

JUST(ice) WORSHIP: LEADERSHIP, LITURGY, and FORMATION

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Abstract: JUST(ice) WORSHIP names the intentional intersection of the communal voice with God’s liberating presence in a worshipping assembly. Framed within the tradition of prophetic critique—especially as voiced by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Malachi—JUST(ice) WORSHIP takes shape through musical presentation, lyrical prophecy, and public proclamation. This work contends that such worship is formative from the outset, beginning with the opening hymn as the service’s “first sermon.”

I. Who am I?

- A. Senior Pastor of Spirit & Truth Sanctuary.
- B. Presiding prelate of the International Communion of Expanding Consciousness (I.C.E.C.), an ecumenical network offering covering, fellowship and ministry credentials to those desirous of creating and sustaining inclusive spiritual communities.
- C. Master of Theological Studies (M.T.S., Global Religions, 2022) from Emory University’s Candler School Of Theology; Doctoral candidate at Candler (D.Min., Scriptural Interpretation, 2027).
- D. Successor of the late Bishop Carlton D. Pearson - called to the message, mission and model of communicating and embodying “Inclusion.”
 1. Equipping pastors and laity with an effective methodological approach to architecting Inclusion with sensitivities to church culture, scriptural context and concerns for financial solvency.

II. Who are we?

- A. Spirit and Truth Sanctuary is an interfaith, LGBTQ+ affirming spiritual collective.
- B. Brief history.
 1. First racially integrated church in the southeastern U.S. (1961)
 2. One awakening leads to another.
 - a. Ordination of women into ministry (1970’s)
 - b. Interdenominational expression (1980’s – Liturgical worship and sacred vestments)

- c. Affirmation of LGBTQIA community (late 1990's)
- d. Interfaith celebration (2000)
- 2. The embodiment of JUST(ice) and the unavoidable price
 - a. With each new shift, shif(T) happens.
- 3. The circular of oppression: the oppressed becomes the oppressor.
 - a. I Kings 9:15a, 20-22 *This is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon conscripted to build the house of the Lord and his own house...²⁰ All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel—²¹ their descendants who were still left in the land, whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely—these Solomon conscripted for slave labor, and so they are to this day. ²² But of the Israelites Solomon made no slaves; they were the soldiers; they were his officials, his commanders, his captains, and the commanders of his chariotry and cavalry.*

III. JUST(ice) Worship, Liturgy and Formation at Spirit and Truth Sanctuary?

A. Doxological JUST(ice)

- 1. From the Greek: doxa = *glory*; logos = *word/speech*. A doxology is literally a “word of glory.”
- 2. Giving glory to God while modeling JUST(ice).
- 3. Doxology is not Didactic - Didactic songs tell us what to believe.
 - Doxological songs teach us how to stand in awe.
 - a. Doxology as Apophatic Worship.

“As theologians, we ought to speak of God. But we are human, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both our obligation and our inability, and by that very recognition give glory to God.” -Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, lecture: The Word of God as the Task of Theology (1922).

- b. If worship truly gives glory to God rather than controlling God, then it must also refuse to dominate people.

4. Doxology as the Foreword.

| Aspect | Doxological Songs | Didactic Songs |
|------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Primary purpose | What kind of world does this praise make possible? | Is it true? |
| The Telos | Foster Unity and Trust around Love | Maintain Control |
| Consciousness | Surrender, Shared Mystery | Mastery, Certainty |
| Approach | Theology bows, the Communal Voice is Lifted | The Pulpit is Esteemed |
| Emotional tone | Awe, gratitude, reverence, wonder | Clarity, certainty, persuasion |
| Typical placement in worship | Traditionally after the sermon, yet centralized as JUST(ice) | Earlier in service; teaching moments |
| Reward / Risk | Generative openness, Curiosity | Creating God in our image |

5. The first sermon is not from the pulpit, but from the lyrics of the music.

a. Examples of Songs we modify or no longer sing:

-*You are the Living Word* – (e.g., “not Buddha, not Krishna, not Mohammed, not Allah, No. You’re the only Living God.”).

b. *Amazing Grace* – “...that saved a wretch like me.”

c. *Welcome Into This Place* – JUST(ice) modification: “Welcome into this broken vessel” to “OPEN vessel.”

d. *He Is God* – JUST(ice) modification: (she, they, it).

e. Avoiding Trinitarian Weaponization – e.g., *Holy, Holy, Holy* “God in each person, we are holy.”

6. Doxological JUST(ice), Dismantling Domination through Responsive Reading:

“As we light these candles today we honor the good and the God that exists in all faiths: the Spirit of God that is everywhere in its fullness, expressing itself through our individual as well as our collective lives - and the truth which is beyond any singular faith's opinion, perception, paradigm or point of view; the truth of that which is real and eternal, shared by and housed within any and all religions and spiritual practices that embody peace (the dynamic of harmonizing good), love (the unconditional generosity of spirit without anything withheld), and beauty (the absolute symmetry of the Word of God in manifestation). Today may we overlook any differences that may exist in this temporary expression of human life in favor of exalting our unity in the power and presence of the Christ as we create and celebrate the beloved community.”

7. Doxological JUST(ice) as Interfaith Mantra:

Om Mani Padme Hum (Buddhist) – invoking the awakening of wisdom and compassion.

Shalom (Jewish) – peace, wholeness, harmony, justice.

Shanti (Hindu) – universal peace, inner calm, stillness.

La ilaha illa'Llah / Allah Hu (Islamic) – divine unity, ultimate reality belongs to God.

Gloria in excelsis Deo (Christian) – Glory to God in the highest, awe and reverence.

- a. These chants function as sacred acclamations—brief, non-didactic utterances that voice peace, praise, compassion, and reverence across traditions without asserting theological dominance.

8. Doxological JUST(ice) as Liturgical Acclamation (spoken or sung communal response):

- a. *Amen* – “so be it,” “and, so it is.”

Amin – Semitic acclamation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, alignment, sacred intention.

Ashe – West African (Yorùbá-derived), activation or release of sacred power, energy.

Namaste(kar) – sacred presence within another; mutual reverence, spiritual equality.

Ohm - beyond language, participation in ultimate reality through sound, breath, and resonance.

9. Doxological JUST(ice) bridges Sacred and Secular:

“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ¹⁷ ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’” Matthew 11:16-17 (NRSVue)

Simon and Garfunkel: *“the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls” – The Sound of Silence (1964).*

Kendrick Lamar – *Alright*, its core message is not denial of pain, but defiant hope voiced from the margins, taken up by crowds in the streets.

U2 – *In The Name of Love*

India Arie – *The Gift Of Acceptance*

Marvin Gaye – *What’s Going On*

Black Pumas – *Colors*

John Lennon – *Imagine*

IV. Who are YOU?

A. JUST(ice) and THE PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE.

1. The JUST(ice) of refusing colonization – respecting the agency of each member.
 - a. Whatever your approach to Scripture might be: 1) infallible, inerrant, 2) inspired, breathed upon or 3) man’s struggle to understand God within cultural limitations, consider these ideas

that foster peace within humanity:

Judaism: Leviticus 19:18 love another person as oneself.

Christianity: Matthew 22:39 / Luke 10:27 love of neighbor as inseparable from love of God.

Islam (Hadith tradition): True faith is incomplete unless one desires for others what one desires for oneself.

Buddhism (Dhammapada): cherish life, neither cause suffering nor wish it upon others.

Hinduism (Mahābhārata): do not do to others what would cause pain if done to oneself; this principle sums up moral duty.

Sikhism (Guru Granth Sahib): Seeing the divine presence in all people calls one to treat others with love, service, and equality.

- b. We do not attempt to syncretize all religions. We can respect their distinctions while celebrating their harmonies.

B. JUST(ice) as COMMUNION and as OPEN TABLE.

1. Interfaith language of RE-memembering the universal “Body” of Christ.
 - a. The importance of Interfaith imagery

C. COMMUNION as UNITY and RECONCILIATION

1. Speaking truth – we cannot achieve reconciliation without affirmation. We curse the souls of our Q+ siblings while we sing their songs.
2. Allowing space for lament – to own our past – to name it – and to move forward refusing to repeat our past by disenfranchising “others.”

D. JUST(ice) as DANGEROUS PREACHING through a WOMANIST LENS.

1. Naming the survival, harm, and hope in Black women’s bodies and communities.
Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. Calling out neutrality as being complicit.

When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid. — Audre Lorde, The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action (1977)

E. JUST(ice) as OFFERING / “JUST” GIVING

1. Giving toward JUST(ice) – resistance to support spaces that do not center JUST(ice).
2. Consumer JUST(ice) – knowledgeable consumption that supports JUST(ice) oriented businesses.
3. Offering taking without manipulation – no Heaven or Hell incentives, but rather, giving through gratitude and shared communal vision.

F. JUST(ice) as CORPORATE CONFESSION, ABSOLUTION OF SIN, PASSING THE PEACE.

1. Corporate Absolution: “Father forgive them, they know not.”
2. Individual Absolution: “Forgive me, I knew not.”
3. Absolution by Truth-telling and Ethical Salvation (e.g., Zaccheus’ soteriology): “pay back what you have stolen...salvation has come to this house today.”
4. A JUST(ice) of Universal Absolution: *apokatastasis* (Acts 3:21) – an afterlife purging, correction that restores creation to its original intention. Sin is absolved, JUST(ice) is not neglected, peace is realized

A Theological Charge

JUST(ice) WORSHIP calls the church into lyrical and liturgical resistance, standing against hegemony and refusing the safety of the theological mainstream. Formation shaped by JUST(ice) requires proclamation that speaks truth to power, names harm, and resists neutrality. In this work, no idea is untouchable, no doctrine enjoys diplomatic immunity, and no theology, song, lyric, or leader is exempt from scrutiny in light of love, justice, and liberation.