



Lenten Study 2025: Being People of Peace & Justice

Looking at the history of social awareness and the development of social change helps us to see what questions and thoughts emerged to bring us to this juncture of time and space. People have not changed that much, so there is no doubt that those who struggled against the powerful in the past felt how unjust things were. However it took time to develop the awareness that people can make a difference.

Feelings are just the beginning of our reactions, and they cannot be the only thing we do if we want to make a difference, or even just see a difference.

We go through cycles in life, and those of us working on history can see that every one hundred years in modern history, we seem to be in the same place. Then we learn and make a difference, and

wait for society's memory to fade so those who lust for power and wealth find ways to dominate our world once more.

We are in a period of awakening now, seeing how far we have strayed from a world that was more just. We were never perfect, but we once had a more equal distribution of wealth and opportunities. We are currently seeing the demand for that society grow. It has taken some wrong turns, such as young men thinking rightwing ideology will get them out of their economic situation, but as a whole we are taking back power. We must see the potential and hope for the future, or we will fail. And we are not the first generation with these kinds of challenges.

Week 5: Social Justice

Towards the end of the Middle Ages people started to realize they had agency. Many things had been changing. On the political landscape, princes had been challenging the popes about the question of authority and who had the say on their lands.

Peasants were uprising and demanding fairer hearings under the law, and the church was amassing wealth at the expense of both groups, which angered many.



The church for centuries had been preaching about personal salvation and the need to confess sins and make atonement, but was not looking at their own sins. Charity was part of that atonement, but when the money given to already wealthy churches was not redistributed in kind, questions started being asked.

In the midst of all of this several major movements happened. By 1500 the Italian Renaissance had been going on for over one hundred years. Not only was this a revolution in art as artists developed visual perspective, but it was also a time of rediscovering Ancient Greek philosophy, drama and literature. The standard assumptions about life were being questioned.

Questions and conversations started happening in southern Europe about what was once assumed as the 'natural order', and the concept of Humanism emerged with thinkers like Baruch Spinoza, who dismissed the importance of religion as the defining factor in life. Humanism argued that people made their own reality, it was not God given.

In the north Martin Luther and other church reformers challenged the monetary wealth of the church and how that did not align with the Gospel. The continental Protestant Reformation saw a breaking away of churches and a belief that no one needed an intermediary to confess to God.

With this new sense of awareness people realized they made society, than society could be changed and adjusted. Math, art, science, architecture, social order, and so many other areas of life were changing.

The Enlightenment emerged not long after. While it has long been assumed that this was a wholesale rejection of religion, it was more accurately a building on the concepts of Humanism, the Reformation and the Renaissance rediscovery of philosophy. Humanity could control, create and change their reality.. Social action mattered in the world, not just in life after death.

In the late 1700's one of the men to grab this concept and challenge what had been happening around him was William Wilberforce, who is seen as the first to challenge the justification for the African slave trade. His writings and speeches eventually changed the minds of most people, and the entire slavery complex would be dismantled.

By the mid-1800's the term Social Justice was coined by Italian Luigi Taparelli. He was a Christian and saw Social Justice as a theological obligation. Others would come along who helped separate the ideal of Social Justice as theology from social obligation. These thoughts eventually lead to the concept of the social safety net, that is seen as a standard part of western society.

In the early 1900's another movement emerged known as the Social Gospel. This connected Social Justice to the Gospel, with the question "What Would Jesus Do?" This question and the renewed understanding of corporate sin rather than personal sin, helped shape the world we now live in. For Canadians, this movement was the bases for the development of the New Democratic Party, who was directly responsible for our healthcare system.

From the ancient Prophets, with the teachings of Jesus and the letters of the early Christians, through the action of charity and eventually to the challenge of Social Justice and Social Gospel, people of faith have made a difference, and we see that as a God given responsibility. So how does all of this inform our actions in the chaos of the world of 2025?

It comes with increased awareness that humans are flawed, and humans that are very wrong need to be resisted and removed from power. That some of our leaders do not have the best interests of our society and economy as their focus, and therefore do not deserve our allegiance. That all of this can be changed with concentrated effort of the public.

What do we do personally? Well, what would Jesus do?

From the prophets we learned to stand our ground. Do not get caught up in the chaos. Agents of destruction like chaos because it makes them feel important and they know it is a way to keep others off balance. Do not get whipped up in to that frenzy. Just stand firm while it blows over, because it always blows over.

From the Gospels we learned perspective, that God wants us to make life better for everyone, not just those we know and love. The teachings of Jesus counter the belief that humans are selfish and only care about their close circles. Faith demands we grow beyond what philosophy calls our 'selfish gene'. Things only change when they change for everyone, not just a few.

From the Epistle of James we learn what works of faith look like. We are not to sit back in this life, but to engage in ways that take care of the vulnerable.

From history we see the significance of how to use our money and voice to enact change. We are not stuck in a natural order of political and economic power, we do have agency.

So in practical terms, what do we do? We support each other because everyone is feeling the unknown and goes through periods of uncertainty. We use our money as a statement, purchasing things that benefit the economy we want to grow while boycotting that which supports the things we want to stop. We share information, ignorance only benefits those in power. We speak up because we do not have the luxury of shrugging and saying it is someone else's problem. We vote for the side of justice when we have the opportunity, and put pressure on our political leaders to work for the people. And we can be assured that these are things people of faith have done for thousands of years to help bring about the world God asked us to make.

