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Christian Perspectives: Justice, kindness and balance

Our grandchildren's parents returned last evening from a few days away while we cared for their two little boys, aged 3 years and 15 months. This morning while packing for the trip home from Ottawa we listened to the sounds of parents and children preparing for their day ? work for the parents and daycare for the children. They were mostly happy sounds of play, breakfast, negotiating over what to wear and what to do and what to not do to one's little brother. Is there anything more important or creative that we are privileged to do in a lifetime than to raise a child or interact with the children growing up around us? Living with children calls out of us more than we could ever have anticipated: more love, more patience, more creativity, more struggle to discern what is right, and more humility because we can never quite manage the perfection we wish these children to experience.

Our Christian tradition calls us to be co-creators with the Creator. We say with Jesus that we live in God and God lives in us and that together with God we are creating a present and future. There's deep wisdom in the stories and poetry of our scriptures to guide our co-creative efforts. One of my favourite succinct summaries is this verse: Micah 6.8. 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?

How do we ?do justice?? And, how do we teach children about justice? Occasionally, I've heard a parent respond to a child's protest that, ?It's not fair!? by saying, ?Get used to it ? life's not fair!? It's apparent that life's not fair: look at the tiny proportion of humanity that feels entitled to horde tremendous wealth while vast numbers of people struggle to secure basic water, food and shelter. But we are called to ?do justice? which means striving to treat one another fairly and live in just ways. Children are dependent on us and learning from us about how the world works. We teach our kids about being fair and doing justice by striving to be fair and do justice This is, of course, overwhelmingly difficult: every choice we make about what to say, do, buy, support, and how we invest our time, energy and wealth involves doing justice . . . or not.

A few examples: Our planet is in crisis so doing justice for future generations means finding the will and committing our resources right now to changing the way we produce and use energy, live on the land and use water, eat and grow food, travel, produce goods and provide services. We must change for human life to survive on earth. We need to change quickly if we want our grandchildren to have safe and healthy lives.

The destruction of war will stop when we learn to resolve conflict nonviolently. Negotiation requires that all parties are respected; that we approach differences with curiosity; that trust is built as we understand one another's positions; and, that mutually beneficial outcomes and acceptable compromises are goals.

Justice happens when we see others and all of life as our brothers and sisters. What hurts another hurts ourselves.

All of these lessons we learned as children or failed to learn or learned only partially from those who nurtured us.

What does ?loving kindness? look like? Perhaps from three year old Hari's perspective it is when a grandparent understands that he won't eat his dinner and is howling for one more episode of Dinosaur Train because he is tired and missing his parents. If this grandparent manages to contain their anxiety and respond with hugs, good food, softness, kind but firm words and reassurance then he has had a lesson in loving kindness. If we threaten, bribe or punish to try to get him to comply, he has had a lesson in power politics where the bigger, stronger power uses violent methods to get their own way.

What does it look like to ?walk humbly with our God?? We're not God but rather we are limited human beings. And yet, we are uniquely gifted creative partners with God who invites us into mutual adventures. So we get it wrong when we want to be the proponent of absolute truth, to be the wise or powerful authority. And, we get it wrong when we think of ourselves as abject, worthy of humiliation. We are beloved children in relationship with the all wise, all knowing, all compassionate One. So we have this balancing act that involves being ?grown-up? ? kind, justice-seeking, creative problem- solvers ? while maintaining a childlike openness all that we cannot know and to the vast Otherness of God. We are invited to use our whole God-given selves in service and also to reach for a hand as needed in this humble walk with our God.

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