

Somewhere over the next four weeks, you will go to a Christmas party or dinner. As you take off your boots at the door you will notice a great conversation happening on the other side of the room. A whole group of people are asking questions, suggesting answers, testing ideas. You will be drawn to find out what they are talking about and eventually to join in yourself.

The person doing most of the talking is someone named Tom Wright. He is saying that it will help us to understand our world if we think of the echoes of a voice that we all hear.

He says that the voice echoes, or speaks in four ways. The first echo is the voice of justice.

I like to think of it as **the voice inside us that says, “Hey!”**

If you hang around a playground long enough, you will hear it, “Hey, that’s not fair!” As we grow up, it becomes, “Hey, that’s not right!”

Let’s try some examples:

Here is a picture of a recent international incident:

(slide of Thierry Henry)

In this case all of Ireland spoke with one desperate voice.

“Hey, that’s not right!”

Let’s switch sports and try it again. People who follow NHL hockey will know that more and more players are suffering brain damage these days. We call them concussions, but a concussion is brain damage. They are getting hurt by body checks and high elbows aimed at their heads.

The result is something like this:

(slide of Toews and Mitchell)

Injured players can be out for weeks.

So here is part of an actual debate on sports talk shows.

If a star player, say Dustin Penner

(slide)

injures someone, his fine or suspension should be less than if someone like Dean Arsene

(slide) injures someone.

The argument says that Dustin Penner puts fans in the seats. People come to see him play. The longer he would be out, the greater the loss of money to the team and the league. No one except his family comes to see Dean Arsene play.

When I hear that conversation, I hear a voice that says, "Hey, that's not right!"

It is not hard to name other issues of justice.

Omar Khadr was arrested at the age of 15 after a fire fight in Afghanistan. He has spent seven years in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. He is the only western citizen left there. The Canadian government has been ordered by our own court to bring him home. The case is now before the Supreme Court. The government's argument is that they are afraid that bringing him home would give the impression that Canada gives a haven to terrorists. So they leave him there, because they are too afraid to do the right thing.

“Hey, that’s not right”.

Edmonton has a shiny new heart institute, and a state of the art children’s hospital, but Alberta Health Services wants to close the Alberta Mental Health Hospital and place those suffering acute mental illnesses among other patients in other hospitals. Some of us know personally how valuable that facility is.

We hear the voice that says, “Hey, that’s not right!”

Executives at companies that were bailed out by taxpayers continue to receive crazy bonuses. Nortel executives are giving themselves raises as the company goes down the drain.

Alex Wedman, a teenager who had been bullied for years, committed suicide. School officials deny any responsibility for the treatment he received from some fellow students.

“That’s not right”.

We each have our own stories. In some of them we are the victims of injustice done by someone else. In others, we have done wrong and we know it.

Our newspapers are a never ending record of the search to make things right. And sometimes, every so often we read a powerful and amazing story of a wrong made right and it is so good.

So what do we do with that voice when there is so much wrong all around us?

1. **We may be tempted to say that the voice is not ‘realistic’.** Star

players should receive a special pass if they injure someone else. “The real world is a harsh place”. We all just do what we can to get by. If some people suffer, well that’s too bad. If others enjoy a great life, lucky them”.

2. **We may be tempted to be upset with injustice ‘out there’ and ignore our own unjust acts.** It was easy in the 80’s to protest apartheid, while ignoring native issues in Canada completely.

3. **We might say that the voice is from a different world altogether.** It is a voice from a special place and someday we will go there, but it doesn’t really have much to do with the here and now. “In the sweet, by and by everything will be wonderful, but that is for another time and place. The thought of heaven is comforting, but for now “suck it up buttercup.”

4. Or..... **the voice just might mean that there is someone speaking to us all,** someone who never grows weary or gives up on us, someone who loves this world. Could it be that we have been created with a receiver to hear the voice of God that says, “Hey, that’s not right!”?

So Tom Wright started this conversation. Peter Schuurman said, “what happens if we bring that voice to the Christmas story?”

I tried it and I was surprised to hear it there more clearly than ever.
Listen: In those days an order went out from the emperor Caesar Augustus that a head count should be taken of every place inhabited by Rome. (The entire Roman “house”).

“Hey, that’s not right!” The Roman boot did not belong in God’s country. The head count was for tax purposes. The Romans demanded funds from the countries they occupied so that they could build roads to move their armies around faster and bring supplies in from the provinces to the cities.

An order went out from Caesar and the voice echoed in every heart of every people who had been conquered and forced to live their lives for Caesar’s benefit. “That’s not right!”

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David because he belonged to the house and line of David.

The house of David, the royal line of David has been **swallowed up** by Rome. There is not much left of the house of David. Joseph could not have been the most hopeful member of David’s royal family.

He must have been from Bethlehem the way that my kids are from Zuidhoorn in Groningen, the Netherlands, where my dad was born. Joseph returns with a pregnant fiancé, but there is no place for them. They have been gone so long there are no relatives to take them in. And so, as we know, there was no room in the inn.

The voice echoes, “Hey, that’s not right!”

And now, I will tell you a mystery.

In those days of terrible injustice and absolute human power when right and wrong were determined by Caesar and the kingdom of God was squashed flat..... **God used the oppressive decree of Caesar Augustus against him and all human empires.** He used it to bring his one and only Son to the place where the prophets had predicted he would be born. The oppressive power of Rome is used to arrange the birth of the Prince of Peace.

It is not just a neat trick. It shows who is really in control of the world. Not empires with their love of power and no concern for what is right. God is in control of his world. This is what he is doing. **God is destroying the foundation of human empires that exist by the love of power. He is bringing in a kingdom that exists by the power of love.** God will use the power of Rome, he will use the rejection of his people and through the death of Jesus on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus from the grave he will defeat all the powers of injustice.

So what does the story say to us about justice?

Don't ever let the power of any empire or any majority government intimidate you.

Instead, follow Jesus. Notice that Jesus doesn't really pay much attention to the power of Rome. It is amazing that Jesus does not really say much about that great oppression at all. Other than, 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's'.

Follow Jesus, watch and learn.

Until we follow Jesus and learn from Jesus we won't even know what injustice and justice looks like. We might think that justice is all about locking up criminals.

Learn from Jesus. **Jesus responds to our own injustice with forgiveness.** Jesus responds to our sins against others and against him with forgiveness.

And then he teaches us that the way to resolution of the hurt done to us will always, at the end of the story, be about forgiveness. The challenge is to know how and when to forgive.

Jesus teaches us and calls us to defend and protect others.

Justice is nothing but love with legs. (Serena Jones) (and with hands)

If we only hear the voice that says, "Hey, that's not right", but do nothing we are useless to those who suffer. Jesus and Paul and James all warn about being hearers only, but not doing anything.

At the heart of all issues of justice is love that dares to care and to do, in Jesus' strength and in his name.

Each of us will have our own opportunities and challenges to act.

But let's go back to that public issue of the closing of Alberta Hospital. Our premier is Ed Stelmach. The Health Minister is Ron Liepert. Our own MLA in St. Albert is Ken Allred. Tony Vandermeer is the chair of the Cabinet Policy Committee on Health and serves as a member of the Public Accounts Committee and the Standing Committee on Health. It would be a very good thing for us personally and as a congregation to

remind them and our government that mental health care is as important as cardiac or pediatric care. It is a justice issue.

There are so many battle fronts when it comes to justice issues. Maybe the toughest one is the one in our own hearts. It is easy to think that justice for others is something that costs **us**. Ultimately, all acts of love come back to us and benefit us and our children too. But we will see that more clearly in a few weeks. For now, let's listen to his voice and in the name and power of Jesus, do what is right, especially for the oppressed and voiceless. Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream. (Amos 5:24)

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.