

The series we are exploring at the moment is called 'spiritual pathways: worship as a way of life'. Recognising that God is intimately involved with us, we've been looking at different ways that we can experience God in our daily lives.

Today we are exploring the area of justice: Justice is rooted in the character of God. At the heart of God is this movement towards a restoration of relationships. As we worship God, He gives us a passion for justice, for restored life for all in community.

Q: How can we make justice a part of our worship of God?

I'm going to interview Jackie. She is a friend of Tamsin's, our CareWorks manager...

Tamsin's recommendation: 'Jackie is someone that encourages me to get creative and active with justice issues, not just because I care, but also as an expression of worship...It's not just what she does but who she is...I find myself more aware and more upset by things that aren't right...more disturbed by the things that disturb Jackie.'

Jackie has agreed to come in and share with us about how working towards justice we can participate in God's restoring work in the world.

Spiritual Pathways: The Way of Justice Interview: Matt & Jackie

Thanks for coming in to share with us today, Jackie...

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I'm a bit of a foodie- so I enjoy going to cafes, eating good food **with friends, having people over for dinner. I like swimming,** I've just enrolled in a wheel throwing pottery class & I like checking out different things going on in Melbourne- exhibitions, gigs, talks, markets. And I have a pet rabbit called Beryl, who I love.

I'm employed as a youth & family counselor. We work with lots of different families and situations- from families affected by family

violence, young people who refuse to go to school- often experiencing debilitating anxiety, substance use. Our goal is to prevent homelessness, reduce risk within households, and have family **members relating better to each other. Previously I've worked as a case manager with adolescents in residential care, dept of housing, and with young women affected by eating disorders and self harm.**

Justice is such a huge area to explore, from a practical everyday level, how would you describe what justice looks like?

To me justice about bringing the kingdom of God to earth- making things right in the world-making things fair, and allowing humanity **and creation to flourish. It's about trying to see people and creation through God's eyes, and responding to that.**

There are so many ways that we can engage with justice. It can be on an individual level- helping individuals get support and better themselves, it can be looking at a societal model- is this person connected to community? Do they have healthy families, friends, a home, do they have a place and sense of purpose? Or it can be at a radical perspective- asking, why is this person suffering in the first place- the law/ systems/ beliefs people have need to be changed! Radical responses can include things like protesting, political campaigning and public promotion for change.

In reality, we need to engage in all these levels to make things right, and some of us will be drawn to respond in different ways.

Can you tell us a bit about your journey of faith...and

particularly how justice has become a key expression of your worship?

I grew up going to a Uniting church- which as a denomination has always had a fairly strong social justice response, but somehow the main message I came away with was that to be a Christian you had to behave yourself- **it was more about what you shouldn't be doing.** That community was also very good at looking after people **within it's mix. My Mum was always very involved in the community-** doing meals on wheels, seniors lunches, cooking for people- **I'm nowhere near as gifted in this area, but she has influenced me.**

In my late teens I had a 'conversion' where I was swept up in a more charismatic movement which emphasised personal

relationship with God & spiritual experiences- during this time in my life I had this idea that God would change the world by many **individuals getting 'saved' and having their lives turned around.** **Whilst I do believe God does this, eventually I didn't like that I was** carrying around an agenda to change people, viewing them as in or out with God, and maybe responding to people with a view to change their beliefs, rather than responding to their entire lives.

When I was 20 I studied community welfare and international development. It was here that I started to think more widely- in terms of the impact of systems on people- and even learning to **question my desire to 'help'.** **Helping people can** feel good, charitable. But do we want to just give people handouts, or do we want their lives and communities to change and flourish? We could **give out food parcels forever, and there's an important place** for that. But we should also be asking, why do people need handouts? Are there other ways to create change? How has society let people down? Are people getting fair wages, access to education, employment, affordable housing, laws that will protect them from domestic violence? What needs to change so that people can flourish?

I feel like a justice response is being a partner with God in his **work. It's about seeing God in people, in his creation. You can't** say you love God but not people- they are linked. **It's about trying** to see and hear what God might want to share with you/ allow you to see, and how might he be inviting you to respond?

Two of the most powerful experiences I've had have been at Fed Square vigils- one was for Reza Berati- the first asylum seeker to be killed on Manus island, and the other one was for Andrew Chan & Myuran Sukamaran- the 2 Bali Nine men who were executed in Indonesia. Both had such large turnouts from the community, people who were united in their grief, sense of outrage, wanting change, and wanting to honour the lives of people who had died unnecessarily- because of policies which devalued the human, because of policies which claimed justice with no grace or compassion. There was a sense of holiness at both those places, a sense God was there and grieving too amongst the solemn crowd holding candles. They both felt to me what like church **should be. At Reza's vigil Father Bob shared, and said "This is church", and the crowd clapped in agreement, even though half** the crowd were probably atheists- because we were sharing in

something that felt holy and symbolic. It felt like God was with us.

What particular justice-related areas are you actively involved in at the moment? What have you been doing?

For the past 6 months I am probably less involved than I have been in the past. Because my job is full time and quite intense I have to **be careful to make sure my entire life isn't intense**- hence doing things like enrolling in pottery classes. I try to speak up at work to more senior people to make sure that programs which are really **valuable get the focus and funding they need to keep going**, I've just taken on the role of child safety officer at church- to make sure the recommendations from the royal commission get outworked in our church.

Last year I door knocked and campaigned in my local area for the federal election for the first time, as I saw an opportunity for the issues I care about most to be represented at a federal level. I got more involved than I meant to, but decided sacrificing my Saturdays for a couple of months was worth it. I enjoyed getting to know people from outside my usual circles, and understanding **who was living in my community better. I was terrified, but it wasn't** as scary as I thought. It was a good chance **to say 'I'm a Christian and I care about a lot of the same issues', and breakdown some** stereotypes that people have about Christians. It also broke down stereotypes I had about others- **that I wouldn't be accepted because I wasn't radical enough.**

I've been involved in varying levels for the past 16 years with **refugee rights, and our country's response. I go to protests and vigils**, write letters, have been involved in love makes a way protests. I have spent a lot of time trying to influence people in my church and other church communities in their response to refugees and asylum seeker rights. For the last 7 years issues around LGBTI rights and marriage equality- particularly how the church responds, have become more important, as friends have become impacted. Most of my engagement on this issue has simply been educating myself, and engaging in conversations with others about my journey- **why I've changed my position, how churches can be inclusive and sharing personal stories. As I've become more open** I find I get quietly sought out by people who know they can talk to me and have questions.

What are some pitfalls/danger zones that you have recognised on the pathway of justice?

It can become all consuming. You can feel too important. There's a tension in life where we need to hold the truth that we are both very important in God's work, and also not very important at all. If we swing too far either way we get into trouble- either getting a saviour complex, burning out, or not recognising that we can make a difference.

People can neglect their own wellbeing or families, or just get too intense. I need to remember to have fun, to be creative, to laugh, and not feel like I always have to be the one to respond. Keeping healthy boundaries in place is important or recognising that there **may be seasons where you need to stretch yourself, but that it's not sustainable to always be stretching yourself.**

I think it's important to be able to hold onto joy. Some people get very angry, and it can get ugly, and stop reflecting the spirit of God. When your anger at injustice is tearing others down, making you abusive, or being disrespectful of others.

It's not about always being 'nice', history shows effective protests can be disruptive and inconvenient, and bold, but I don't think it should be hate filled. This can be hard.

What tips would you give to people here who feel that they **don't have time or energy for getting actively involved in justice issues?**

I would say that guilt is a bad motivator in this area, and no one can do everything, but everyone can do something. We can be tempted to feel so overwhelmed that it stops us doing anything at all, or telling ourselves that our small acts are worthless. Rob Bell in **'Velvet Elvis' book talks about the hells that people live in-** for example: the hell of being alone with kids all day and losing the plot, the hell of loneliness, the hell of being in prison, in detention, of not having food.

Any way that we can recognise and respond to hells around us contributes to bringing the kingdom of God to earth. Calling a friend who is lonely, making a meal, talking to someone at church, being involved in a community garden, planting trees, being a friendly driver, writing to a politician, going to a protest. At different stages in life we will have capacity to be involved in different things- whether time or money. Maybe we are retired and

volunteer in an area we are passionate about, maybe we contribute money, maybe we find ourselves disturbed and feel called to join with others to make a difference.

What would you say to someone (like me) who hesitates at going to rallies or taking a stand (from fear, from not feeling that they fit in to that scene)?

I would say that it's really powerful and important to have lots of people represented and speaking out about areas of injustice. You **don't have to go to a protest to stand for injustice-** but I would encourage people to go at least once! You might find that respectfully voicing your opinion to a friend or family member is your way of standing up- I would say go for it! One protest march is unlikely to change much, but it is powerful statement, and it's the momentum that builds when these statements repeat and people **see they are not fighting alone. That's my favourite part. Most of us** have images of protests in our mind- from TV or newspapers. Some can get ugly and abusive, some are beautiful and powerful, some are a mix. Try and find people who are like minded, or choose to reflect a different spirit in the mix of an issue you care **about. Sometimes I've made a sign that will identify me as a** Christian who cares, that distinguishes me from an angry person beside me who might be responding in a way I disagree with, and demonstrates that people of faith are there. The Palm Sunday march for refugees is one of my favourites- there are people from such a wide variety of communities, there are church groups, socialist groups, grandmas for refugees, beautiful choirs along the way. Groups like Love makes a way bring a distinctive Christian response to people in detention- disruptive but loving. Politicians need to know that a wide variety of people care about issues- **Christians writing letters saying "I care about the great barrier reef, or 'gay marriage', or 'people in detention', or 'homelessness' is important, and doesn't take long.**

There are always going to be way more things to respond to or go to than you are able- **it's better to go to something when you can, than to beat yourself up for going to nothing, or deciding it doesn't** matter. These issues require all of us to stand up- we might feel **like a drop in the ocean, but often I can feel God's presence, feel God's heartache, or have restored hope in the goodness and** compassion of humanity in those places.

