HON initially targeted assistance to those facing utility shut-off and/or eviction notices for failure to keep up with utility, rent, or mortgage payments. But moved by regular contact with persons living in homelessness and other challenging circumstances, the HON volunteers have learned by asking, "What do you need?" Many of those they have come to know in their service said, "We need a reliable way to communicate with persons and places that are essential for our safety and welfare." So HON reached out to the local Cricket cell phone stores, who partnered with them, and now they provided cell phones with coverage. Dick Shilts, a volunteer of the program, knows this ministry is making a significant impact on the lives of those who have received this gift. He has already received feedback about one person who used the cell phone to apply for a job and has begun working regularly at a Kalamazoo store conveniently located near a bus route. Another has used their new phone to call for 911 to come and help deliver a new baby. Someone has used the phone to call for help in a medical emergency. Grateful recipients have shared with him how much it means to be able to stay connected to the wider world.

Peace with Justice calls the church to advocate publicly in communities and nations throughout the world. It aims to make God's presence visible and active in people's lives and communities by walking alongside the abandoned: the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned, and the poor.

Going back to John Wesley. Wesley had such a heart for the abandoned that it was said when he died, he died penniless because he gave everything to the people in need. And in tradition of the passing of an Anglican priest, black cloth would be made to cover the local church's windows as a sign of mourning, but Wesley made the church promise to reuse that cloth to be made into clothes for the poor. Which they did. And Wesley's last words? "The best of all, God is with us".

Friends social justice is about proving that belief, that we are never alone, God is with us, just as God was with Jesus in that garden. And God's presence is never made as clear as when God's will is proven in what we, the church of Jesus Christ, say and do. When we walk alongside others, when we help one another in a time of trial.

I want to close today by inviting you to join me in this reading of our Social Creed, first written in 1908, but recently adapted to this version in 2016.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.umc.org/en/content/peace-with-justice-sunday-ministry-article>

## OUR SOCIAL CREED AND COMPANION LITANY

God in the Spirit revealed in Jesus Christ, calls us by grace to be renewed in the image of our Creator, that we may be one in divine love for the world. Today is the day God cares for the integrity of creation, wills the healing and wholeness of all life, weeps at the plunder of earth's goodness.

**And so shall we.**

Today is the day God embraces all hues of humanity, delights in diversity and difference, favors solidarity transforming strangers into friends.

**And so shall we.**

Today is the day God cries with the masses of starving people, despises growing disparity between rich and poor, demands justice for workers in the marketplace.

**And so shall we.**

Today is the day God deplores violence in our homes and streets, rebukes the world's warring madness, humbles the powerful and lifts up the lowly.

**And so shall we.**

Today is the day God calls for nations and peoples to live in peace, celebrates where justice and mercy embrace, exults when the wolf grazes with the lamb.

**And so shall we.**

Today is the day God brings good news to the poor, proclaims release to the captives, gives sight to the blind, and sets the oppressed free.

**And so shall we.**

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