

About Human Rights Day: 70 Years of Awareness

In 1948, following the bombing of Japan to end WWII and the approval of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations declared December 10 to be set aside each year for Human Rights Day. Crafted by people of cultures, legal teams, and traditions from around the world, “The Declaration sets out the universal values and a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. It establishes the equal dignity and worth of every person.” (<http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/>)

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home -- so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.” -- Eleanor Roosevelt

From The United Nations:

Human Rights Day: <http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/>

Resources for Human Rights Day: <http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/>

Reflection: Micah 6:8

⁸ *He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Jesus came to humanity as one of us, fully mortal, yet fully God. Perhaps reflecting upon Micah’s words when he responded to the Pharisees who questioned him about the greatest commandment, Jesus said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Perhaps we Christians would find this life in Christ more easily lived within the parameters that Micah gives us. Micah’s instruction to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly,” more often than not, is easier than loving God, our neighbor and ourselves. Loving those who are not like us asks us to reach into the deepest cells of our limitations, prejudices, and fears. Loving God asks us to take the time to know who God is with mind, heart, and soul, with every part of our being. Loving ourselves may call us into a place of discomfort if we’ve been taught that we are being “selfish” to consider our own needs and desires. We generally love others in the way we love ourselves.

Christ calls us into a relationship of health with God, each other, and ourselves as we live into the reign that God has given to us. Loving is not a feeling, it is doing justly, as well as we can do, toward others and ourselves. It is living kindness in every relationship. Loving, doing justice, and extending kindness toward all of life is a consequence of walking humbly with God.

Walking humbly allows each of us to accept our broken selves with love, so that we can allow God to free us from our own limitations, prejudices, and fears. Each of these aspects of our humanity, limitations, prejudices, and fear, cause us harm because they do not enable us to trust ourselves or God. They cause

to run from those who are different, those who challenge us, and those who we believe will harm us in some way.

When we are able to love our enemies, we glorify God by living into God's desire for our life together. When we are agents of ministry for God's reign, we are agents of love. When we love, especially those we fear, we are agents of change. And in the changing of our own hearts, minds, and souls, toward God's own commandments, we bring more light into the dark places.

"Let there be peace, and let it begin with me." Peace within our own heart and mind and soul comes from having a clear conscience, knowing we have done what we could to repair our own broken relationships. Confession, repentance, and forgiveness are the hallmarks of a contrite and forgiving heart. As we confess, with humility, what we have done to harm another person, our shame is lifted.

As we acknowledge the harm we have done to another, we are able to change what we have done to harm another, we find that new life in Christ. When we accept forgiveness and live differently, we find the freedom that Christ offers us in his death and resurrection. We acknowledge that we are not the authors of our salvation: God is. God has given to us the basic human rights of life, "equal dignity and worth of every person."

Honoring Human Rights Day brings each of us an opportunity to bridge the chasm between who God calls us to be and who we find ourselves being in these difficult days. Remembering the rights of others, including prisoners, calls us into difficult places.

We hope you will join us in remembering the Christian tenets that are expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, who we are as Christians in a broken world, and who we are as Christians seeking to live with loving kindness, without fear, with others.

For further thought and study:

Can Paul's imprisonment mean something to us in our treatment of people in prisons and jails in this time and in our context? Do imprisoned people share in "equal dignity and worth?"

What does "equal dignity and worth of every person" mean to you? Who do we allow to be mistreated, abused, and neglected?

How do we think of the rights of prisoners, both local and international in the age of terrorism? Are there limits to rights of the convicted? Are there limits to the rights of those imprisoned without charge or trial?

In what ways do we participate in the mistreatment prisoners, unknown, tortured, and without being charged of a crime?

How does the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, signed by our country, inform our treatment of international prisoners? How do we as people of faith respond when our agreements are ignored?