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I used to believe justice was constant action in the forms of service and activism. The word “justice” brought to mind a sort of frenzied, urgent passion – protesting, educating, debating, and serving. It conjured up images of social activists, fighting for change in their neighborhoods and communities, constantly going against the mainstream voices of government and those in power.

I conformed my lifestyle to be aligned with this frantic working for peace. I did service, and I learned how the “system” worked. I learned to question those in power and to advocate for the marginalized.

But there came a time when I realized I couldn’t do everything. There were moments when I was confronted by my own humanity and my own weaknesses in the face of human suffering. There were moments when my heart bled for someone else’s pain, but I didn’t have the resources, power, or frankly, the energy, to provide the social change necessary for healing. These moments caused me to stop in my tracks and reflect on what I was doing and the intentions behind my actions.

During my first year at Loyola, I spent spring break in Baltimore learning about the complexities of the prison

system. This was a monumental moment in my justice journey. I couldn't do anything except sit there and listen to the prisoners and ex-convicts tell me their stories. Was this enough for me? I couldn't believe there wasn't anything more I could do. But, when I came back from that trip, I was deeply changed.

I felt a profound connection to those around me, even those behind bars. I felt compassion rise up from within me and bind my heart to the wellbeing of everyone in my community. From that point on, my definition of justice was altered slightly from a "doing" to more of a "being." I found myself more and more in situations where all I could do was offer my heart, my ears, and my presence.

For me, justice is connection. The human heart longs, at its core, for relationship – with others, with self, and with God. It yearns to be recognized as a person with inherent worth and infinite potential. Justice doesn't always have to be boycotts and sit-ins. Sometimes justice is the act of connecting with someone you normally would turn away from, and offering yourself to them.