Travelling the Justice Journey

A signature ISJC Workshop
A. Direction for the Journey

A review of Jesus’ teachings on social justice will not reveal a clear criterion for taxing the rich or providing medical care as a human right. Neither will we find standards for minimum hourly wages or legislation to protect people working in unsafe factories. Explicit directions to respond to the bottom billion of the world’s population who live on less than two dollars a day will not be evident. There will be no prescriptions to define the role of the state in determining social policy priorities.

However, both Jesus’ teachings and his practices invite us to discern justice-related decision making principles. The Scriptures invite to us to construct a worldview that helps us balance our individual responsibilities with collective commitments. They offer a map to pursue human rights and measures of equity for all people. We learn that budgets are more than just the distribution of financial resources. They are moral documents. We become aware that social policies are value-laden. They reveal what we believe about our obligations to share our resources with those who have much and those who have little.

The direction for the journey is neither ambiguous nor tentative. Jesus actions are definitive.
Repeatedly -- he
 included the excluded,
 challenged cultural practices,
 confronted the powerful and
 advocated for the oppressed.

We cannot encounter Jesus Christ fully until we embrace him as an advocate for the poor.
B. Defining Social Justice

Social justice invites a vision of the world where... people are treated equally without prejudice and able to access a fair share of the world’s resources; while living with dignity, people are given opportunities to pursue and sustain their wellbeing as responsible citizens contributing to their communities.

The justice mission mandate envisions a world where people everywhere have...

- Access to food security, shelter and healthcare
- Opportunities for education and employment
- Freedom of religion and the press
- Good governance and social order
- Fair treatment in the courts
- Human rights to thrive while contributing to the wellbeing of others

GROUP INTERACTION
Engage participants to reflect and assess their country and local situation. How do they rate their status and progress? Using a scale of 1-10 (1 is low and 10 high) invite them to use their fingers to indicate how they rate their contexts. Briefly discuss the reasons for their assessment.
Following the discussion: A reading to personalize and humanize injustice

Injustice has the upper hand...
WHEN: Eight-year-olds cannot read,
   Families cannot drink water without getting sick,
   HIV-positive women cannot protect their newborn babies,
   Funerals displace preventable deaths,

WHEN: Children go to bed hungry seven nights a week,
   Parents bury their children because they have died of malaria,
   Women, young girls and boys are exploited as sex slaves,
   Workers labor for scandalous wages to fashion designer clothes,

WHEN: The earth is abused without regard for future generations,
   Skin color and social status padlock doors of opportunity,
   The healthy and educated cannot use their strengths to work,

WHEN: The righteous disregard the impoverished and unclean,
   God’s compassion is closeted in sanctuaries and temples,
   The strong and the privileged disregard the weak and the oppressed,

THEN: Injustice rules,
   Countless lives are squandered,
   Our shared humanity is disgraced,
   And darkness prevails.

   The spirit of justice cries out: “It’s not fair!”
C. Historical Social Justice Difference Makers

Aung San Suu Kyi
Myanmar political activist

Martin Luther King Jr.
Champion of racial rights

Malala Yousafzai
Pakistani teenager advocate for girl’s education

Mother Teresa
Examplar of dignity for the poor

William Wilberforce
Political strategist for abolition of the slave trade

Nelson Mandela
Anti-apartheid revolutionary
D. Every social issue has a human face.

Injustice has both individual and social dimensions. Every social issue has a human face. Personal injustice is often the consequence of structural injustice.

GROUP INTERACTION
Invite participants to identify examples where injustice currently reigns and exploits people. It may be helpful to re-visit “Defining social justice…”

Create two categories… “global” and “local.”
Compile the responses...

KEY LEARNINGS: (Selective leader input: Examples below that may be added to the discussion are cited below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global injustice</th>
<th>National/Local Injustice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Youth unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trafficking</td>
<td>Inadequate minimum wage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave labor</td>
<td>Aboriginal marginalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe factories</td>
<td>Professionals refusing to retire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child labor</td>
<td>New immigrant struggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee camps</td>
<td>Church rejection of fractured/broken families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedophilia</td>
<td>Self serving governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender inequality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War and civil unrest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political corruption</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E. Learning from Jesus: Protesting Gender Exclusion

In Jesus’ context and time, women were considered inferior to men. The New Testament culture was lived in the shadow of Old Testament norms. The legacy of Eve, “the temptress” in the Garden of Eden, lived on. Married women were influential with their children in their homes but their husbands held the power in their hands. When divorce was initiated, it was a one-sided choice at the prerogative of the husband. Talking to strangers or testifying in courts was forbidden. Women were under the authority of men—more like a possession than a person. Rather than living as dignified human beings, their status was “slave-like.” The elevation of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the inclusion of the Magnificat in Scripture stands in contrast with cultural practices of the day.

Jesus was a cultural maverick, a social revolutionary and a religious innovator. Jesus included women in his life when other people of influence excluded them. He elevated women to a new level of life. He bestowed dignity on the female gender in a cultural context where women were repressed and assumed to be inferior.
GROUP INTERACTION

Ask the participants to make a list of the instances when Jesus actively related and interacted with various women. (They will include: Mary and Martha, the woman at the well, Mary Magdalene, the woman with her perfume, the woman who was healed of hemorrhaging, etc...)

What do these instances teach us about Jesus ‘inclusion of women... his views, relationships and practices with women?

KEY LEARNINGS (Selective leader input: in case the group omits what’s central to the issue. Rather than reading the lists... select 2-3 that are important)

- Jesus’ inner circle of people included women
- He was approachable — he signalled freedom of access to his time and attention
- Jesus engaged in candid conversations with the women he knew
- Outside the tomb in the early morning light,
- Mary recognized the sound of Jesus’ voice — the voice of the one who had taken time to be her teacher
- At a most critical time in Christian history, Jesus revealed himself first to a woman
- In a culture that did not recognize a woman’s testimony in a court of law,
- Jesus trusted Mary to be the first person to spread the resurrection message
GROUP INTERACTION OPTION #1 for SECTIONS F. and G.

We suggest that the workshop leader divide the participants so that both John 8:1-11 and Luke 19:1-10 are discussed at the same time and that the feedback involve both groups.

Divide your group into two sections to discuss both Biblical passages at the same time. One to address John 8:1-11 and the other to respond to Luke 19:1-10. Then separate both sections into conversation groups of 6-10 people.

Reconvene the total group so that both Biblical passages are discussed at the same time and the feedback involves both sections.
F. Learning from Jesus: Challenging Cultural Practices

John 8:1-11

* Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” (NRSV)
GROUP INTERACTION OPTION #2 for SECTION F.
Separate your participants into conversation groups of 8-10 people. Instruct them to read John 8:1-11 together, appoint a discussion leader and a reporter and ask them to respond to the two following questions:
1. What can we learn from Jesus behaviour?
2. What direction can we receive that informs us how to live in our situations?

KEY LEARNINGS (Selective leader input: in case the group omits what’s central to the issue. Rather than reading the lists... select 2-3 that are important)

Jesus’ Behavior:
- Jesus discerned who was vulnerable and needed protection
- De-escalated a threatening situation
- Turned the accusers threats into self reflection of their sin
- Refused to further condemn the woman’s actions
- Addressed the woman in private without further embarrassment
- Balanced the virtues of compassion and conviction

Direction for Living:
- Develop the capacity -- to “detect vulnerability”
- Resist the instinct to judge rather than understand
- Stand up for people who are being treated unjustly
- Reflect on the virtues of compassion and conviction.
- Develop a self understanding on which virtue is naturally stronger.
- Seek to strengthen the weaker virtue
G. Learning from Jesus: Confronting the Powerful

As a tax collector, Zacchaeus was part of the Roman revenue machine that should have been contributing to social order and justice for all. The Jewish cultural consensus was clear. Tax collectors were sinners. They were scoundrels on a number of counts. Working for the Romans was considered collaboration with the enemy. This perception was reinforced by the Roman practice of selling tax-collecting franchises to the highest bidder. Tax collectors could use whatever tactics necessary to extract all they could from the populace, so long as they paid their quota to the Roman authorities.

Spiritually speaking, tax collectors were judged as people who sold themselves to a life of sin and deliberate disregard for God’s ways. Zacchaeus was rich at the expense of others and, hence, he was socially marginalized. He was considered the chief of sinners. Given the circumstances, Jesus was criticised for his lack of judgment in going to Zacchaeus’ house. Here he was, having a lavish meal with a rich sinner.

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” (NRSV)
GROUP INTERACTION OPTION #2 for SECTION G.
Separate your participants into conversation groups of 8-10 people. Instruct them to read Luke 19:1-10 together, appoint a discussion leader and a reporter and ask them to respond to the following two questions:
1. What can we learn from Jesus behaviour?
2. What direction can we receive that informs us how to live in our situations?

KEY LEARNINGS (Selective leader input: in case the group omits what’s central to the issue... Rather than reading the lists select 2-3 ideas that are important)

Jesus’ Behavior:
– Jesus noticed Zaccheus… took initiative for more contact; was ready to pay the price of relating to the “outsider” in the crowd.
– Accepted hospitality and welcomed the intimacy of sharing a meal.
– The outcome shows that Jesus “talked truth” about abusive business practices… which was named as sinful behavior
– Jesus prompted Zaccheus to change his behavior in ways that affected the social order in the community

Direction for Living:
– Notice people... how do people send signals of openness for contact
– Be ready to let our schedules be interrupted
– Are we in relationships where “truth talk” would be beneficial?
– Are there situations where we have wronged people – and restitution or confession and seeking forgiveness is needed?
– Personal salvation is only part of the gospel... social change and honorable business practices are consequences of living the faith
CONCLUSION: Great moments in small encounters

As individuals, we do have limits, but we also possess measures of inter-personal and personal power. We can live right and let our living make statements that underscore our values and beliefs. We can love our neighbours within our reach and beyond our borders. William Bausch in his book, “Once Upon a Gospel” (Twenty-Third Publications, 2008) shares a beautiful story.

A taxi driver went to pick up a woman on a late August night. He arrived at 3:30 a.m. in front of small brick building where he saw a single light flickering in the ground floor window. Under the circumstances in this neighborhood, most drivers would sound their horn once, wait a minute and if no one appeared, they would drive away. But this cabbie got out of his car, walked to the door and knocked.

He heard a frail, elderly voice answer, “just a minute.” He could hear something being dragged across the floor and then the door opened. There was a small woman in her eighties dragging a small nylon suitcase and wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat looking like someone in a 1940s movie.

In that moment, the cabbie caught a glimpse of the tiny apartment with furniture covered with white sheets. He carried the suitcase to the car and returned to offer his arm for support. They walked slowly to the curb. She gave him an address and then asked if they could drive down-town.

“That’s not the shortest way,” he answered.

“I don’t mind” the woman said, “I’m in no hurry. I’m on my way to a hospice. I don’t have any family left and the doctor says I don’t have much time.”

The cabbie then quietly reached over and turned off the meter. For the next two hours these two strangers drove through the city.
They drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had first lived. They pulled up in front of a furniture store that had once been a ballroom where she went dancing as a girl. She showed him a building where she had worked as an elevator operator. Sometimes she’d ask the cabbie to stop in front of a building and she would stare into the darkness and say nothing. At the first hint of the rising sun, the old woman suddenly said, “I’m weary, let’s go now.”

They drove to a tired looking small convalescent home. Two orderlies who were obviously expecting her came out to the car. The cabbie went to the trunk and took her small suitcase to the door. The woman was already sitting in a wheelchair.

Reaching into her purse she asked, “How much do I owe you?”
“Nothing,” he said.
‘You have to make a living,” she protested.
“There are other passengers,” he replied.

In what seemed so natural, the cabbie bent down and gave the woman a hug. She held him tightly. “You gave an old woman some moments of joy,” she said. “Thank you.” He squeezed her hand and walked back into the dim light. Behind him a door shut. It was like the closing of a life.

Let the cabbie finish his story in his own words:
“I didn’t pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly, lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver or one who was impatient to end his shift. What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, and driven away. On a quick review, I don’t think I have done anything more important in my life.”

And now listen to his wise insight:
“We’re conditioned to think that our lives revolve around the great moments. But truly great moments often catch us unaware, beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one.”
Together -- we can strive for a justice vision where...

Children learn and play,
Mothers and fathers work, lead and love,
Families build houses and live in them,
Neighbours are loved,
People sing and dance,
Creation and nations thrive,

And -- God smiles...