

Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church: M2/W2/P2 and Crime: Cry Justice, Cry Healing!, February 20, 2005

Thank you for the opportunity to share something about the prison ministry work of M2/W2/P2 (Man-to-Man/Woman-to-Woman/Parent-to-Parent) Association, Restorative Christian Ministries.

I have entitled my talk today: **M2/W2 and Crime: Cry Justice, Cry Healing!**

At the outset, I wish to say, we are deeply grateful that your fellowship has supported our ministry over the years.

Bobby

Bobby committed terrible crimes of incest over 25 years ago. He served 15 years in prison for those crimes, becoming involved in our program early on. Upon initially being paroled, he was rejected first by the city of Prince George, then by Toronto. In each case, a huge outcry forced him to leave for his own personal safety. John Kastner produced a documentary about this for CBC entitled “Hunting Bobby [then his last name].” (He goes under a different name now, but I still honour his right to privacy.)

Bobby was eventually forced to seek haven back in jail. Because of the documentary, one attempt was made on his life there. Bobby lived in fear of return to society too.

In June, 1999, he was released on a “warrant expiry”, meaning there were no further correctional controls on him. After his release, the police secured a court-ordered set of conditions on Bobby. He went to live in Clinton, BC.

On July 11, a Town Meeting that turned ugly forced Bobby out again.

No one was interested to know that Bobby in prison had taken every treatment course possible, then himself had paid for further counselling on the outside. No one wanted to hear that Bobby was deeply remorseful for his past crimes, and personally was committed NEVER AGAIN to reoffend.

In the case of Bobby’s offences, there is no question that indescribable harm was done and that the pain and suffering of his victims, and that of other victims of sexual offences, is unconscionable. These things ought *never* to happen! And further, far more concrete ways must be found to address the needs of victims of sexual offences – and all victims! – for healing, safety and restoration.

Bobby subsequently became part of a community-based “Circle of Support and Accountability”, with full endorsement and engagement of the local police and other authorities. He has lived as a crime-free, gainfully employed, and functioning member of society to this day. Though he has just in the past few months encountered serious health problems, for which he needs prayer.

M2/W2 Origins

The origins of M2/W2 were a pastor's visits forty years ago in Seattle prisons to men who had no one showing an interest in them. The core vision of our work continues out of the response of that pastor: to recruit, train, deploy and supervise volunteers from the church community to show one-on-one care to men and women in prison. Two classic biblical texts have always informed our work:

Matt 25:36

I was in prison and you came to visit me.

Heb 13:1-3

Keep on loving each other as brothers[sisters]. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners [offenders], and those who are mistreated [victims] as if you yourselves were suffering.

Besides the core program of finding about 350 volunteers a year to work with men and women in the prisons, our agency has had a specialized contract in one provincial prison. We also have National Crime Prevention Centre funding and some other grants, to work with mothers struggling to raise children in the 0 to 5 year range. This Parent to Parent (P2) program operates in Chilliwack. We continue to be sensitive to victims' needs as well, and connect to them in various ways, though not formally through an established program. We do operate a significant CORE training series, when victims are fully brought into the training. There are notices at the back about our CORE Training beginning this Thursday with an evening on victims' issues. We warmly encourage you to attend. With all the recent government cut-backs, some other unique ministries, including working with Mentally Disordered Offenders under contract, are no longer operating.

There is a display at the back with information and a Power Point presentation. I'll also be there for a time after the service. We are doing a significant CORE training beginning this Thursday, Feb. 24, through Saturday. We are looking in depth a victims issues, Restorative Justice, the role of Corrections, the mandate of M2/W2, and the connection to spirituality in our ministry. You are warmly invited to attend. I thought there were notices at the back about this. But there are not. Please phone our office tomorrow for more information.

Our full name is M2/W2 (Man-to-Man/Woman-to-Woman) Association: **Restorative Christian Ministries**. We are also increasingly inserting "P2" into our name. "Restorative" is the term used to describe a biblical understanding of justice to which we are committed.

Cry Justice!

What does biblical justice look like? We've heard already from Pastor Tom about the CRC Report on Restorative Justice. I'll try to personalize it a bit.

Wilma Derksen

Wilma Derksen's daughter set out to walk home Nov. 30, 1984 in Winnipeg, after her mother had told her on the phone she could not pick her up from school that day. Wilma tells this story in her book, *Have You Seen Candace?*, which possibly some have read. Candace was not seen alive again by her family. She had been kidnapped, and left to freeze to death, tied and bound, in an abandoned shack.

It took two months for her body to be found.

At one point not long after her funeral, a close friend asked Wilma, "What would be justice for you?" Wilma let her imagination respond. She began to envision no less than ten child murderers lined up for execution. And she would pull the trigger, one by one. As she did so, and watched each drop lifeless to the ground with their death hoods falling loose, she could almost taste the sweetness of revenge, and knew for a few exquisite moments that this would indeed be "justice" for her. But her mind's movie projector continued to roll. She looked up from the scene of desecration she had just created and suddenly saw ten mothers like her weeping unbearably for their children, and knew she had now created ten other victims' families.

"But that doesn't satisfy", she heard herself saying, "I think our choice to forgive is the right one. (*Have You Seen Candace?: A True Story of Faith and Forgiveness*, Wilma Derksen, 1991, pp. 224ff)." She adds: "By forgiving we can transcend the hurt and choose to be loving again (p. 227)." The subtitle of her book is: *A True Story of Faith and Forgiveness*. Justice became for Wilma and her family a conscious choice of *pardon* and *mercy*.

Biblical justice is active *peacemaking love towards others*.

Please read with me Romans chapter five, verses six to eleven:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In this text, we read these various expressions: we were "powerless", "the ungodly", "we were still sinners", "we were God's enemies" – four very alien aspects of our relationship towards God. But the text goes on to say: through Christ, "we were reconciled to [God]" and "we have now received reconciliation [from God]". That is God's action-oriented peacemaking justice! It draws a circle of inclusion around "the least of these", a circle that embraces not only the "neighbour" who is familiar, but also the "enemy" who is alien – and offers to make peace.

Why does this understanding of justice strike one as strange? Because, for almost a millennium, Christians have believed largely in a biblical notion of justice that elevated penal, punitive law, and neglected the “weightier matters of the law”: *justice, mercy, and faithfulness* (Matt. 23:23).

In summary: *Biblical justice in relation to crime is a constant embracing love of neighbour and enemy: victim, affected community, and offender.*

II. Cry Healing!

How can one further designate what this biblical justice is?

Restorative Justice

As we have already heard, there is a worldwide movement of practitioners and professionals in criminal justice called “restorative justice” in response to crime.

The above biblical understanding of justice is in part back of this movement. A significant source of this phenomenon of over 25 years is Christian development of biblical themes of justice, in particular of themes underscoring justice as

- wholeness (*shalom*),
- reconciliation,
- peacemaking,
- and restoration. Restorative Justice is a *peacemaking* response to crime, rather than a *warmaking* attack on criminals. In summary, in its ideal vision, it refuses to scapegoat the criminal, nor to leave the trauma of the victim and community unhealed. It genuinely wants “justice and healing for *all*” in response to crime, which means new departures towards peaceful lives for everyone! It refuses to let anyone remain “unhealed”, unless by their obstinate choice.

Restorative Justice in North America, birthplace of its contemporary worldwide expression from within criminal justice systems, grew out of a religious community, specifically in the mid-seventies in the Mennonite community of Kitchener, Canada, as an explicit religious response to a social problem.

Beyond Retribution

I want to look for a few additional moments at a Christian Spirituality of Restorative Justice through the recent publication of a book on this issue.

Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment (Marshall, 2001) is a stirring instance of rereading the Judeo-Christian founding texts to provide a basis, not for continued scapegoating violence in the Western secular state (which still has intact many trappings of a bygone religious era!), but for a profound redirection of traditional interpretation of those texts away from violence, “beyond retribution”, towards, biblically, *shalom*, reconciliation and forgiveness.

In 1965, noted New Testament scholar C.F.D. Moule published an article in a little known Swedish academic journal. Entitled “Punishment and Retribution: An Attempt to Delimit

Their Scope in New Testament Thought”, he began with this observation: “It is likely, I know, that many readers – perhaps most – will find themselves in disagreement with the radical thesis I am about to present. But my hope is that time will not have been wasted – whatever the conclusions reached – because the thesis leads us in any case to ponder, once more, the very heart of the Gospel.” He continued with a terse summary of his conclusions:

“What I offer for your consideration is the thesis that the word ‘punishment’ and other words related to it (especially ‘retribution’) have, if used in their strictly correct sense, no legitimate place in the Christian vocabulary (Moule, 1965, p. 21).”

His was a clear call for the Judeo-Christian tradition to move “beyond retribution” in its appropriation of the sacred texts. Thirty-six years later, New Testament scholar Chris Marshall published a book-length study with similar conclusions. There was nothing like it in the interval.

The study is wide-ranging. Section one, “Introduction”, considers various Christian sources of moral guidance; early Christian witness from the “underside” (“they write as, to, and on behalf of the victims of abusive state power (p. 16)”); and how Christian faith speaks to the public arena (neither “directly and legalistically to the machinery of the state” nor “irrelevant[ly] to wider social issues (p. 31).”) Marshall states,

“My premise is that the first Christians experienced in Christ and lived out in their faith communities an understanding of justice as a power that heals, restores, and reconciles rather than hurts, punishes, and kills, and that this reality ought to shape and direct a Christian contribution to the criminal justice debate today (p. 33).”

In the second part Marshall considers “The Arena of Saving Justice”, with a look at Paul and Jesus, seeing in Paul *Justice As the Heart of the Gospel, Divine Justice as Restorative Justice, Justification by Faith as Restorative Justice*, and the work of Christ (atonement) as *Redemptive Solidarity, Not Penal Substitution*. Marshall writes:

“The logic of the cross actually confounds the principle of retributive justice, for salvation is achieved not by the offender compensating for his crimes by suffering, but by the victim, the one offended against, suffering vicariously on behalf of the offended – a radical inversion of the *lex talionis* [law of retaliation] (pp. 65 & 66).” Finally, he sees Jesus as embodiment of God’s justice, and his way as non-retaliation.

In the third Section, “Punishment That Fits”, Marshall looks at the *Purpose and Ethics of Punishment*, and after discussing all the main theories considers the notion of “Restorative Punishment”, which he believes is *Punishment as the Pain of Taking Responsibility*. He retains the word “punishment”, but first empties it of all its punitive thrust, then reinvigorates it with an accountability/responsibility payload.

With the fourth Section, “Vengeance is Mine”, Marshall looks at divine and human justice, including the issue of “Final Punishment”, the doctrine of hell. His overall conclusion is, “Restoration, not retribution, is the hallmark of God’s justice and is God’s final word in history (p. 199).”

The fifth Section, “Justice That Kills”, spends fifty pages on the issue of capital

punishment. It should be no surprise that Marshall finds no biblical mandate for the death penalty. “Capital punishment is incompatible with a gospel of redemption and reconciliation (p. 253).”, he succinctly sums up. This is in line with the findings in 1981 of a special Christian Reformed Church committee on capital punishment, published in *Acts of Synod 1981*.

The final Section, “Conclusion”, presents *Forgiveness as the Consummation of Justice*. Marshall discusses the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as illustrative of the attempt at a state-wide process and application of forgiveness and accountability in post-apartheid South Africa.

Marshall quotes Tutu saying, “[W]ithout forgiveness, there is no future (p. 283).” This conclusion is similarly argued persuasively in Donald Shriver’s *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (1995). He says, “Forgive and forget” gives way to “Remember, forgive, and be free.”

Theologian Richard Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (1996) states that *tradition, reason, and experience* throughout history have prevented biblical Christians from living out the radical nonviolence and forgiveness of the Gospel. Chris Marshall has pointed the way of such a biblical reading in response to crime and justice. Will biblical Christians and a secular culture profoundly impacted by biblical revelation rise to the challenge, or settle as so often for sub-biblical, even non-biblical views about retribution? This book stands as direct challenge to embrace a justice “beyond retribution” “that manifests God’s redemptive work of making all things new (p. 284).”

Glenn Flett

Our fall Dinners’ speaker two years ago was Glenn Flett.

Glenn spent several years committing robberies with violence, until one day he and a partner shot and killed a man during a Brinks Armoured Truck robbery. Through Christian friends inside and outside the prison, Glenn eventually chose to follow Jesus. Changes happened remarkably quickly. But a supreme test came after a woman in Victoria, a Christian pastor, was brutally murdered. She had been a grandmother figure to Glenn through all his criminal years. She had loved him unconditionally.

By a strange twist of circumstances, the man who murdered her ended up in the same prison as Glenn, and finally, in an English class he was teaching! Glenn was a “wheel” in the prison, had a lot of power, and could have called in favours. He could have had this guy killed. Not only did he not do this, but ultimately helped him successfully apply for and obtain parole. Glenn’s new love for Jesus helped him embrace the man who had murdered the most accepting person in his life at that time.

Today, Glenn, who also had M2/W2 visits throughout his jail time, serves Jesus by reaching out to ex-prisoners through a local government-sponsored program that helps them reintegrate into society. It is called L.I.N.C.: Long-Term Inmates Now in the Community. He tells his story widely, and is well-known in the larger criminal justice community, and also works closely with M2/W2. His life is tribute to the power of

Restorative Justice.

Conclusion

Christians are called *now* to live out the reality of what God promises *then*. A tall order fraught with risk and danger – but also with anticipation and joy. Part of our living out the *then, now* is our restorative response to crime.

If this is your nudging, if the Spirit of the Lord is upon you to help “set the prisoners free” (Luke 4), consider finding the “prison of your choice” to join with us in visiting men and women in prison, or some other avenue, to live out the Good News of “Kingdom Come *Now*” in response to victims, the hurting community, and criminals.

And so we pray:
Matt 6:10
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. (KJV)

That prayer includes a vision for Restorative Justice. The vision is glorious and breathtaking! The time for “Kingdom Come” living is *now*. May we all continue to rise to its challenge. Amen.

Again, I'll gladly meet folks at the back at service's end. Thank you.