



Matthew 25 Gathering 2017: Anglican Justice and Mercy Contending for Shalom

Erin Clifford – September 29, 2017

It's great to be with you this morning. We have heard and exchanged a lot of words, so my prayer in preparation for today has been that Jesus would speak *his* words, that I would decrease and he would increase, because he is so much cooler than I am, and he has so many more wise things to say than I do. That has been my prayer, and now I'll open us in prayer:

Lord, we come to you with full minds, full hearts. We come to you in preparation for what we're going back to. We ask, Lord, that you would clear out our minds and make some space for your words and your Spirit to speak to us, and we thank you that you are always speaking and that your message is always one of love. In Jesus's name, amen.

It has been such a joy to get to know so many of you. If I haven't met you, it's because I was avoiding you—no, just kidding. Like Albert, my sense of humor takes a little while to get used to, but you'll get there. No, I am sad that I didn't have a chance to really get to know some of you. One of the joys of being here at the second conference is that there were people I thought

that about the first time around, and now I've gotten to spend time with you *this* time around, so hopefully we'll all experience that joy the next time we're together.

I have been working for International Justice Mission, either as a volunteer or on staff, for about ten years now. The man who founded International Justice Mission is named Gary Haugen, and he tells a story that I love about when his kids were little and they were afraid of the dark. He started a tradition in the family called "charging the darkness." Gary would stand outside the kids' bedroom door, he'd get the kids behind him, he would yell "Charge!" and then he would run into the dark room. Of course, nothing would happen, and they'd all fall over laughing, and the kids would realize they had nothing to fear in the dark. I daresay that the work that each of you are doing, and the work of International Justice Mission, is charging the darkness. It's a work of taking the light of Christ, the Light of the World into dark places.

That can be tiring, and depending on how long you've been doing this, you have probably seen people you care about fall to the wayside along this journey. It's a spiritual battle that rages all the time. So how can we stay in it? How can we stay healthy? How can we contend? How can we persevere? How can we be together after Matthew 25 turns twenty-five years old, celebrating our victories and the fact that we're still charging the darkness with all of our hearts?

Eugene Peterson has a great title to his book *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. The book is good, but I love the title. It's a book about discipleship, but I feel like the title could also describe a book about the calling of justice and how you stick with it—seeking justice requires a long obedience in the same direction. It isn't always a string of victories that are achieved one

after the other. There are often long spaces of wilderness and desert between the places where God comes in and victoriously does his work.

I have been working this last year with one of my dear friends, Bill Haley, who you heard a bit from yesterday. He is one of my oldest, dearest friends, and we have been on mission together for many years with Coracle, which is a ministry that believes in spiritual formation for the purpose of kingdom action. At Coracle, we believe that God bears the fruit of justice and righteousness in us because that is God's job.

In that mission, we read a lot of different contemplatives, and one of our favorite quotes is from Thomas Merton and James Finley: Merton says, "How does an apple ripen? It just sits in the sun," and Finley reflects that "a small green apple cannot ripen in one night by tightening all its muscles, squinting its eyes, and tightening its jaw in order to find itself the next morning miraculously large, red, ripe, and juicy beside its small green counterparts."¹

Merton suggests that we must be like that apple: We must wait for God. We must be awake. We must trust in God's hidden action within us. We must sit in the sun. That's what we have hoped these last few days have been for you: a chance for all of us to just sit in the sun, bask in the presence of God, and let God ripen the fruit of justice and righteousness in us. That's God's job. That's God's fruit to bear.

¹ Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1978), 114.

But as action-oriented people, I'm sure most of us would confess that we're not very good at sitting. We're good at doing. We embrace the active role of activism. But I daresay that if we don't also embrace the difficulty of stopping and listening for the voice of God above all of the other cries around us and in us, we won't persevere in this work. If we tighten our muscles and try to do things ourselves, if we strive to become something, to make our ministry something we want it to be, we won't last.

So how do we hear the voice of God above all of the other voices? I think that's one of the keys to persevering, and I think we can find guidance in Matthew 23. This is a passage that some of you may use when you're sharing Jesus's own words with people about the priority of the work of justice. It's what I like to call Jesus's what-not-to-do-at-a-dinner-party passage.

Jesus, as we know from the parallel passage in Luke 11, is at a meal, and the guy who owns the house has become perturbed because he notices that Jesus has not washed his hands. Faithful Jews always start a meal by pouring water over their hands, cleansing themselves from the sin and the dirt of the world. But here's Jesus—I mean talk about the dirt of the world! He has been cleansing lepers and healing people. He has been surrounded by crowds of strangers, and yet he comes to this meal and doesn't wash his hands.

Then Jesus sees that the man who owns the house is very perturbed, and so he gives this message:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matt. 23:23–28)

As I said, this is not a speech to give at a dinner party. Discussing the work of justice is already awkward enough at a dinner party, but cursing the people who are not caring enough about justice is probably not the best way to go about that. Nonetheless, Jesus sharply addresses the Pharisees in the room as hypocrites. It's been called a *message of the woes*, but I see it as the message of *alas*, as a mournful cry of "Alas, alas, you're doing it all wrong." The Beatitudes show us the kingdom of God and how to follow Jesus; these woes show us what not to do.

I think one of the things that Jesus is warning us about is performance. The voice of performance is so easy for us to fall into, especially when we're faced with external voices. Perhaps we slip into that voice when our critics—I know you all don't have any of those—say this is not what

you should be doing with your life, your money, your church's mission, or when our donors say, "*This* is what you should be doing our money."

Jesus is talking about our priorities. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees," he says. "For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness." We know, of course, that tithing is a good thing; Jesus isn't saying, "Don't tithe." He's saying that the Pharisees have forgotten that there are more important things than tithing. He's showing, perhaps with some humor, that they're going to great extremes and tithing a tenth of their garden herbs, a tenth of things they're not even required to tithe, and yet they've forgotten the important things. They've concentrated on the trivial and forgotten justice and mercy. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Oh, *this* tithe? This is for me? I never asked for this. I asked for justice. I asked for faithfulness. I asked for mercy."

Those of you who are married may have experienced this in your life. This is the husband who goes out at Christmas and buys the weed whacker for the wife, even though she doesn't garden. The husband exclaims, "Merry Christmas, honey!" and the wife replies, "Oh, this is for me? I didn't ask for this." Likewise, Jesus is saying, "This is not my priority. You've forgotten my priorities. You care more about the voice of performance and how you'll appear to people."

This comes down to a question of who is in charge and whose priorities we are serving. As we used to say in Campus Crusade, "Who sits on the throne? Who's on the throne of your life?" Are there places where the external voices in our lives have overtaken the voice of God? Have our texts and emails overtaken the voice of God? Are there voices we're afraid to return to—perhaps

even the voices of the people we serve—because they feel louder and more powerful than the voice of Jesus?

The voice of performance can make our reputation, respect, or religiosity a priority over the kind of fast the Father has chosen. As N. T. Wright has said, the Jews here would have immediately recognized that when Jesus mentioned justice, mercy, and faithfulness, he was alluding to Micah 6:8. They would have heard that the fast the Father *has* chosen is to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

One of the Hebrew words for justice is *mishpat*. It occurs more than two hundred times in the Old Testament, and it means to acquit or to punish a person on the merits of the case, regardless of their race or their social status. Tim Keller says *mishpat* is giving people what they're due, whether that's punishment, protection, care, or their rights.²

Whenever *mishpat* makes an appearance in the Old Testament, it's accompanied by the *quartet of the vulnerable*. We heard about three of these vulnerable groups last night. They include widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor. Today, of course, this quartet could be expanded to include refugees, migrant workers, elderly people, single parents, homeless people, individuals with no social power, and people who live at a subsistence level.

² Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2010), 3.

As Scripture says, the justness of a society, its *mishpat*, depends heavily on how a society treats this quartet of the vulnerable. A society isn't just seen as a bit uncharitable or unmerciful if they don't serve the vulnerable; they are seen as completely unjust.

I'm often asked why should we care about vulnerable people. The answer is, of course, because God cares about them. How many times in Scripture is God introduced as the Father to the fatherless, the defender of widows? This is one of the main things God does. God identifies with the powerless. God takes up their cause.

The other word we know for justice in the Hebrew is *tsdaqah*. This is often translated as "righteous" or "righteousness," but it could just as easily be translated as "justice," particularly in the New Testament. When we see that word in Scripture we normally think of moral righteousness, sexual chastity, dedication to prayer, or reading Scripture, but it's actually much more about having right relationships, not only with one another, within the church, or with God but also with society. *Tsdaqah* calls us to conduct our relationships with fairness, generosity, and equity—with justice. Indeed, a number of scholars will say, particularly in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied."

You may be saying, "Erin, why in the world are you talking about this with us? As practitioners of justice, we're the ones who get rolled out onstage every time we need to do a Sunday on compassion or mission or to explain what exactly justice is and why God cares about it. Why would you be explaining this to us? Why would we even need to talk about that? You're preaching to the choir."

Ironically, I've found that as practitioners of justice and mercy ministries, as those who seek shalom, we are often the first ones to forget that this is God's idea and not ours. This is actually who God is, the defender of the widow and the fatherless. God makes homes for the orphan. God is the one who requires that we leave resources for the poor. This is God's idea, not ours.

God has given us a passion for this. God has given us the ability to lay down our lives for it. Many of us have said multiple times, "Lord, here I am. Send me," but it is God who goes before us. It is *God's* mission. They are *God's* resources and *God's* fruit that *God* has to bear in us as we sit in the sun. And that means that it's all the more important to hear God's voice.

There's this great book, *The Justice Calling*, which was co-written by the woman who started our Institute for Biblical Justice at International Justice Mission (and who happens to be David's sister), and in it she writes the following:

Perseverance comes as we recognize more fully that justice begins in the heart of God, not in our faltering ideas and intentions, our anger at injustice, our desire to make a difference, our frustration, our ambition, our sadness in the face of pain, or our desire to please others or do what others are doing. Justice that perseveres is justice that is intimately connected to our life in Christ.³

This passage shows how Jesus commands us to love and seek justice, not as frantic and reactive

³ Hanke Hoang and Deede Johnson, *The Justice Calling: Where Passion Meets Perseverance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 190.

producers of justice but rather as bearers of the fruit that *Jesus* is producing, fruit that will be borne *through* us not *because* of us. The work of justice is guaranteed to bring discouragement (I know none of you have felt that before), sleeplessness (again, you probably can't relate), intense questioning, physical danger, roadblocks, and spiritual attacks, and it's nearly impossible to sustain an impulsive and emotionally driven response over the long haul.

We've all seen that. We've seen people who've gotten into the work of justice because it seemed sexy or trendy or cool, as well as people who are overwhelmed with compassion for others. But those motivations won't lead to perseverance. This is God's mission. We are following God's voice in this work. Thus, we need to be planted by those streams of living water. Psalm 1:3 says, "That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers." In Hebrew, that passage says we are to be replanted by streams of water, we are to be picked up and put by the stream of living water. This is always an encouragement to me when I find myself farther away from that stream of living water than I want to be, than I know I need to be. I can be replanted next to that stream of living water. Whatever I do will prosper.

That's a good strategic plan, right? Tell your board that when they ask what you are going to do this year: "I'm going to be planted by streams of living water, and whatever I do is going to prosper. I'm going to bear great fruit." And yet there *is* truth in that. The voice of God is what bears that fruit in us. We must be replanted by streams of living water.

I'm going to date myself here, but do you remember those old dot-matrix printers with the infinitely long sheets of paper that were great for making banners? Imagine that we had one of those printers here today and that it was printing out all of the messages that have come at us in the last few days, all of the internal and external voices we've heard, all of the texts and emails and conversations and Scripture.

When I first became a Christian, I had the New King James Version of the Precious Moments children's Bible. It was filled with *thees* and *thous*, and what I loved about that Bible—what I still love—was the red lettering for the words of Jesus. I loved seeing the words of Jesus pop off the page. Sometimes when I was little, I would just read those red letters.

Now, returning to that long sheet of printed paper—if we looked at that banner, how much of it would be red? How much of it would be the voice of God? Would the red letters overtake all of the other voices or vice versa? How do we tune ourselves again to the voice of Jesus so we can stay in this for the long haul?

Another voice I think we tend to listen to is the voice that's focused on self, and this is what Jesus is talking about when he discusses washing the inside of the cup. He is saying that the Pharisees wash the exterior but inside they are full of self-indulgence. He doesn't mince words when he tells them what's wrong with them. "Moral flabbiness" is how the New Testament for Everyone translates it.

This passage shows how ritualism has replaced a living relationship with God—that’s where that image of the gnat and the camel comes in. I’ve always loved this imagery, which actually happens to be a pun in the original language. Jesus describes a priest who is straining the wine of unclean gnats before doing a ceremony so that the wine will be pure, and Jesus tells the Pharisees, “You’re straining out the gnats. You’re so particular, so careful to make this thing look good and clean on the outside, but inwardly you’ve swallowed the largest, most unclean animal on earth: a camel.”

We too can get lost in ourselves, lost in thinking, “This is *my* ministry. *I’m* the one who needs resources. These are *my* ideas, God.” My old vicar, who first trained me in England, used to say, “Erin has ten ideas before breakfast,” and it’s true. I’m an idea person. I have a lot of ideas, and they are not all great. But I’m very attached to them, of course, because they’re *my* ideas. We can do that in the work of justice. We can have great ideas, but what are *God’s* ideas and what are *our* ideas?

I had a friend who was driving his kids to school, a seven-year-old daughter and a six-year-old son. On the way to school, they passed a gambling shop, and his kids asked him what it was. So as you do, he began a conversation about the weighty topic of addiction on the way to school. He tried to explain that an addiction is when you love something so much that it becomes unhealthy; you love it so much you never want to let go of it.

His daughter chimed said, “Well, then, I’m addicted to my guinea pigs.”

“Well, okay,” he said. “Maybe you could love your guinea pigs so much and be so focused on them that you forgot about God. That could be a bad addiction.”

The daughter got really excited about this idea and started to list her top-ten addictions. First was God, because she had just realized that’s the best one to put first. Second was her guinea pig. Third was her mother. Fourth was Patch, her brother’s guinea pig. And then finally she got to nine. Dad was nine. He made the list.

Then my friend’s son, the six-year-old who had been quite quiet and hadn’t really been saying anything, suddenly announced, “I’m addicted to me.”

Aren’t we all? It’s so easy to put the voice of *us* and what *we* want and *our* ideas and *our* vision before the voice of God.

Another voice that gets in the way is the voice of power, the desire for control. I’m sure there are not any control freaks in the room. I’m sure we’re all just chill, and whatever happens happens, but some people struggle with this, so I’ll talk about it anyway. Now, power is not necessarily bad—the Spirit is powerful—it’s how *we use* our power that can be bad.

A lot of people say to me, “Oh, Erin, I don’t have any power. I don’t have a high-ranking job.” But all of us have power. We all have a sphere of influence over which God has given us some power. As we talked about on the first night, issues of injustice are always about power, about

the misuse of one person's power over another person, regardless of how small that misuse may seem to the powerful.

In this passage, Jesus is ultimately talking about power. He's saying that the Pharisees' hypocrisy comes from their misuse of power. In a sense, this kind of misuse is more dangerous because they're leaders, because as they listen to a voice that's not the voice of Jesus, they lead other people astray.

When the pilgrims would come to Jerusalem, they would paint all of the tombs white so nobody would accidentally trip over them—you wouldn't want to touch a tomb because it's full of unclean bodies—and that's the image Jesus uses to describe the Pharisees. He's saying, "Your leadership is so corrupt and you've misused your power so greatly that you're like whitewashed tombs as leaders, and those who follow you are unclean just because they follow you."

Justice and injustice always necessitate conversations about power, which is why justice can be awkward to talk about with people. These conversations make people uncomfortable because they suggest that someone has misused their power. Sin has been involved.

Of course, it's easy for us to point our finger at the perpetrators of injustice around us, or at broken systems, and we need to play a part in changing those things, but I think that as workers of justice and mercy and shalom it's also good for us, as Daniel said the first night, to check ourselves. Where have we misused our power, even in small ways, to take from someone the good God intended for them? How have we marred their reputation, their life, their freedom, or

God's love? We must recognize that we have the ability, just as much as the perpetrators of injustice that we fight against, to do injustice.

The next voice that we encounter is despair. This is a loud voice for those of us who work in areas of injustice. I have to admit I feel despair sometimes at International Justice Mission. There are forty-six million people enslaved today, and every time I say that to a group of people I feel despair. Forty-six million people.

This line of work makes it easy to listen to the voice of despair and self-pity, to the voice that complains, "That person got all that money for their building. What about me? That person got their Matthew 25 grant. What about me? There are too many homeless in this neighborhood. How will we ever care for them with the resources we have?" Despair, despair, despair.

Despair, like the other voices we've discussed, is the voice of the enemy. The voice of despair never comes from God.

Even Paul felt despair, which I find encouraging. In 2 Corinthians 1:8–9, he says this:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Our hope is the voice of God, and that voice of hope is always trying to break through that voice of despair.

I went to a conference last month on prayer, and I was sitting in a room of about thirty people. We were in a morning Bible study, and the woman leading our group told us we were going to spend some time in silence listening to the voice of God, some time to sit in the sun a bit. As we prayed, she told us to ask for the name that God calls us, to ask what aspects of our lives God celebrates. “What’s your name?” she asked.

As she was giving these instructions, I saw a man sitting with his wife a couple of people down from the woman who was leading our group. I’d never seen the man before, but in that moment he caught my eye, and I felt the Lord say, “He is an oak of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for his splendor. He needs to know that he is valuable in my kingdom.”

I remember thinking to myself, “Lord, this is about me. I’m supposed to be listening and hearing your word. You’re supposed to give *me* a name. I don’t want to worry about this guy. I’ll find him later and tell him his word later, but let’s focus on me, Jesus. This is about me.”

We went through the exercise, and then as the day went on I couldn’t find the guy. Around lunchtime I saw his wife, and I thought, “Where she is, he is,” so I followed her. When I finally saw the man, I said to him, “Hey, we were in a group this morning together, and when the leader said to listen for our names, I felt like the Lord said you are an oak of righteousness.”

The man began to weep, and his wife began to weep. I've learned that in these situations it's best to just keep going, so I continued, saying, "You are an oak of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for his splendor, and the Lord told me to tell you that you are valuable in his kingdom, and you need to know how valuable you are in his kingdom."

Again, there were a lot of tears and then he said, "Erin, you don't know how much that means to me. This morning when we began that exercise and the woman said 'Listen for what God calls you—'" He paused for a moment and then continued: "I haven't heard from God in so long. I've been in a desert. I was in despair. I just felt this sense of fear come over me in that moment, and I said to the Lord, 'Lord, I'm desperate for you. I'm desperate for you to tell me my name.'"

"I went through the exercise," he said, "And I never heard anything. I left feeling so discouraged. But God told you my name."

Isn't God weird like that? It would have been a lot easier just to tell the man directly, but he uses us, and the Holy Spirit uses us, to encourage each other, to be the voice of God to one another, to pull each other out of despair.

That man had been a pastor for twenty-five years and in a particular parachurch ministry for ten years. But he'd just been let go, and he was in despair. He felt not at all valuable to the kingdom. He didn't know what God had for him. He'd lost his identity as a pastor and a minister. The words God gave me about the man echo the words of Isaiah 61, a passage that promises that

when the Messiah comes, he will bring us a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Even Paul, three chapters later, after talking about being in despair himself, says this:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. [...] For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus's sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Cor. 4:7–8, 11)

I love that. We are perplexed but not despairing. That's a good word for me. I'm hearing from the Lord, "Erin, don't despair about the world, the wider church, or our denomination. Just be perplexed." So that's what I'm going to take to the Lord: "I'm perplexed, Lord."

Lastly, there's the voice of shame. There is a lot of great writing about shame. Our brother mentioned that last night. Brené Brown has done some great work on how the antidote to the voice of shame is vulnerability.⁴

Another person who has done some great work in this area is Curt Thompson, a Christian counselor and psychologist in DC who wrote a great book called *The Soul of Shame*. He discusses the idea of a shame attendant, kind of like your own personal Siri who wakes up with you in the morning, sending you messages of shame. But unlike Siri, shame is not helpful. The

⁴ See for example, Brown, "The Power of Vulnerability," TEDxHouston, June 2010, https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.

shame attendant is actually there for your disintegration, whispering to you as the day goes on for that purpose. Here's how he describes this in his book:

When we wake up each morning, our attendant greets us with the words “Wow, you really didn't get enough sleep last night. What were you thinking?” You move to the bathroom to take a shower and are reminded that you look like you have put on more weight. You get in your car to go to work and your attendant whispers that the conversation you have scheduled with [that difficult person you're serving] is going to go poorly because you are ill-prepared.

Later that day as you are bored at work and your mind drifts off to the beach where you would rather be, you hear that you won't ever have the job you really desire. While that is taking place, the shame attendants of each of your colleagues [the people you minister alongside] are also quite busy, deepening their reluctance to help others by reminding them that [what they do won't really make a difference].

[...] When you arrive home, your wife, seemingly unworried about hiding any sense of resentment in her voice, reminds you of the leaking toilet, which you said you would repair two weekends ago. And the shame attendant, faithful as ever, offers you images of other failed handyman excursions, basting your mind in the notion that you are a mechanical moron.

This does not give you more confidence, leading to feeling deflated and passive. All of which means, of course, that you are not likely to have sex with your wife tonight because she's not very attracted to a deflated, passive husband. And the attendant watches you, offering multiple opportunities to assimilate a story that tells you, in essence, that you are not enough, you do not have what it takes to be okay.⁵

The voice of shame. Again, that's the enemy's voice. He loves to take us to this place of shame, especially those of us who have dreams of what we can do in the world in the name of Christ and who feel we're never going to get there. Thus, the voice of Jesus is so important to hear above the voice of shame. The voice of Jesus says, "You *are* enough." The voice of Jesus tells us that, in fact, we were *chosen*. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We have been chosen out of love and grace.

The message God is constantly sending you through his spirit is one that isn't about how cool we are or the fact that we have it together. The Lord is not worried about all of the things we're *not* doing well. The Lord's love is coming to us through grace. The one who began a good work in you, the author of your salvation, *will* complete it.

Jesus is the one who brings justice. *He* is the initiator of justice. Isaiah 42 says he will bring justice to the nations. In faithfulness, he will bring forth justice. He establishes justice on earth. Justice is, therefore, God's initiative and our hope. Living under and by the justice of God is an

⁵ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe about Ourselves* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 93–94.

act of faith and obedience, and it is an act we know is only done by the Spirit. It's the fruit of the Spirit borne in us.

I think that's our invitation from God as we go back into the midst of the voices. It's an invitation to come sit in the sun. Doing the work of justice is first and foremost a fruit of being formed in Christ. Thus, persevering and contending in the work of justice can only be accomplished by sitting in the sun, tuning our ears to the one voice above all other voices, and seeking first God's kingdom, God's justice, and all of these other things shall be added unto us. Amen.