

A reading this morning from the epistle of Robert Shantz to the people of St John's West Toronto. Some thoughts on compassion and justice as essential components of a holy life.

Dear Friends,

I greet you in the name of Jesus, the Christ, the one who has been a constant source of inspiration and trustworthy guidance from changing age to age. Our worries and concerns are manifold, yet we come together as a community with confidence not in the certainty of our belief but with the conviction that the righteousness as seen in the life of Jesus is our guide to holy living. That is, we are committed to living a life guided by the principles of compassion and justice that are based on the Great Commandment to love God and our neighbour. Our wonderful and diverse religious and social backgrounds are united in living out this command.

Jesus calls us to follow the path that leads to life. It is a narrow path from which it is easy to fall away. We all have fallen and come short of God's glory but, thankfully, each of us has also stayed, at significant times, on the path and been witness to the power of love in our works of compassion and justice.

Just as we want others to listen carefully to the complex, beautiful and disturbing stories of who we are, we have likewise listened carefully to painful accounts of exclusion, economic inequality, grief and disappointment. No two stories are the same but too many have the sadly familiar themes of the experience of cruelty and injustice. There are those among us who have been silenced, excluded and persecuted because we are female, or gay, or poor, or not baptized, or of another race or creed. We bring these stories here to be heard and responded to with compassion and the willingness to work for change so that the pain is not repeated – that is for the sake of justice.

We know that injustice will not go away. We pray for the strength, wisdom and courage to be persistent and creative in our response to its pain in the stories of those near to us,

and those further away, across this city and around the world. Our desire to live a life of integrity requires courage, for our integrity often comes at a great personal cost. Thus, as we uphold the life of Jesus, we also hold up the cross as being part of that holy life. In faith, with our spiritual ancestors, we continue to proclaim that life is stronger than death.

We know that together we can work more effectively for justice as a people rather than as individuals. We dare to call ourselves the people of God committed to following the narrow path. We design our worship as a sign of the way a world of justice and compassion would be experienced. No one is turned away from any portion of the service. All are included. The pain we carry is carried by all, as is the hope to which we cling.

We are religious people but we know that our religious observance is not the center, not the main event of our religious lives. Rather, it is our response of compassion and justice seeking, as we live out the Great Commandment, that is the hallmark of our spirituality. Prayer and worship help us identify the narrow path. They guide and inspire us as we move along its way.

We are disciples of Jesus, the Christ, evangelists bringing the Good News. May our actions bear witness to the power of love.