

When the Rubber Hits the Road

Racial Justice Sunday

Main Scripture: John 6:1–15

May I speak and may we hear in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

One of my favourite verses in the Bible comes from the prophet Micah:

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

That verse doesn't leave much room for confusion. It grounds us in the truth that faith is not hidden or abstract. Faith is lived. It is practiced. It shows up in how we treat one another, whose voices we listen to, and whose suffering we are willing to see. We live out Micah's call whenever we love our neighbour not in theory, but in practice.

But there comes a moment when love can no longer remain comfortable. A moment when compassion stops being an idea and becomes a responsibility. When faith moves out of words and into hands and feet. We often describe that moment with a simple phrase: **when the rubber hits the road.**

Racial Justice Sunday brings us directly to that moment. It does not ask whether we agree with the idea of dignity or equality. It asks what we are willing to do when those convictions collide with real hunger, real exclusion, and real inequity. It asks whether our faith is strong enough to be lived out in the real world.

And that is exactly where John's gospel meets us today.

If Micah tells us what God requires, John 6 shows us what that requirement looks like when people are actually hungry. It begins where justice always begins, with real bodies, real need, and no easy solutions.

In John's Gospel, Jesus sees the crowd before anyone says a word. He notices their hunger, the kind of hunger that cannot be explained away or postponed. Justice always begins with seeing, with refusing to look away from real human need.

Only then does Jesus turn to Philip and asks where bread can be found. Philip responds honestly, naming limits, budgets, and scarcity. He is not wrong, but scarcity is never the final word with Jesus.

That same voice of scarcity still shapes our world today, especially in conversations about racial justice. It tells us there isn't enough to go around, that the cost is too high, that the problem is too complex to touch. Scarcity sounds reasonable. It sounds responsible. But it often becomes the excuse that allows suffering to continue.

Then Andrew speaks up. He points to a boy someone small, unnamed, easily overlooked, with five loaves and two fish. It's not much. It doesn't solve the problem. And Andrew himself seems unsure it's even worth mentioning.

But this moment matters.

Again and again, justice begins when voices that are usually dismissed are finally heard. When what seems insignificant is taken seriously. When the offerings of those with the least power are no longer ignored.

Jesus takes what the boy offers. He does not measure it. He does not minimise it. He receives it with gratitude, breaks it open, and uses it to feed the crowd.

Jesus does not deny hunger. He does not spiritualise it away. He responds with action.

This is the moment when the rubber hits the road, when compassion becomes embodied, when faith becomes visible, and when God's justice moves from possibility into reality.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 8 that the whole creation is groaning, longing to be set free from bondage. Groaning is not weakness. It is the sound of pain that has gone on too long and can no longer be silenced.

Racial injustice is one of those groans. It is heard in unequal access to food, education, healthcare, safety, and opportunity and realities shaped by history and sustained by systems that continue to advantage some while harming others.

And yet Paul insists that hope is still possible. Not a passive hope. Not a waiting-without-engagement hope. But a hope that acts, a hope that listens, a hope that shows up when suffering demands a response.

At the heart of that hope is something deeply human. We all want to be seen and known, loved and valued for who we truly are. We want to be treated with dignity. We want to be heard.

Jesus understands this. He does not blame the hungry crowd for their need. Instead, he turns to those with proximity and resources and says, "You give them something to eat." Not alone. Not perfectly. But faithfully.

To act justly. To love mercy. To walk humbly with our God. That is what faith looks like when it meets the real world.

And in a time of increasing strife and polarisation, this story calls us to bridge divides not with slogans or certainty, but with compassion, humility, and courageous love.

In the end, the miracle in John 6 is not only that thousands are fed.

[pause]

It's that Jesus chooses to begin with something small.

[pause]

A boy.

[pause]

Five loaves.

[pause]

Two fish.

What looked insignificant became enough when it was placed in Jesus' hands.

[slow]

What was easy to dismiss became life-giving when it was finally taken seriously.

On this Racial Justice Sunday, that matters.

[pause]

Because justice does not begin with having everything figured out.

[emphasis]

It begins with seeing.

With listening.

With refusing to walk past the hunger in front of us.

We all want to be seen and known, loved and valued for who we truly are.

[slow]

So do our neighbours.

So do those whose voices have too often been ignored.

When the rubber hits the road, faith asks us a simple but costly question:

[pause]

What are we willing to place in Jesus' hands?

Not alone.

[pause]

Not perfectly.

[pause]

But faithfully.

And when we do

[slow]

God still multiplies what is offered.

God still feeds the hungry.

God still brings justice to life in a groaning world.

When the rubber hits the road, may we be a people who see clearly,

[pause]

name injustice honestly,

[pause]

and respond faithfully to the groaning of the world.

[slow]

Amen.