

## Peace and Justice

A cry for justice is so deeply different from a call for vengeance.

by Jon Wilson

JUSTICE HAS ALWAYS LOOMED monolithic in my world view. I think of it as something enormous that happens—or doesn't—in courtrooms and police precincts. I see justice served, and I'm glad; I see it perverted, and I'm outraged. Mostly, I see it as the product of crime and punishment, or of hard-won legal battles. It all feels separate from me, and intractable: something I could affect only if I were in law enforcement or politics or the judicial system. I'm not a demonstrator, so I won't be found marching for it. But the idea of justice has seemed so institutional to me for so long that I've neglected to think much about what it might really mean in person. I've thought of it as part of the "civilizing" of us, like education—something we impose upon our wilder instincts—not as an element of the natural order. There are no courts in nature, after all, and certainly no lawyers.

RECENT CONVERSATIONS with thinkers and doers in the restorative justice movement have illuminated some of my darker corridors. Not only are my definitions of justice being deepened, but those of peace as well—which I had never seen in the same light. I'm learning far more than I expected about the ways victims contend with violation and injustice, and about the ways they find the peace and comfort they really need in such times. Punishment for their offender, for example, is only one of the ways. It's often nowhere near as critical as their need for real empathy and understanding from that offender, or manifestations of remorse and regret. And we

probably all know that real remorse is a punishment far more terrible, and certainly more enduring, than anything we could invent for another. The sweetness of revenge may be even briefer than I'd thought. Apology, it turns out, is more deeply significant than I had believed. These insights are kindling new possibilities in me.

To be honest, I've always been more inclined toward retribution than reconciliation. I know this embarrasses some of my friends and family, and may surprise a few readers, but I might as well be candid about my limitations. Frankly, the eye-for-an-eye system has always seemed to me to be the epitome of perfect justice; the surest way to evoke absolute and authentic empathy. When John William King was convicted in the dragging death of James Byrd, Jr. last year, and left the courtroom with so little remorse that he gestured disgustingly at Mr. Byrd's family, I would have asked to drive the truck with King at the end of the rope. I thought the planet would be better off without him. When ethicists write about how barbaric such an attitude is, I can't dispute their conclusion. Nor could I escape the resentment I felt. But things are changing. When I think now about how I might feel in the aftermath of such an act, I realize I'd be sickened at my own depravity. As I ponder that, I confess that it's a relief to know.

Working on the piece about restorative justice (see page 59) is changing me, and I'm frankly astonished to see it happening; to be witnessing this unexpected transformation in myself. But this is what I love so much about *Hope*: that it really can change the way we see

the world, in totally unpredictable ways. When I began researching the piece, I expected to gain new understanding, but I didn't expect my viewpoint to be realigned. I'm neither a victim nor an offender in mediation, but the whole notion of restorative justice is restoring something important in me, as well.

Somehow, I'm reminded now of the slogan, "no justice, no peace," which evokes images of protesters marching in solidarity amid shouts of bitter outrage over someone who has fallen victim to unfairness. The cries of protest send a simmering threat, but what I want to hear better is the powerful lament behind the edge and the anger. It is the mourning at oppression's triumph. It is the grieving at the epochs of inhumanity that darken our history; at the imbalance of power that corrupts the principles of fairness and justice and corrodes the human spirit in unimaginable ways.

When the marchers march, I wonder what the whole truth is, and how different the stories are that other sides tell. There is always the possibility that something has been overblown, and there is always the possibility that a huge injustice has occurred. But a cry for justice is so deeply different from a call for vengeance. When we hear this cry, let us listen carefully, and allow the wailing and the anguish full voice. It should not be restrained. Let us listen, and learn, and work to ensure that no one is ever denied justice, and that each of us may find peace. ▲

Jon Wilson is Publisher & Editor-in-Chief of *Hope*. [editor@hopemag.com](mailto:editor@hopemag.com)