

The year is 1976 and the scene is from the movie “Network.” The character, news anchor Howard Beale, struggles with the ramifications of the social ills and injustices of the time.

“I don't have to tell you things are bad. Everybody knows things are bad. It's a depression. Everybody's out of work or scared of losing their job. The dollar buys a nickel's work, banks are going bust, shopkeepers keep a gun under the counter. Punks are running wild in the street and there's nobody anywhere who seems to know what to do, and there's no end to it. We know the air is unfit to breathe and our food is unfit to eat, and we sit watching our TV's while some local newscaster tells us that today we had fifteen homicides and sixty-three violent crimes, as if that's the way it's supposed to be. We know things are bad - worse than bad. They're crazy. It's like everything everywhere is going crazy, so we don't go out anymore. We sit in the house, and slowly the world we are living in is getting smaller, and all we say is, 'Please, at least leave us alone in our living rooms. Let me have my toaster and my TV and my steel-belted radials and I won't say anything. Just leave us alone.'”

“Well, I'm not gonna leave you alone. I want you to get mad! I don't want you to protest. I don't want you to riot - I don't want you to write to your congressman because I wouldn't know what to tell you to write. I don't know what to do about the depression and the inflation and the Russians and the crime in the street. All I know is that first you've got to get mad.”

“You've got to say, 'I'm a HUMAN BEING! My life has VALUE!' So I want you to get up now. I want all of you to get up out of your chairs. I want you to get up right now and go to the window. Open it, and stick your head out, and yell, 'I'M AS MAD AS HELL, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS ANYMORE!'”

“I want you to get up right now, sit up, go to your windows, open them and stick your head out and yell - 'I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore!' Things have got to change. But first, you've gotta get mad!... You've got to say, 'I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!' Then we'll figure out what to do about the depression and the inflation and the oil crisis. But first get up out of your chairs, open the window, stick your head out, and yell, and say it: 'I'M AS MAD AS HELL, AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS ANYMORE!'”

Like the readings from Isaiah and Hebrews, Beale is asking us to be moved to action – feel anger, feel repulsion, feel frustration – acknowledge those feelings and let them move us to seek justice. You can't seek justice unless you are moved to do so. “Things have got to change. But first, you've gotta get mad.”

We aren't being called to take vengeance. Instead we are asked to seek justice – justice for the poor, the hungry, the oppressed – those who deserve a voice, to be heard, and to know that God is still speaking through the actions we choose to take. As a friend of mine – who has probably dealt with his fair share of injustice - put it, “Justice is selfless and for the greater good; vengeance is selfish and done for one's personal beliefs.”

So what moves you to action? What injustice makes you become so passionate that you want to yell, “I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore”? Maybe it's something large scale like poverty, human rights, or environmental abuse. Maybe it's something on a closer, local scale like proposed cuts to your school district's music program or the welfare of an elderly neighbor living alone.

Our faith and our God call us to justice. The calls come to us from all directions: from individuals, church, the denomination, but in most cases today, the media. We think of seeking justice as an individual choice; however, I want to challenge you with the notion that our passion for justice is not always driven by our faith, but instead by the mass marketing of messages we receive through the various media and the individuals and groups that run them.

For better or worse, the call to justice comes to us through well-crafted, well-conceived marketing campaigns designed to motivate us and play on our passion to do the right thing. Want to make a donation to a current crisis? Simply send a text message and an amount will be added to your cell phone bill. Want to rally people against a recent Supreme Court ruling? Simply send a “tweet” on Twitter with the details of the public protest and urge it be shared. Angered by apparent police brutality caught on video? Simply post a public link of the footage on your Facebook page asking people to e-mail the Mayor's office and let him know how they feel.

Today's media thrives on the fast-reaction world of technology. The call to justice can spread quicker than ever before and as individuals we suddenly possess this sense of personal empowerment. We receive almost instant gratification with the lightning speed at which information is disseminated. “God is still speaking” and now God and justice can spread whenever and wherever we choose and Amen to that.

“I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore” and I'm going to post it to my Facebook page for everyone to see because Lord knows if I write to my congressman I'm only going to get a form letter back that has an electronic signature in blue ink. I am standing up for justice and I am getting my message out. It's my message, my passion, and I am taking justice into my own hands. I am in control of the justice I seek.

Or am I? I don't own Facebook. I have a Facebook page, but I don't own the media that produces it. Likewise, I don't own Twitter. And even if I owned stock in any cell phone or other media company, I would be foolish to think that I own a say in what terms and conditions are placed on the types of communications and messages they produce.

The message of justice is not solely owned by us, but it is controlled and influenced by the various media to which we are exposed each and every day. It's market share, ratings, and prescreened information to keep the audiences happy and buying into the system and to the products – and to the various agendas – be they progressive liberal or right-wing conservative, Democrat or Republican. When I try to take personal action for justice, the field gets plowed down under me and all I'm left with is a tangled mess of vines full of sour grapes. “I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore.”

When we call others to justice, is it really coming from the Spirit within us or is it coming from someplace else? How often are we moved to action by the constant barrage of messages aimed at us each day through various media? For better or worse, we do need some form of media to communicate the need for justice. You can't have the grapes – fine wine grapes or sour grapes – without the vine. But we need to take a step back and look closely at the origins of those vines. What's at the root of those vines and by all means what is in the soil from which they grow?

I am the first to admit that when disaster strikes I want to help and I will contribute in whatever way I can. I turn on the television and get caught up in the news stories from overseas or here at home. I feel moved to make a difference, but quite frankly I doubt the first notion that comes to me is that I am being moved by the Spirit of God to do so. No – I am reacting to actors and singers and well-staged performances bringing the disaster to my living room, but at the safe distance of the television screen and some great film editing and lighting.

The earthquake in Haiti brought hour after hour of images and sounds – from television networks to the Internet and every media in between. Major networks preempted regular programming to run a telethon to raise money needed for medical and emergency supplies. Watching the footage of scenes from Haiti, seeing the children, and listening to the music gripped at my heart. It was a beautifully produced, orchestrated, and performed call to action. I wanted justice for the people of Haiti and I was moved like so many others to donate. While my sense of justice was genuine, I know that it was first driven by the media's marketing of the disaster and not the Spirit of God. The Spirit was there, but as more of an afterthought.

Justice needs tending, like the grapes in the vineyard. Justice to be effective must be our sense of a calling from God and not the idea that by calling in our donation we can talk with a celebrity.

I look back on the earthquake in Haiti and ask myself why was Haiti so important? I let myself be so swept up in the media frenzy of doing what was just for Haiti that it was so easy to overlook justice needed elsewhere locally and abroad. I must admit that when I worked on putting the benefit concert together for Tent City 4 and the Emergency Feeding Program, I felt like I had to compete with the marketing prowess of the Haitian relief efforts. The voice of justice for the homeless and hungry at home were back page news and no matter the effort to get that voice heard it could not help but be drowned out by bright lights and an all out marketing blitz.

Justice on a global scale took a back seat as well. Remember, the media is a business and anyone who has done marketing will tell you, there are just some things you cannot spin enough to sell to an audience. But the media could spin Haiti and the injustice of a natural disaster with the earthquake.

So what about the injustices of the genocide in Darfur that has claimed over 400,000 lives and displaced two and a half million people? Try spinning that so people will tune in. Where is the telethon for the people of Darfur? Why aren't there images and stories bombarding us hour by hour like there were for the people of Haiti? God must want justice for Darfur just as God wants justice for Haiti.

So, why the silence? Why must the average American have to probe through a newspaper to find a story about Darfur buried somewhere in the international news section? This is a disaster that has been going on since 2003 and continues today. How can God call us to justice on behalf of the people of Darfur when so many are ignorant of the situation? No wonder God get frustrated with us. No wonder the vineyard is plowed under and we are left with sour grapes. We deserve to know and if we're not being told, we need to start asking questions and taking the initiative because you can't have justice when there's ignorance.

'Please, at least leave us alone in our living rooms. Let me have my toaster and my TV and my steel-belted radials and I won't say anything. Just leave us alone.'

You can't do that if you want justice.

I hate to admit it, but I am like so many who have come to rely on mass media and the new media of technology for news and information about what is going on in the world. I come home from a long, stressful day at work and sometimes all I want to do is stare at a rerun of "Frasier" or watch a musical on DVD. We are a culture of media junkies. "American Idol", "Dancing with the Stars", "America's Top Model" are all part of the reality show craze, but where's the reality?

There are hosts with production crews, makeup artists, and prescreened audiences. Even the evening news is just one more production with editors and producers who decide what news you and I get to see. At some point, the vineyard was plowed under and what has taken root are vines of sour grapes. How do you make fine wine from sour grapes? How can we call for justice when the Spirit can't even get air time?

The producers at his network turn Beale into the equivalent of an on-air preacher to boost ratings and profits, dubbing him "The Mad Prophet of the Airwaves." Howard Beale gets his own television show which he uses to continue with his provocative commentaries. The show gives his network the market share in prime time because of his – what you would call sermons – and how they move people. The fact that his own viewers have become so mesmerized by what he proclaims each week on the television is not lost on Beale. A bit crazy, perhaps, but Beale questions the motives of the very media that he has used to move people to act justly. When his own network is taken over by a large corporation motivated not by what is just, but by what is profitable, he offers this commentary to his faithful flock:

*"Edward George Ruddy died today! Edward George Ruddy was the Chairman of the Board of the Union Broadcasting Systems, and he died at eleven o'clock this morning of a heart condition, and woe is us! We're in a lot of trouble! So. A rich little man with white hair died. What has that got to do with the price of rice, right? And *why* is that woe to us? Because you people, and sixty-two million other Americans, are listening to me right now. Because less than three percent of you people read books! Because less than fifteen percent of you read newspapers! Because the only truth you know is what you get over this tube. Right now, there is a whole, an entire generation that never knew anything that didn't come out of this tube! This tube is the Gospel, the ultimate revelation. This tube can make or break presidents, popes, prime ministers... This tube is the most awesome ...force in the whole godless world, and woe is us if it ever falls in to the hands of the wrong people, and that's why woe is us that Edward George Ruddy died. Because this*

company is now in the hands of CCA - the Communication Corporation of America. There's a new Chairman of the Board, a man called Frank Hackett, sitting in Mr. Ruddy's office on the twentieth floor. And when the twelfth largest company in the world controls the most awesome ... propaganda force in the whole godless world, who knows what [stuff] will be peddled for truth on this network? So, you listen to me.

Listen to me: Television is not the truth! Television is an ... amusement park! Television is a circus, a carnival, a traveling troupe of acrobats, storytellers, dancers, singers, jugglers, side-show freaks, lion tamers, and football players. We're in the boredom-killing business! So if you want the truth... Go to God! Go to your gurus! Go to yourselves! Because that's the only place you're ever going to find any real truth.

*"But, man, you're never going to get any truth from us. We'll tell you anything you want to hear; we lie like hell. We'll tell you that, uh, Kojak always gets the killer, or that nobody ever gets cancer at Archie Bunker's house, and no matter how much trouble the hero is in, don't worry, just look at your watch; at the end of the hour he's going to win. We'll tell you any [thing] you want to hear. We deal in *illusions*, man! None of it is true! But you people sit there, day after day, night after night, all ages, colors, creeds... We're all you know. You're beginning to believe the illusions we're spinning here. You're beginning to think that the tube is reality, and that your own lives are unreal. You do whatever the tube tells you! You dress like the tube, you eat like the tube, you raise your children like the tube, you even *think* like the tube! This is mass madness, you maniacs! In God's name, you people are the real thing! *WE* are the illusion! So turn off your television sets. Turn them off now. Turn them off right now. Turn them off and leave them off! Turn them off right in the middle of the sentence I'm speaking to you now! TURN THEM OFF..."*

"God is still speaking ..." but the next time you feel called to act for justice, step back and listen. Just who is calling you?

"Go to God! Go to your gurus! Go to yourselves! Because that's the only place you're ever going to find any real truth."

And in truth, there is the Spirit and in truth, there is justice.

Amen.