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## Just Ice

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## Just Ice

In a kitchen with a linoleum or hardwood floor, if someone says that the crystalline piece we almost stepped on is just ice, all concern about possible broken glass is dissipated, and we go on with whatever we were doing. But if someone raises the topic of justice, everyone takes notice, for any discussion is fraught with more "danger" than from a possible piece of broken glass on the floor.

When justice is the subject, most of our wariness arises from the possibility that a value of great personal importance to us might be challenged, or that we will be confronted with some painful experiences of others or of our own. How easily we can be made to feel uncomfortable when we learn about such things as juveniles sentenced to life in prison on mistaken testimony, or notorious criminals being set free through some legal maneuverings by well-paid attorneys, or people losing their homes and/or life-savings through some scam or other. Each of us has suffered injustice of one kind or another, so that the very word "justice" bears distressing emotional content.

How might we consider some contexts for the word "justice" with as care-free an attitude as when someone speaks the words "just ice?" Since we have nothing to fear from a piece of frozen water, neither do we have to beware of justice.

When the word that is meant to convey an existing right relationship between persons is misapplied to some destructive or hurtful attitude whereby persons are discounted, written off, or rationalized as undeserving of compassion, we are disturbed by these perceived abuses of justice. We want to be treated with justice and fairness, and to treat others the same way. Our desire for such justice is a spiritual movement within us that resonates with the loving intention of our Creator, and reflects well the genuine meaning of justice.

God's justice is radically different from many of the human understandings of the word that are applied negatively to the supposed restoration of rights that have been violated: everything from property damage to hurt feelings. If God were concerned primarily about "rights" we would all wind up "in the wrong." Rather, God's justice is an orientation to bringing about the right relationship between persons, including our relationship with God, not through coercion, but through the more powerful force of love.

Human laws can be made and applied that restore stolen property, but they cannot compel an apology by a thief or acceptance by the one who has been robbed, much less repair physical, emotional, and spiritual pain by financial

payment or through punishment of perpetrators. Justice is a matter of heart more than mind, for no matter how much we might think about it, we must choose the attitude that brings us peace. Justice is spiritual, not material, and is a gift, not a debt that can be paid off. Further, justice is about honesty, not equality, as we see in all relationships where love is involved. When we are in a just relationship with God or other persons, we experience peace, the internal mark of our having accepted the spiritual gift of justice.

A quick look at Jesus Christ crucified provides a clear image of the worst kind of injustice, as he said or did nothing to harm others. Our ordinary sense of justice would suggest that those who act unjustly should be "brought to justice." We are, if we accept God's sense of justice as expressed in his words of "Forgive them," which no one can deserve. Whenever we intend and seek to be at peace with regard to another, we are in a right relationship with that person and also with God.

Justice might seem dangerous when we think about trying to "make it happen," but when we seek and accept it as grace and gift, we might come to discover that it is just ice.