

JustPraxis: Liberating the Politics of Jesus from Voluntary Suffering

I refuse to suffer, does that mean I am less of a Christian? Christianity is based on the blood of an innocent victim—Jesus; the love of God is shown by having a father giving up his son for our sins. This is one traditional interpretation we hear often as a dominant narrative, to question it is to expose one to be rejected. Voluntary suffering is prescribed as good for our souls in order to demonstrate our faithfulness. Can I keep the faith in Jesus, and find truth in other life-giving narratives? In writing this chapter I have done that journey in liberating the politics of Jesus from voluntary suffering.

The predominant Christian teaching about suffering has been an obstacle for women healing from gender-based violence. This teaching is based on a belief that all that happens is under the perfect will of God and that we should “take our cross” and suffer for Christ’s sake. Women are taught to accept suffering and not to question the human-made systems and structures that keep us enmeshed. When I was a child attending the Catholic Church with my family, I experienced this teaching by nuns and priests, who forced us to face the crucifix as catechumens. As a young adult during my conversion in a Mennonite Pentecostal church, I experienced the message of the fire of hell, demonizing our problems without addressing their political root-causes. Spiritualization of suffering posits an invisible evil spirit instead of recognizing that humans commit violent acts and need to be held accountable. Later, in my adult faith journey in the U.S., simple Mennonite folks taught me a life of self-sacrifice, a lifestyle to which I submitted for the good of the community. To be a servant—to sacrifice one’s life—was to suffer, and that was deemed good and acceptable. In Anabaptist churches, it is prevalent to glorify martyrism as prescriptive to Christianity and descriptive of discipleship. Violence toward women

has been tolerated and even promoted from literal biblical interpretations about suffering in the name of Christ, further traumatizing and making our wounds difficult to heal.

In my life, liberation came when I questioned these theological assumptions, allowing justice to shine light on the truth of suffering. Interpreting Jesus' actions addressing the politics of suffering, no longer ones needs to ask: Why do I suffer? All through the Hebrew Bible and New Testament it is noticeable that God works to liberate oppressed, captive, exiled, and hurting people—people suffering from evil human doing. As a Latina practical theologian, I aim to deconstruct suffering—as it is found in many socio-economic realities. I found that using only theological language constrained me, in that disentanglement I move toward exploration of the term “politics of suffering.” My task is to uncover the politics of suffering acted out in Jesus' doing and being, intentionally moving beyond the theology of suffering so predominant in Christian teaching. The concept of ‘politics of suffering’ has been used in theories of politics and social science, most recent by writing about Palestirina’s refugees in Syria, Africa analysis and Aboriginals life conditions in Australia. Patrick Chabal as an African scholar defines it as “journey into the politics of every day live...”¹

In this chapter, I seek to address a politics of suffering that moves us into healing waters and does not perpetuate more hurt. Liberating the politics of Jesus is not about voluntary subordination;² rather, it is about our political existence, reading the text of our bodies. Feminists have argued for decades that “the personal is political.” Accordingly, we have searched to define the political nature of our sexuality, race, class, and gender, give they are social constructs. In her book *Political Theology*, Dorothee Soelle brought “faith and action together,” asserting that our

¹ Patrick Chabal, *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*. (London: Zed Books, 2009) p 172.

² Yoder, 1972.

theological statements do carry political meaning.³ Thus, it is not possible to confine the issue of suffering to a religious realm: advocating for no more suffering necessarily entails action, with social and political implications. I will argue that in order to stop suffering produced by human actions (whether intentional or unintentional), we need to disrupt the cycle of violence. This process of proclaiming liberation is based on truth-telling and breaking silence, giving meaning to our pain. Pain is agency. Pain is power that speaks to and demonstrates the injustices. The pain in our bodies is the text. The politics of suffering cries out for justice, urging us to pay attention to claims for justice-liberation.

This process of justice-liberation I call JustPraxis: compassion and communal healing for those suffering from hurt and violence caused by human wrong-doing. This chapter theorizes and illustrates JustPraxis, which emblazes God's justice with real actions toward healing and liberation. This constructive theological exercise is an invitation to perceive how, out of woundedness, pain and suffering one can create new paths. I will address a politics of suffering that has not suffering as its core but liberation from suffering as its divinely given goal, based on God's salvific plan for humanity. JustPraxis focuses not on cognitively complex answers but on life-giving alternatives found in the messiness of our pain.

Exploring Praxis

Wisdom is found in the praxis of our life and faith. Feminist theologians define the term "praxis" as "intentional social activity toward emancipation in Christian feminism."⁴ Rebecca Chopp defines Christian praxis as "means the work of God and Christians [all humans] in

³ Dorothee Soelle, *Political Theology*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 3.

Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson Editors. *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 221.

alleviating oppression, in forming communities of survival and hope . . . providing new ways of flourishing.”⁵ Mujerista theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz reinforces, saying, “reflection action that has as its goal liberation . . . it’s liberative praxis.”⁶ It is in the praxis that I find my voice. Praxis, according to Isasi-Díaz, “enables Latinas to understand the many structures that almost completely determine our lives.”⁷ Ministry is the arena where action-reflection is done in the ever-transforming movements of being aware and guided by praxis at its core. The interconnectiveness of theory-praxis is a dance in which one informs the other, in a non-linear or hierarchal way. It is a continual dialogue of reformulating based on reality, providing practical implementations toward change. When we speak of praxis it informs both the means and the end we seek to change, working to free self and others.

Miguel De La Torre starts with the question, “Who was Jesús”? The formulation of a Christology then grounds Jesús the Christ within his political reality and his action from the margins. In De La Torre in his Christology it is essential Jesús is pronounced and written with the Spanish accent, as it proclaims his religions and ethnic identity. Therefore, the white Jesus has nothing to do with our Latino Jesús who knows what the suffering of the poor feels like. De La Torre thus challenges the Euroamerican’s epistemological privilege in reading of the politics of Jesus. Similarly, Obery M. Hendricks, as a black scholar, asks the same question from a different angle, concluding that Jesus was a first century political revolutionary on behalf of the kingdom of God.⁸

⁵ Ibid., 222.

⁶ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 62.

⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁸ Citation needed for Hendricks.

De La Torre said it well, for the politics of Jesús to find ways, praxis can work in bring about just society for all.⁹ All of Jesus' healing was both political and physical; these actions spoke loudly about the ethic of Jesus restorative power. Jesus challenged the principalities and powers of his social location by being countercultural; he created alternatives to these structures of power through teachings and practices, confronting, disarming, and giving life to many—what I call JustPraxis.¹⁰

JustPraxis challenges our misconceptions of God, demands that we re-know God, and invites us to use new names and images more inclusive of the divine being.¹¹ In my spiritual journey, I created the name “Cristo-Sofia,” claiming the wisdom (*Sofia*) of God ever present as a female embodiment of the divinity in Jesus the Christ. It is my intent to highlight the feminine sign of God within Christology as part of my healing journey; as I have journeyed with children, men, and women in their pain and attended to my own afflictions. Praxis declares the need for change: that things cannot stay the same and that knowledge of God should provoke transformation of self, others, and the world.¹² As Anabaptists we claim our faith to be Christ-centered.¹³ Yet, it is not a simple matter to live one's life base on the kin-dom's¹⁴ values. In

⁹ De La Torre, 19.

¹⁰ It was by reading Hendricks's last chapter that I was able to create the word JustPraxis. The writer simply states that the followers of Jesus mostly seek 'just actions,' and he concludes, "For the politics of Jesus seeks not possession of worldly power, but to serve the justice of God." Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of the Teachings of Jesus and How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 331.

¹¹ Job 42:5 "My ears had heard you but now my eyes have seen you." A new understanding of God has emerged for Job, who always claimed his innocence.

¹² Dictionary of Feminist Theologies Ibid., 222.

¹³ Palmer Becker, *Anabaptist Essentials*, (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press: 2017) 34.

¹⁴ Term first used by Mujerista Theologian Cuban American María Isais-Díaz in *Mujerista Theology* (pg 66 and 83). The word refers to the kingdom of God, in Mujersita feminist theology we use instead kin-dom, an equality to all kin and since this kin-dom is as humble as Jesus was therefore no need for capital letter which represents power and prestige is not searched for.

addition, I find truth by walking with marginalized communities in *lo cotidiano*¹⁵ (everyday life)—not from a desk but from my wounds and sufferings with the people. As an active pacific Christian, Jesus is the center of my faith, what is compelling has been his life not his death, his realistic teachings and his deeds here on earth. In being grounded in CristoSofia I find my voice and where my authority to construct and deconstruct comes from. JustPraxis is a calling, being part of the body of Christ, *Ekklesia* of love and justice holding hope as our principle guide.

Praxis does not explore theory, yet it makes implicit the need to question theories that are non-functional for our reality today. To question the assumptions about God taught by my upbringing, I needed to disarm the patriarchal apparatus, necessitating the work of justice offering light into the intersectionality of the real issues of color/race, gender, and class. As a Latina theologian, I recognize that I have been given not only a patriarchal biblical interpretation but also another layer: that of a colonized/occupied people. W.E.B. DuBois described the African-American reality as double-consciousness. Later, Womanist theologians identified the triple nature of Black women's consciousness. I will dare to say that Latina women in the U.S. carry three or four consciousnesses, "looking at one's self through the eyes of others."¹⁶ Our otherness arises from our country of origin, our migration/immigration status, our woman-self, and our religious identity. Postcolonial African feminist Musa W. Dube adds another term: "double colonization meaning oppression is done by two structure systems: imperialism and

¹⁵ For a more inclusive reading of this Spanish word *lo Cotidiano* read *Mujerista Theology* 66–73. In *Latinas Evangélicas* (2013) you can become familiar how Loida I. Martell-Otero (41) and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier uses this great term as the space of daily struggle where Latinas exist and survive (79).

¹⁶ William E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: A Signet Classic, New American Library, 1969), 49.

patriarchy.”¹⁷ As a Puerto Rican, second-generation migrant, Latina, and Mennonite, I see reality differently than my white, male and female colleagues and experience oppression differently from our black communities, yet we meet in the margins—not to compete to exist but to collaborate in our mutual struggles to BE as equals. I need to constantly decolonize my belief, arriving to my own understanding led by Cristo-Sofia, who informs my struggles and sufferings in the United States, the matrix of my praxis.

Suffering as a Political Problem

When we define suffering as a political problem, it is necessary to see it as a direct result of systems of oppression that allows abusive actions, causing harm and pain, in other words everyday life for the oppress. Womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland defines suffering “as the disturbance of our inner tranquility caused by physical, mental, emotional and spiritual forces that we grasp as jeopardizing our lives, our very existence.”¹⁸ We need to acknowledge that God does not desire the suffering of people.¹⁹ Through her groundbreaking writings, Marie Fortune has taught us once again, “there is no redemption in suffering”²⁰ and adds as a reflective theological piece, “God does not will people to suffer.”²¹ Feminism moves away from “it is God’s will we suffer” toward recognizing the systems and ideologies that promote suffering. Dorothee Soelle names three phases of response: submissiveness to suffering, powerlessness to

¹⁷ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000) 113

¹⁸ M. Shawn Copeland, “_____,” in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 109.

¹⁹ Soelle, 108.

²⁰ Marie M. Fortune, *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse* (HarperSanFrancisco: 1987), 18–20.

²¹ *Violence against Women and Children*, ed Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune, (New York: Continuum, 1995) 91.

suffering, and conquest of powerlessness. In other words, Soelle reaffirms, “the suffering that society produces can be conquered and this leads to changing even the structures.”²² Hence the politics of suffering aims to address the problem.

Suffering caused by natural disaster, I have noticed that it is the poor sectors whose rental units are totally divested by the hurricane, tornado or earthquake suffer more. The marginalized do not have house insurance, or live in the best built homes therefore will not be able to re-built; losing even the little they once had by unexpected water floods or fire. Their suffering portrays a political problem that always existed, but now by the disaster it is exposed. Although we all suffer by unexpected disaster, not all sufferings are the same. Maybe this is what famous Latin-American writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez was referring in his short novel *Chronicle of an Announce Death*.

The politics of suffering requires of us to dismantle the systems of oppression that sustain sexism, classism, and racism—the root causes are shared. Human suffering, as explained by Cynthia Halpern, has been the most urgent and least understood question of contemporary politics. Suffering “as a political question . . . opens up a public moral space . . . and that demands a public response through the exercise of power.”²³ What does the politics of suffering require of Christians? Peace Church believers? Pacifist doers? A spiritual practice I have learned: to lean into it even as my wounded self just wants to leave it and reject it. This can only be done because we have support systems ready to listen and impart their healing upon us. The politics of Jesus requires us to listen to self and other common stories and to imagine how it would be without the suffering. One learns not to take suffering personal, but to take it institutionally.

²²Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, 73.

²³ Cynthia Halpern, *Suffering, Politics, Power: A Genealogy in Modern Politics Theory*, (New York State University, SUNY: 2002) 2.

The truth of evil and suffering calls us to rethink the questions theodicy often presents. Instead of asking why God allows such pain, we need to name the problem in terms of our personal conceptions of God. The problem with the why question in an individualistic society is that it seems too subjective and me-focused. Behind the question is a simple rejection: to ask why is to say no. But for my inquiry, just saying no is not enough. As a brown skinned woman, I see the collective nature of suffering without forgetting my own suffering. German theologian, Dorothee Soelle writes about making the shift in seeing sin not as only a personal matter but as harmful social structures. Soelle mentions “the language of Jesus is always both religious and political, encountering the whole man [person] in his social environment.”²⁴ Yet changing the question instead of why? To what are the factors? Demands a response because God is action. In the analysis of politics of suffering, when justice is address then we would have used JustPraxis. It is in the searching for the root causes of suffering—allowing for God’s love to be present and working with justice an act of liberation is started. Yet this does not happen alone, but among communities of wounded healers that find each other in the journey toward wholeness. In mid1980’s during my early years of walking with sexual abuse victims in the church, I accompanied a young Latina teenager studying in one of our schools. Anita ended up in a mental health hospital in her struggle as victim of sexual abused from her Latino pastor back home. I went to pick her up at the hospital and traveled that evening to her home city, back to her mother’s house. She told me her pain with anger and tears. This was not right, for a pastor of one of our city churches to sexually violate this young girl. Later in their living room, her sister too shared her story of abuse by the same pastor. I was very upset and promised I would take this case to the white bishop, no longer trusting the Latino bishop that oversaw the Latino pastors of

²⁴ Soelle, Political Theology, 36.

that same conference. Perhaps justice could be done by expositing the story up to the highest power I was able to go. Justice thirty years ago was to get him out of that church, even if the Latino congregation had forgiven him the Sunday before. Justice for Anita at least was to feel safe in her mother's house. This child of God would need to be accompanied professionally to start her journey toward healing what lead my actions was JustPraxis emerging.

Rejection of Voluntary Suffering

The idea of voluntary suffering is oppressive in nature, infringing on our freedom in Christ and, worse, perpetuating more abuse. The teachings about suffering for Christ is masochistic. It has kept us women from healing. Furthermore, there is no such thing as voluntary suffering: the status quo of these teachings has saturated our souls with chains of oppression. I fully agree with Teresa De Ferrari, who questioned JHY's interpretation of Jesus' supposed voluntary subordination: "It is easy for a man in the twentieth century to tell slaves and women that Christ wanted them to fully accept their subjection. One wonders whether Y. himself would teach this same pacifism so enthusiastically if he were in the social position of a slave or a woman in the past or even in present society" ²⁵ It is one thing for a male in a position of power to submit voluntarily; it is another, very different thing for a colored, poor woman to submit voluntarily. The points of reference are not equal in currencies of power; hence, to prescribe voluntary subordination is abusive.

The cross was a clear political statement of destruction and death. The Roman Empire made it a visible way of terrorizing the inhabitants of their occupied lands, and the supreme

²⁵ Teresa M. De Ferrari, "The politics of Jesus: vicit agnus noster," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1974): 149-150.

temple leaders knew how to use it to eliminate their enemies, too. Jesus was killed, eliminated by the evilness of both religious leaders and Roman political powers. It seems senseless, incompatible with the nature of a loving God who cares for his son. It has been logically wrong for me to accept the cross as the center of Christianity promoting self-sacrificial, religious dispositions and accepting suffering. I can live with the solidarity of Jesus, knowing what pain and abandonment has felt like in his humanity, but one cannot stay at the foot of the cross forever. How can Christians move beyond this symbol of death? Feminist writers Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker wrote an extensive survey of history of the Christian church taking us back to more life affirming symbols present in the early church.²⁶

I prefer to interpret the cross as a transitional bridge, a traumatic event ending with the power of God manifested in the resurrection. The cross was not divinity imposed but acted on by human power. Jesus lived in an occupied and oppressed political world. Delores Williams kindly reminds us, “Jesus came for life and to show us something about life and living together and what life was all about.”²⁷ In Jesus’ crucifixion is a reminder to us “of the world’s crucifying violence”²⁸ and how we can face as victims the indignity of our crucified oppression. However, because many Christian churches preach the cross from a patriarchal viewpoint, it is hard to find a safe place for those seeking healing from crucifixion experiences within Christianity. There are no safe places therefore we are called to create those dwelling transitioning us out of death into life, experiencing our resurrection-liberation.

²⁶ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. (Boston; Beacon Press, 2008)

²⁷ What’s Faith Got to Do with It? (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 90.

²⁸ Kelly Douglas Ibid., 192.

Ultimately, subordination has led many women into suffering. This proposition of JHY²⁹ promotes an unjust status quo and prescribing nonresistance instead of a nonviolent resistance a position I practice. I join the many womanist writers, especially Emilie M. Townes, as women of color we reject suffering as God's will and reject suffering coming from both socio-political and religious arenas.³⁰ I propose that Jesus' appeal was how he used his power, his human agency, religious male power, his presences--the text of his own broken body—as one that understood suffering and death. Jesus learned how to exercise his divine power as Son of God / the Christ to bring about God's justice interrupting the gentiles' and Jewish reality of their times. Jesus existence was a political statement for the Romans and a religious upheaval for his religious leaders. Jesus' politics toward the oppressed found the truth, and it has set us free to no longer believe those patriarchal scripture interpretations. Today we need to ask collectively: What is the politics of Jesus for us NOW? By addressing the suffering (sexual abuse, massive incarceration, homelessness, racial discrimination) of our people not found in humiliation subordination.

Once we have critically analyzed suffering, the inclination is to do something about it. To know its root causes is a call to action. Soelle presents it as: "God has no other hands that ours."³¹ Violence produces suffering; suffering is felt in on-going pains—physical, emotional, and spiritual. To feel pain reminds me I am alive and that I do not want to feel pain any longer. I see Christ who knows what pain and suffering are all about. What is the politics of Jesus? Emmanuel with us, incarnated in a humble Jewish man from the margins of Galilee. This is the Jesus I love moves me into action, empowered by the Holy Spirit is the Sofia that guides to proclaim, "This should not be."

²⁹ For more in-depth reading Dr. Janna L. Hunter-Bowman has research JHY's writing on voluntary subordination.

³⁰ Emily M. Townes ed, *A Troubling in my Soul: Womanist Perspective on Evil & Suffering*. (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis Books) 1993. 83-84.

³¹ *Suffering*, 149.

Suffering requires a response with actions of pastoral compassion and lamentation as a call for prophetic just-actions. Crucifixion *no tiene la última palabra, ni la muerte*—death does not have the last word, but it is in the resurrected healing in which we find hope. Susanne Guenther Loewen offers one way to give meaning to the cross: “a model of God of Solidarity and Life . . . at the foot of these crosses, women name their pain . . . God’s call for nonviolent resistance and conscientious objection to all the ways we are living in death. . . . with that we might then step into liberation, healing, and life.”³² How can we wait together for resurrection? Emilie M. Townes describes resurrection as “God’s breaking into history to transform suffering into wholeness—to move from victim to change agent.”³³ My perspective as a *Mujer-lista*³⁴ feminist leads me away from prescribing the cross, a movement toward the consequential nature of Jesus’ radical being and teachings. In order for this to happen it requires to exercise our faith, one which is Jesus-centered, aiming for the ultimate good of the people our response is the action and reflection of JustPraxis.

JustPraxis as Power to Change

In JustPraxis is implicit the justice of God and the very motif of “making things right.” It is not mainly about restitution or reconciliation, yet that it could be part of the action; it is about living out the true meaning of justice as taught in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus embodied the Hebrew meaning of justice *mishpat*, more than punishment of wrong doing it also mean giving people their rights. Justice was giving people what they were due that mean taking up the care for the

³² PhD dissertation thesis Mennonite Peace Theology and the Suffering of Women.

³³ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁴ I coin the word *Mujer-lista* as an Anabaptist woman ready/*lista* to do the active work of justice from a *Mujerista* perspective.

widows, orphans, and the poor. Justness-*mishpat*³⁵ was about violation of justice—a lack or neglect toward these people. Another word related to justice in Hebrew is *tzadeqah*, a life of right relationships not only with God but socially. The first expression of justice in the Gospel of Luke is found in Mary’s canticle 1:46–55. In her humble and vulnerable stage as a Jewish young pregnant woman finds in her heart to articulate the song of the oppressed. In her song to God she understands the act of God to “scattered the proud . . . bring down the powerful and lifted up the lowly . . . filled the hungry and sent the rich away empty.” Vs 51–53. The kin-dom of God type of justice could be good news for rich and powerful, it meant letting go of positions of power and privilege. Jesus’ politics required the option for the poor³⁶, the consciousness of our co-existence and the movement of the empowerment of the Spirit of God to address these disparities. It is JustPraxis our human response that offers the tools to restore right relationships.

JustPraxis is about distributing power to make changes in institutions and systems, reviewing and transforming policies that are fair and equal to all. Abuse happens as a misuse of power and power dynamic of unequal. It is most healthy sense power is about producing change, dynamic energy to move and make things happen. During the colonization period power was associated with control and dominion, today in a post-colonization we opt to conceive power as a share commodity of mutual respect. Musa Dube as a postcolonial African Feminist names it this way “to cultivate postcolonial strategies . . . that resist and decolonize both patriarchy and imperial oppression is to seek to articulate liberation” Womanist call it power as cooperation, a call to develop our potential and capacities toward interconnectiveness.³⁷ Moving away from the power-over into power-with. For the powerful they might need to learn to release power and for

³⁵ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010) 3-4

³⁶ *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, 158.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

the powerless they will unleashing their agency/power. Other words we can use instead of this imperialistic word ‘power- as domination’ is what social sciences use today agency, capacity for change and in JustPraxis is the call to redistribute power toward the vulnerable.

When we move from paralysis and silence to raising our voices of lament, our pain cries out for justice to work for transformation.³⁸ There are key biblical narratives where listening to the cries of the people is attended to from God such as Exodus 3:7 and James 5:4b. These cries for justice are to stop the wrong-doing and restore the others dignity. Not only does God hear the cry, there is action. This does not imply reconciliation but realignment with self, God, and others (with whom we feel safe). I imagine God fighting/*luchando* for truth and justice. Miguel De la Torre reminds us in the end of his book *Embracing Hopelessness* that the pursuit of justice “is what makes life worth living in the present and to hope against all hope.”³⁹ In Shalom we find the notion of justice and peace. A false sense of peace happens when we do not actively seek JustPraxis. Pastor Judy Zook names it this way “When we move too fast into peace it’s like creating a ‘veneer peace’, at the front it looks nice, but once it shatters the ugly wood shows.”⁴⁰ The easy fix, fast answers does not bring about lasting peace or real Shalom, I am summoned to use my cry for justice.

One example of JustPraxis is what Letty Russell calls Just Hospitality.⁴¹ It is an articulation of our need as communities of faith that we are not afraid of extending the table of hospitality all. Russell was arguing in favor for churches to be inclusive of the LGBTQA community, and today we can extend the table to undocumented immigrants and newly release

³⁸ Ibid., 74.

³⁹ Miguel a. De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 155–56.

⁴⁰ Pastoral conversation with Judy Zook, pastor at Laure St Mennonite Church, November 2018.

⁴¹ Shannon Clarkson & Kate M. Ott eds *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press) 2009.

citizens from prison. JustPraxis moves us to create bridges not walls, inclusion not exclusion, openness to innovative approaches not repeating notions that are not helpful for our church today.

In JustPraxis we find the strength for nonviolent resistance; it is the energy to push forward with conviction and collective wisdom of a community that is healing. Countless times I have had to articulate my song, “God does not desire suffering for your life. *Dios no desea sufrimiento para tu vida,*” to victims I have journeyed with through tears and anger. When it has been my wounds of sexual abuse, what comforts me? What moves me into healing? To recognize that if I continue to nurture hate and ill feeling towards my enemy, that would further injury my body, mind and soul. It is a spiritual practice coming out from the power of reclaiming healing to self and others, in which I am able to love even my enemy. After all the enemy and I share the brokenness of humanity and there is plenty of grace for all. May no assumption that with righteous indignation it is necessary to hold the abuser responsible and restituted for the wrong committed. It starts with a lamentation and proclaiming a song of “NO MAS/NO MORE,” stating together with De La Torre that “Jesús is not a thought—Jesús is a praxis.”⁴² Jesus is action of life. Jesus’ teachings embodied a community-based politics. The political implication of JustPraxis is made tangible; its manifestation is in the body of those claiming justice, always searching for liberation.

Liberation

The core of JustPraxis is manifested in liberation from suffering. I have experienced in my life the truthfulness of JustPraxis. In the need to heal, it has not been working for peace but rather building the essentials for justice to be actively present. The image Psalm 85:10 is helpful

⁴² De La Torre, 9.

to better draw the connections: “*Mercy and Truth will meet together, Justice and Peace will kiss each other.*” Mercy as the expression of love and truth translated by faithfulness are essentials, but peace needs to encounter justice and it will go before God preparing the way, as the Psalmist so well draws us the picture with words. It is in the question, “what do you need?” articulated to a victim of sexual violence within the church, which invites us to search for the root cause of the suffering toward liberation.

Today it is not enough just to stop the violence; there is a higher call to create policies and procedure for earlier intervention and preventive approaches. JustPraxis seeks not only justice for individuals but also entire communities. Here the power of togetherness allows the bodies to speak, cry and move resisting the normalization of historical violence. Denominations and church conferences hold accountable their credential leaders by applying their policies and educating on healthy boundaries. Today I teach healthy boundaries, educating pastors (women and men) in preventive measures toward best ethical practices in ministry. Today we have clergy accountability and we seek restoration for the victims as we create educational tools toward prevention.

In liberating the politics of Jesus, we find a true historical and political person in Jesus. It is not about blindly imitating Jesus but rather creating a path forward out of oppression. Helder Camara in his classical message in *The Spiral of Violence* directed to the youth in Brazil, ‘justice is the condition for peace.’⁴³ Justice is Jesus’ way of bring peace and healing. When we take seriously our own context and the text of our walk with Jesus, we can better understand the impact the politic of Jesus had in his social location and that which is having in our world today. Matthew 6:33a within the teachings of the Sermon of the Mount is an invitation to “seek first his

⁴³ Helder Camara, *The Spiral of Violence*. Page 55.

kingdom and his righteousness,” (NIV) to pursuit right actions and these come out of kin-dom values and principles. Today beyond political ideology or partisanship, our alignment should be with God’s justice. JustPraxis is one way to incarnate God’s justice, one that move us away from suffering as we address together that which produces pain—injustices that is what the politics of Jesus is about and JustPraxis can take us there.

As I conclude this exercise I dare to return to the question I initially name in the beginning of this chapter: Can I keep the faith in Jesus and find truth in other life giving narrative? To accept suffering is allowing the pain to oppress us further, but to understand where this pain comes from is part of the journey toward liberation. Worshipping a justice caring God is the narrative I wish to keep and JustPraxis is the faith respond I desire to offer. The politics of Jesus was expressed here on earth, so we can continue to pray-act together “may your will be done on earth and it is in heaven ...” I aim for JustPraxis because there is much justice to be done, and then heaven will happen here on earth where it matters.