

“Don’t Sit On Charity”  
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God loves **you**

God loves you when you are broken hearted

God loves you when your life is full of joy

God loves you when you accept who you are and learn to love yourself

God loves you when you doubt God’s love

God is with us when we try and fight for Justice and Peace.

Out New Testament reading was from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

To give you an idea of the magnitude of this sermon Gandhi, a Hindu who gave his life for peace and justice, said that it was the greatest sermon ever preached.

It opens:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

This statement begs the question “Why does the kingdom of God belong to the poor?”  
**SURELY, No earthly kingdom belongs to the poor.**

Kingdoms by definition belong to kings. It’s right there in the title “KING”-dom.

To have a kingdom belong to the poor would REQUIRE A COMPLETE reversal of societal roles. Jesus believes that the poor should be treated with the utmost care and respect, the respect usually shown towards a KING.

To create this kind of a society we as Christians will have to get beyond acts of Charity and begin to work towards JUSTICE for the oppressed.

CHARITY is often about undoing the harmful effects of unjust societies. Perhaps a new twist on an old adage will help explain what I mean.

An act of CHARITY is giving a man a fish so that he can eat.

A bigger act of CHARITY is teaching a man to fish.

A JUST act is setting up a school in his neighborhood to teach everyone in his community to fish.

The difference is that the JUST act addresses the larger social issue. It asks a deeper WHY? question.

Why doesn't this man have the life skills he needs to survive? Why are there fishing schools in some cities and not others?

We also we need to ask how we are involved in these situations. Are we doing or not doing things to hurt the poor? Are we making sure things are equal for everyone?

Sometimes we hurt our global neighbors when we don't even mean to.

Let me tell you a story to highlight this point a bit more.

In a town in rural Vermont there was a young entrepreneur named Thomas who, at a young age, had made quite a bit of money in the stock market and now lived on a hobby farm and attended the local church.

He was a generous and respected man. He was hard working and through monitoring his investments he was able to live a modest lifestyle and enjoy maintaining his small farm.

He was a respected member in his congregation, known for lending a helping hand at most church functions. He was ESPECIALLY known for his ability to set up and then clean up church potlucks in record speed. No one was quite sure how he did it so fast, there was a rumor that he brought in outside help, although nothing was ever confirmed.

Despite his knack for cleaning, He was most known for was the annual fundraiser for the poor of India. He spearheaded the fundraiser which helped raise funds to pay the school fees of children whose families could not afford tuition. The church responded ever year with increasing donations. Each year they were able to help more children.

The event had begun with one family. It was this family that Thomas would give regular updates on. Thomas would share how the tuition fees had helped the Indian family sent all three daughters to school each year and how they were growing up so fast and all the sorts of things people say about relatives they rarely see.

This year was the TENTH anniversary of Thomas' fundraiser. Since the eighth year Thomas had been pondering how to make this year special. He thought about bringing in some Indian artifacts he bought on Ebay. Or perhaps having a drama by the youth group where they would dress up like the family and share about how the donations had changed their lives.

But as the day approached he woke up in the middle of the night and realized what had to be done.

(Pause)

HE would fly to India and meet the first Indian family and then come back and report his first hand experiences of Indian poverty. It was perfect.

Pause

However, things were not perfect for the Indian family. Life was difficult and they seemed to be stuck in poverty. The family's greatest joys were their daughters. The daughters of the family were becoming beautiful young women.

Their names were MADHU, MADHUBALA, and NANDITA meaning honey, sweet girl, and happy respectively.

As you may expect they were happy and sweet girls who were charished and loved by their parents and neighbors.

The father was named AVINASH which means Indestructible and it was a good name for him because he seemed to be indestructible. He worked long hard days in a local sweat shop. He spent ten hours a day making T-Shirts with one simply three letter word on each shirt.

The word was English and he knew that the company was from America. The workers could often be heard muttering Indian curses on Americans. It was a common practice to say an individual curse on anyone who wore the particular T-shirt the worker was making at the time. AVINASH struggled with this sort of talk. He had mixed feelings about Americans.

On the one hand an American was helping put his daughters through school. This was such a blessing. But on the other hand, it was an American who owned the sweat shop he worked at. He received a wage that barely paid for his rent and food for his family. It did not pay him enough to save any money to buy a house or put his girls through school. In fact, the sweat shop was the reason he had to rely on the donations from Thomas' church.

When AVINASH heard that Thomas was coming to visit his family he was ecstatic. He was excited to show off his daughters to Thomas, to prove to him that his donations were not given in vain. He also hoped to explain to Thomas about his situation with the sweat shop. Maybe Thomas would have some money to help get HIM go to school and get a better job. AVINASH was hoping that Thomas would help create a situation where AVINASH did not have to rely on Thomas' donations.

The long awaited day came for Thomas to arrive. AVINASH's family cleaned the house and put on their best clothing. They all waited in eager expectation and excitement for Thomas' taxi to arrive.

Tears began to well up in the daughter's eyes as they saw his taxi turn onto their streets. AVINASH could barely maintain a dignified demeanor he was so joyful. The taxi parked in front of their house and Thomas stepped out with a big smile.

Unfortunately, the Indian families smiles were not able to meet Thomas' nor were they able to look him in the eyes. The look of joy faded into a look of confusion and horror when they saw three English letters printed on his T-shirt. AVINASH was crushed to see the same letters that had enslaved him in poverty on the man who claimed to be his friend.

Pause

In the story, Thomas acted charitably by raising money for AVINASH and his family, but Thomas was not living JUSTLY in other areas of his life. The annual fundraiser was a good thing to do, but what Thomas failed to realize was that he was making other choices in his life to keep the Indian family in poverty.

The JUST decision would have been to avoid purchasing items that were made in sweatshops AND raise money to help send children to school. Perhaps the fundraiser could also have helped raise awareness in the congregation about the problem of unfair wages in developing countries.

Now before you start to feel guilty about your spending habits. Or start to think that you got out of bed this morning just to hear me tell you about how terrible you are hear this. God loves you. We all are trying to live better lives.

I have another story.

[hold up hat] About a week ago I saw this hat at Target. It was made in China and 12.99. I didn't buy it at first because I knew I would be preaching this sermon and I wanted to be a good example. But then I had a bad week and this stupid hat was on my mind. So I bought it. I'm not sure where in China it was made, so I can't say it was a JUST purchase. However, it did make me feel quite a bit better...and my girlfriend said I looked hot in it...which also made me feel better.

I tell the second story to remind you that we are all part of the joys and struggles of trying to love our neighbor. It's hard to weigh out the good and bad, pro's and con's. I want you to hear me say "Don't beat yourself up." DO NOT BEAT YOURSELF UP. \

Remember that living Justly is a process. We are trying to follow Jesus...so don't expect yourself to be Jesus. And never forget that no matter what you do, God loves and accepts you.

The Sr. High students of Lynnhurst will be addressing questions of JUSTICE when we go to the Heifer Ranch this summer. We will attempt to turn the corner of charity towards justice. This service learning experience will help equip students to live justly,

love mercy, and walk humbly with God. It is my hope that the things we learn will spread throughout Lynnhurst and help inform all of us how to embody the values Jesus spoke of.