

We believe in the forgiveness of sins

- ❖ In Jesus Christ, we have forgiveness of every sin: **of every crime and of every harm** we have done to one another. We forgive because we have been forgiven.
- ❖ It is the job of Christians to build structures of justice aimed at pursuing **reconciliation and restoration of right relationship**. Prisons are the opposite of this kind of justice.
- ❖ Prisons aim to rehabilitate but also to punish. Because these aims are in conflict, they are unable to do both. **True justice should be aimed at rehabilitation.**

God is present here

- ❖ The most important lesson about prisons in the Bible is from Matthew 25:31-46, where Jesus tells us to "visit the prisoner...as you have done for the least of these, you did it to me."
- ❖ **Jesus is present in every prisoner. Jesus is here with you today.**
- ❖ God accompanies us through all oppression, injustice, and suffering. And God's presence brings **the promise of freedom and liberation.**

*The Lord sets prisoners free,
the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
the Lord loves the righteous.
(Psalm 146:8 NIV)*

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What Does the Bible Say About Prisons and Justice?

*Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me
to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
(Luke 4:18 NIV)*

Our God is a God of Liberation

- ❖ Jesus proclaimed **an end to every form of imprisonment** (Luke 4:18). He promises freedom to every captive in the coming kingdom of God. There is no place for prisons in the kingdom of God, where all are healed from every addiction, trauma, and sin and set free to love one another.
- ❖ Christians worship the God who brought Israel out of bondage in Egypt. From the beginning, God's promise to his people has been a promise of **freedom and belonging**.
- ❖ The Exodus is the story of setting free those who are enslaved, but it applies equally to prisoners. God is the one who **brings those in prison out of bondage** into the Promised Land of the beloved community.
- ❖ The Apostles' Creed tells us that Jesus descended into hell after his crucifixion, and **freed the souls held captive** upon his resurrection. By entering hell, Jesus abolished it, setting free those who were imprisoned by death or sin.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2 NIV)

What is justice?

- ❖ Often, people think justice is synonymous with punishment: "you do the crime, you do the time."
- ❖ But **Jesus bore the punishment of every sin** in our place on the cross and thus reconciled us to God. As a direct consequence of this, the need for punishment and retribution ended when Jesus died.
- ❖ Because of the cross, we are liberated to imagine **justice that is free of retribution**. There is no more punishment, because "Jesus paid it all."

Good People vs. Bad People?

- ❖ Our system of prisons is designed to make society safe by separating out "bad people" from "good people."
- ❖ But as Christians we know that **there are no bad people and good people**. Every one of us is capable of great good and great evil.
- ❖ Justice means learning how to **live together in peace**, take responsibility for our actions, and make amends for the harm we have done, no matter who we are.

God's community of justice

- ❖ God's goal is for no one to be cast aside (Luke 15:7) but for justice to be worked out **in the community**. No one is disposable in the kingdom of God.
- ❖ The church is entrusted the **ministry of reconciliation** (2 Corinthians 5:19). It is Christians' job to seek justice in ways that reconcile offenders to the community.
- ❖ Restorative justice in community can look like **taking responsibility and making amends**, but also like addressing the conditions that led to the offense.

The reconciliation of all things

- ❖ Our ultimate hope is in **God's reconciliation of the entire creation** at the end of time.
- ❖ When we are reconciled to each other, we are **anticipating** the coming kingdom of God.
- ❖ Jesus tells us "**the kingdom of God is within you**" (Luke 17:12). When we work for restorative justice on earth, we are making real the kingdom of God which is already present in us.