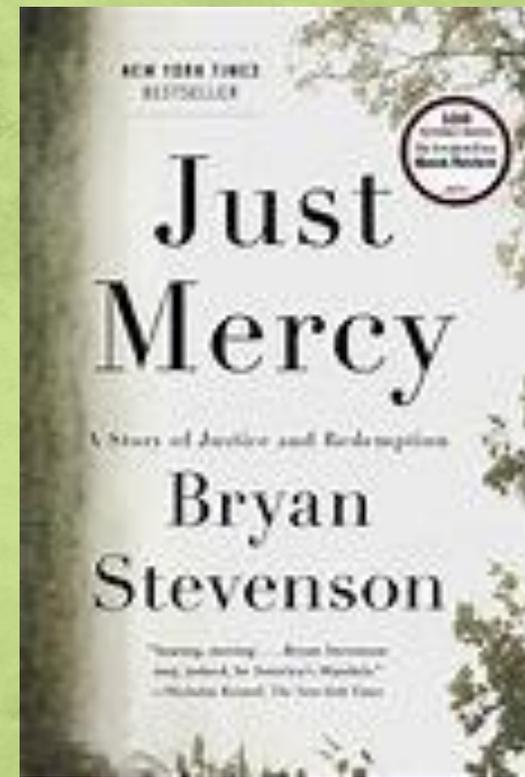


Welcome to the Just Mercy

Summer Grace Group

Fourth Session



Linda Hitchens and Ed Bryant

Shake Us from Our Slumber

When our eyes do not see the gravity of racial justice,
Shake us from our slumber and open our eyes, O Lord.

When out of fear we are frozen into inaction,
Give us a spirit of bravery, O Lord.

When we try our best but say the wrong things,
Give us a spirit of humility, O Lord.

When the chaos of this dies down,
Give us a lasting spirit of solidarity, O Lord.

When it becomes easier to point fingers outwards,
Help us to examine our own hearts, O Lord.

God of truth, in your wisdom, Enlighten Us.
God of hope in your kindness, Heal Us.
Creator of All People, in your generosity, Guide Us.

Racism breaks your heart, break our hearts for what breaks yours, O Lord.
Ever present God, you called us to be in relationship with one another and promised to dwell wherever two or three are gathered. In our community, we are many different people; we come from many different places, have many different cultures. Open our hearts that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Course Structure and Plan

- Lessons based upon the book but will reference the movie
- Lessons
 - Introduction – Chapter 3 June 3
 - Chapter 4 – Chapter 6 June 17
 - Chapter 7 – Chapter 10 July 1
 - Chapter 11 – Chapter 13 July 15
 - Chapter 14 – 16 and Epilogue July 29
 - Final session August 12
 - Critical Race Theory
 - The Importance of Music to African Americans
 - Additional Requests from the Discussion Group

Chapter 14, Cruel and Unusual

- Michael Gulley, Nathan McCants, Joe Sullivan
 - Stole money and jewelry from Lena Bruner who was sexually assaulted later the same day
 - Joe Sullivan (13) indicted in adult court for sexual battery and other charges
 - Convicted by 6-person jury, short trial, incompetent defense lawyer
 - A 13-year-old with mental disabilities; physical abuse, neglect, unstable home; multiple violations; a follower
 - Untruthful, non-compassionate judge sentenced him to life imprisonment without parole
 - In prison, raped and sexually assaulted, attempted suicide, developed multiple sclerosis
- Between 1990 and 2005, a new prison opened in the United States every 10 days
 - Prison industrial complex
 - Imprisonment was very profitable with serious lobbyists
- Based on new Supreme Court ruling, several challenges were filed
 - Contemporary neurological, psychological and sociological evidence has established that children are impaired by immature judgment and an underdeveloped capacity for self-regulation/responsibility
 - The commitment to harsh punishment for children was intense and reactionary

Chapter 14, Cruel and Unusual (continued)

- Bryan focuses on children under 15 and children convicted of non-homicide offenses
 - Such a judgment is irrational
 - Potential for growth and change
 - Products of an environment they have no control over
 - Lack of recognized maturity and judgment
- Bryan argued before the Supreme Court to change the rules across the country
 - USA the only country that imposes life imprisonment without parole
 - Condemning children violates international law
 - Disproportionately imposed on children of color
 - Harsh treatments were created for career adult criminals; cruel and unusual
- A miracle to laugh under such adversity

Discussion Topics

- The biological and psychosocial development of adolescents 12 to 18.
- The ability to laugh under adversity

Chapter 15, Broken

- Walter's decline
- Short documentary was made about the death penalty
- Awaiting the Sullivan judgment from the Supreme Court
- Decision to represent all scheduled for execution without counsel
- Staff, resources, and funding needed to meet the new demands
- Several states take capital punishment off the books
- Bryan flies all over the country litigating on behalf of children
- The case of Jimmy Dill
- Bryan understands that he is broken too.

Discussion Topics

- Just Mercy – what does it mean?

Chapter 16, The Stonecatchers' Song of Sorrow

- US Supreme Court ruling – Life imprisonment without parole sentences imposed on children convicted of non-homicide crimes is cruel and unusual punishment and constitutionally impermissible (May 17, 2010)
- Constitutional ban on mandatory life-without parole sentences imposed on children convicted of homicides (June 2012)
- Continuing work
 - Ban on housing children under the age of 18 with adults in jails and prisons
 - Young children should never be tried in adult court
 - Death penalty work – relief for over 100 death row prisoners
 - Launch of the race and poverty initiative

Chapter 16, The Stonecatchers' Song of Sorrow (continued)

- Rate of mass incarceration declines in 2012 for the first time in 40 years
- Four institutions in American history that shaped the approach to race and justice
 - Slavery
 - The reign of terror that shaped the lives of people of color following Reconstruction until World War II
 - Jim Crow
 - Mass incarceration
- Creation of re-entry programs
- New cases of juvenile lifers – Joshua Carter, Robert Caston
- The Stonecatcher

Discussion Topics

- Domestic terrorism on 9/11 vs terrorism of Black people for hundreds of years
- Re-enslavement and convict leasing
- Racial profiling
- Have your views about capital punishment changed while reading *Just Mercy*?

Epilogue

- Walter dies – 11 September 2013
 - He remained kind and charming until the very end
 - He died on God's schedule, not the government's schedule
 - He survived it all and never gave up
 - His capacity for forgiveness and mercy
 - What did Walter teach you?
- One major theme – resilience

Words to Remember

A death-in-prison sentence is a terminal, unchangeable, once-and-for-all judgment on the whole life of a human being that forever declares him unfit to be a part of civil society.

We exploit the inability of the poor to get the legal assistance they need—all so we can kill them with less resistance. . . . We've legalized vengeful and cruel punishment.

Why do we want to kill all the broken people? What is wrong with us that we think a thing like that can be right? . . . Instinctively we want to crush those among us whose brokenness is most visible.

Bryan Stevenson

Where Do We Go From Here?

- **Love Is a Habit** – from the children’s message
- **Repairing Our Relational Infrastructure: Love** – Rev. Dr. Ben Trawick, Grace Presbyterian Church sermon from July 11, 2021
- The Importance of Being Educated
- ??????
- ??????

Last Class, Assigned Videos and Readings

- Critical Race Theory
- The Importance of Music to African Americans
 - The History of Black Music – [History of Black Music - Bing video](#)
 - A Special Guest Presenter
- Additional Requests from the Discussion Group

Resources and References

- **Primary Resources**

- **Just Mercy** – the movie, available on Prime Video and YouTube
- **Opinion:** When it comes to knowing U.S. history, we should all be 'woke' (an article from the Washington Post):
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/05/27/american-history-we-should-all-be-woke/>
- **13th - A Documentary** by Ava Duvernay
- **Repairing Our Relational Infrastructure: Love** – Rev. Dr. Ben Trawick, Grace Presbyterian Church sermon from July 11, 2021

Resources and References (continued)

- Recommended reference materials
 - **The History of Black Music** – [History of Black Music - Bing video](#)
 - **Michigan Journal of Race and Law, Volume 25, 2020**
 - Man's Best Friend? How Dogs Have Been Used to Oppress African Americans
 - **The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism** by Jemar Tisby
 - **So You Want to Talk About Race** by Ijeoma Oluo