

Sermon Outline  
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church  
“Jesus Pursues Justice for poor, oppressed & marginalized people”  
(Part III of “The Kingdom of God and UM Social Principles”)  
April 26, 2026

Scripture

Isaiah 42:1-4  
Matthew 12:15-21

Core Idea and purpose

**Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:**

- (04/12/2026) The Kingdom of God is not just a future event or the place we go when we die. It is a present reality for us to live and pursue – encouraging the world to be more in line with life as God intends.
- (04/19/2026) God calls us to be good stewards, not exploiters, of the earth

**Core theological idea:** Jesus pursues Justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. We should do the same.

**Challenge/purpose:** To encourage people to pursue justice by 1) treating everyone with dignity and respect, 2) doing what we can to help anyone in need, and 3) standing in solidarity with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

The Sermon

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension but the presence of justice.”<sup>1</sup> He understood that a truly peaceful and productive society must have justice. He therefore passionately pursued justice for all people.

Dr. King’s passion for and understanding of justice largely came from Scripture and his relationship with our Savior & Lord, Jesus Christ. As a Christian and Baptist Pastor, Dr. King believed in the Bible as the inspired word of God and followed the life & teachings of Jesus. This naturally led him to pursue justice.

The United Methodist Church (UMC) also understands that to follow Jesus is to pursue justice. In section IV “The Political Community/Basic Rights and Freedoms” of the UM Social Principles, it says the following:

*We declare that all individuals, no matter their circumstances or social standing, are entitled to basic human rights and freedoms. These rights are grounded in God’s gracious act in creation (Genesis 1:27 – “..let So*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/202045-true-peace-is-not-merely-the-absence-of-tension-it>;  
<http://voicesfromloysville.blogspot.com/2008/04/true-peace-is-presence-of-justice.html>; <http://www.goodnet.org/articles/820>;  
[http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2015/01/martin\\_luther\\_king\\_jr\\_quotes\\_m.html](http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2015/01/martin_luther_king_jr_quotes_m.html)

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*God created mankind in his own image...male and female he created them”), and they are revealed fully in Jesus’ incarnation of divine love. As a church, we will work to protect these rights and freedoms within the church and to reform the structures of society to ensure that every human being can thrive”*

God’s love of justice is clearly demonstrated in the Old Testament prophets and Psalms. The following are a few examples from among hundreds of verses: Psalm 146:6-9; 72:1-7 & 12-14, Jeremiah 7:1-8; 22:1-5, Micah 6:8, Isaiah 1:10-17; 58:6-7, Isaiah 61:1-2 (Quoted in Luke 4:16-21). I encourage you to contemplate these verses. Write them down or take a picture of the slide. Later today or first thing tomorrow morning, study these passages. Remember, these are just a small sample of hundreds of verses showing God’s desire for justice.

Some of the Old Testament passages about justice are also prophecies about Jesus. One such passage is Isaiah 42:1-4. We know that Isaiah 42:1-4 is a prophecy about Jesus because Matthew 12:15-21 quotes it as a prophesy.

Isaiah 42:1-4 says,

<sup>1</sup> “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and **he [Jesus] will bring justice to the nations.**

<sup>2</sup> He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets.

<sup>3</sup> A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness **he [Jesus] will bring forth justice;**

<sup>4</sup> he will not falter or be discouraged till **he [Jesus] establishes justice on earth.** In his teaching the islands will put their hope.

In three out of four verses, this passage tells us explicitly that Jesus will bring forth justice. Along with saving us from our sins, Jesus also brings forth justice. This makes sense because sin is the root cause of injustice. It’s our sinful nature that causes the strong to oppress the weak and the rich to take advantage of the poor. With justice, the strong cannot oppress the weak and the rich cannot take advantage of the poor.

Jesus doesn’t bring justice through force or manipulation. He doesn’t “...shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets” (Isaiah 42:2) but simply loves everyone the same. He, therefore, loves and stands in solidarity with the ‘bruised reeds’ or ‘smoldering wicks’ of society. (Isaiah 42:4)

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Look at this bruised reed. A person could easily bend and break it so that it dies. But Jesus doesn't do that. He takes the bruised reed, straightens it out and enables it to grow and thrive!

Look at this smoldering wick. A person could easily snuff it out. But Jesus doesn't do that. He gently blows on it with His breath of life so it can burst into flames and thrive!

Who are the ‘bruised reeds’ and ‘smoldering wicks’? They are the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people who are often neglected or abused by society – homeless people, mental health patients, drug addicts, members of the LGBT community, uneducated folks, poor people, persecuted ethnic groups, and the list goes on. Jesus gently props up the ‘bruised reeds’ so they can grow. He kindly fills the lamps with oil so the ‘smoldering wicks’ can burst forth into bright flames.

So, Jesus brings justice to the world by loving all people the same. Let me say this again: Jesus brings justice to the world by loving all people the same. As more people change and learn to follow Jesus' example, more people will be treated with dignity and respect in all aspects of society. Racism, sexism, classism, and all the other ‘-isms’ will come to an end. But this does not happen easily or without struggle.

As Christians, we are to follow Jesus' example. We too must learn to pursue justice by loving all people the same. Loving everyone the same consists of three specific behaviors: First: Treating everyone with dignity and respect, Second: Doing what we can to help anyone in need, and Third: Standing in solidarity with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized.

So, first, we treat everyone with dignity and respect. Ideally, we should treat a homeless person with the same dignity and respect we would the President of the United States. We should never ignore or mistreat any person because they come from a particular group of people. Consider James 2:1-4 – “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

Second, we do what we can to help anyone in need. If someone is in need, we don't consider what social status they have or what they can do to pay us back. Neither do we consider whether they deserve our help. We don't consider

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whether it's their fault they are in need. We even help those who have mistreated us (Matthew 5:43-48 & Romans 12:14-21) If someone needs help, we do what we can to help them. Consider the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Third, we stand in solidarity with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. Remember, Jesus is fully human and fully God. As such, he became the son of a struggling carpenter who was part of an oppressed ethnic group. His family became asylum seekers when they fled Bethlehem to avoid the state-sponsored murder of all children under 2 years of age. In this way, God stands in solidarity with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. If God can stand in solidarity with them, so should we. So, when we hear negative gossip about a person, we intentionally say something good about the person being talked about. We intentionally become friends with unpopular people. We also advocate for people to the governing authorities and may take part in non-violent demonstrations or civil disobedience.

If we practice these three specific behaviors, Jesus can use us to continue His work to bring justice to the nations.

The importance of justice hit me like a ton of bricks when George Zimmerman murdered Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. I became the Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Sanford in January 2012 and George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin in February 2012. Soon after Trayvon's murder, I became involved in an ecumenical and multi-ethnic group of Pastors called 'Sanford Pastors Connecting'. We knew that we had to seek & demand justice to maintain the peace. That is what all the non-violent marches and demonstrations that occurred in Sanford were all about – demanding justice. When I participated in the marches, prayer vigils, and demonstrations, I felt I was loving everyone the same, helping people in need, and standing in solidarity with people who were being oppressed.

When Dr. King preached about justice and loving all people, he wasn't saying anything new. He was proclaiming what Jesus taught 2,000 years ago, and even Jesus wasn't saying anything new. He was reiterating what the FATHER already explained in Micah 6:8: “...what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Let's pray.

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Sermon Outline

- I. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension but the presence of justice.”<sup>2</sup>
  - A. He understood that a truly peaceful and productive society must have justice.
    - He therefore passionately pursued justice for all people.
  - B. Dr. King’s passion for and understanding of justice largely came from Scripture and his relationship with our Savior & Lord, Jesus Christ.
    - As a Christian and Baptist Pastor, Dr. King believed in the Bible as the inspired word of God and followed the life & teachings of Jesus.
    - This naturally led him to pursue justice.
- II. The United Methodist Church (UMC) also understands that to follow Jesus is to pursue justice.
  - A. In section IV “The Political Community/Basic Rights and Freedoms” of the UM Social Principles, it says the following:

*We declare that all individuals, no matter their circumstances or social standing, are entitled to basic human rights and freedoms. These rights are grounded in God’s gracious act in creation (Genesis 1:27 – “..let So God created mankind in his own image...male and female he created them”), and they are revealed fully in Jesus’ incarnation of divine love. As a church, we will work to protect these rights and freedoms within the church and to reform the structures of society to ensure that every human being can thrive”*
- III. God’s love of justice is clearly demonstrated in the Old Testament prophets and Psalms.
  - A. The following are a few examples from among hundreds of verses:

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[http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2015/01/martin\\_luther\\_king\\_jr\\_quotes\\_m.html](http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2015/01/martin_luther_king_jr_quotes_m.html)

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- Psalm 146:6-9; 72:1-7 & 12-14
- Jeremiah 7:1-8; 22:1-5
- Micah 6:8
- Isaiah 1:10-17; 58:6-7
- Isaiah 61:1-2 (Quoted in Luke 4:16-21).

B. I encourage you to contemplate these verses.

- Write them down or take a picture of the slide.
- Later today or first thing tomorrow morning, study these passages.
- Remember, these are just a small sample of hundreds of verses showing God’s desire for justice.

C. Some of the Old Testament passages about justice are also prophecies about Jesus.

- One such passage is Isaiah 42:1-4.
- We know that Isaiah 42:1-4 is a prophecy about Jesus because Matthew 12:15-21 quotes it as a prophesy.

IV. Isaiah 42:1-4

A. Isaiah 42:1-4 says,

<sup>1</sup> “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and **he [Jesus] will bring justice to the nations.**

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  - With justice, the strong cannot oppress the weak and the rich cannot take advantage of the poor.

C. Jesus doesn’t bring justice through force or manipulation.

  - He doesn’t “...shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets” (Isaiah 42:2) but simply loves everyone the same.

D. He, therefore, loves and stands in solidarity with the ‘bruised reeds’ or ‘smoldering wicks’ of society. (Isaiah 42:4)

  - Look at this bruised reed.
    - A person could easily bend and break it so that it dies.
    - But Jesus doesn’t do that.
    - He takes the bruised reed, straightens it out and enables it to grow and thrive!
  - Look at this smoldering wick.
    - A person could easily snuff it out.
    - But Jesus doesn’t do that.
    - He gently blows on it with His breath of life so it can burst into flames and thrive!

E. Who are the ‘bruised reeds’ and ‘smoldering wicks’?

  - They are the poor, oppressed, and marginalized people who are often neglected or abused by society –
    - homeless people
    - mental health patients
    - drug addicts
    - members of the LGBT community
    - uneducated folks
    - poor people

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- persecuted ethnic groups
- and the list goes on.

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V. So, Jesus brings justice to the world by loving all people the same.

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B. As more people change and learn to follow Jesus’ example, more people will be treated with dignity and respect in all aspects of society.

- Racism, sexism, classism, and all the other ‘-isms’ will come to an end.
- But this does not happen easily or without struggle.

VI. As Christians, we are to follow Jesus’ example.

A. We too must learn to pursue justice by loving all people the same.

B. Loving everyone the same consists of three specific behaviors:

- First: Treating everyone with dignity and respect
- Second: Doing what we can to help anyone in need and
- Third: Standing in solidarity with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized.

C. So, first, we treat everyone with dignity and respect.

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E. Third, we stand in solidarity with poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

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  - As such, he became the son of a struggling carpenter who was part of an oppressed ethnic group.
  - His family became asylum seekers when they fled Bethlehem to avoid the state-sponsored murder of all children under 2 years of age.
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- We intentionally become friends with unpopular people.
- We also advocate for people to the governing authorities.
- If necessary and called by God, we may take part in non-violent demonstrations or possibly civil disobedience.

F. If we practice these three specific behaviors, Jesus can use us to continue His work to bring justice to the nations.

VII. The importance of justice hit me like a ton of bricks when George Zimmerman murdered Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida.

A. I became the Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Sanford in January 2012 and George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin in February 2012.

B. Soon after Trayvon’s murder, I became involved in an ecumenical and multi-ethnic group of Pastors called ‘Sanford Pastors Connecting’.

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D. When I participated in the marches, prayer vigils, and demonstrations, I felt I was loving everyone the same, helping people in need, and standing in solidarity with people who were being oppressed.

VIII. When Dr. King preached about justice and loving all people, he wasn’t saying anything new.

A. He was proclaiming what Jesus taught 2,000 years ago,

B. and even Jesus wasn’t saying anything totally new.

- He was reiterating what the FATHER already explained in Micah 6:8: “...what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

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