

Justice and Equity  
February 11, 2024  
Bridging Darkness and Light: Embracing Imbolc's Renewal

*As we leave behind the darkest days of winter and prepare to welcome the coming spring, it is also time to consider which seeds of change we might choose to plant and nourish*

Chalice Lighting:

*As the Wild Wind Bites (Ben Soule, Worship Associate at First Parish in Lexington)*

On a bare, frozen branch, a bubble forms frost patterns

Let us hold a quiet moment together as our chalice is lit.

As the wild wind bites, so does the still flame warm us.

As the deep snows block our doors, so does the gentle flame bring us out.

As the crackling cold air stops our breath, so does the radiant flame draw from us

the words we need to give and to receive:

words of greeting, words of comfort, words of solace,

words to challenge our minds and words to bring us to action.

Let us gaze upon this our common flame,

so that we remember who we are and what we can do

when we are together.

- Imbolc marks the midway point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, symbolizing the stirring of new life and the return of light
- February Soul Matters theme is justice and equity
- So how do we tie these things together?
  - Cycles of Nature: Imbolc is a time of transition and renewal in the natural world
    - Draw a parallel between the awakening of the earth from its winter slumber, and our own journey towards justice and equity?
      - Callieach's story: gathering firewood on Feb 2. A nice sunny day means she's out picking up lots of firewood because she's cranking up the winter winds.

- Maybe look at the world in a similar way. When it looks like things are moving backwards, it's because the wave is retracting before it crashes forward.
  - Balance and Harmony: emphasize the interconnectedness of all living beings
    - Calleiach and Brigid share the power of the seasons and maintain a balance.
    - Similarly, justice and equity need to be integral parts of this balance, ensuring that power and resources are distributed fairly among members of the community
  - Seeds of Change:
    - Seed catalogs abound right now, and those of us who garden are thinking hard about what we'd like to see blooming in a couple months
    - Solid metaphor for social change and transformation
    - Just as seeds require nurturing and care to grow, so too does the work of justice and equity require commitment, perseverance, and collective action
- Justice
  - Define "justice"
    - The quality of being just. Really?
      - fairness
      - "In the interest of justice, we should treat everyone the same."
    - The principle of moral rightness; decency.
    - Conformity to moral rightness in action or attitude; righteousness.
  - Justice embodies the pursuit of fairness and righteousness in our interactions with one another and with the world around us
    - rooted in recognition of inherent worth and dignity of every individual
    - calls us to uphold the principles of compassion, empathy, and solidarity
  - Justice: For many individuals, justice embodies the idea of fairness and the righting of wrongs
    - It means holding individuals—and institutions—accountable for their actions
      - ensuring everyone is treated with dignity and respect

- ensuring laws and social norms are applied impartially
    - often involves seeking restitution for victims, promoting equality before the law, and addressing systemic injustices that perpetuate inequality and oppression
  - Justice requires us to actively confront systems of oppression and discrimination
    - whether based on race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, or any other form of identity
    - It challenges us to dismantle barriers to equality and to create inclusive communities where all individuals can thrive and flourish
  - Justice is not merely a legal or moral concept, but a spiritual imperative—an expression of our commitment to living out our principles in the world
    - calls us to engage in acts of service, advocacy, and allyship
      - working together to build a society that reflects the values of love, equity, and justice for ***all***
    - By embracing the transformative power of justice, we honor the inherent worth of every soul
  - the journey is ongoing
    - we must continually strive to deepen our understanding, challenge our assumptions, and listen to the voices of those most impacted by injustice
- Story:
  - Pastor Wetzel was running late. Her car hadn't started, and that meant taking the bus. It also meant cutting through a rough section of town. She noticed the body laying in the gutter, but kept her eyes straight ahead and kept walking. She should have been at the church ten minutes ago.
  - Charlie saw the body too, and grimaced, Damn drug addict had decided to pass out not twenty feet from his storefront. It was hard enough trying to keep a small grocery going these days without having his customers put off by that kind of thing.
  - Zach parked his Harley and headed toward the bar. As always, people stepped out of his way, scared off by the shaved head, thick beard and multiple facial piercings. When he saw the body in the gutter, he checked it out. Rolling the guy over, he could see the man had been beaten severely, but was still breathing. He wasn't sure if an ambulance would even come to

that neighborhood, so he called a cab, waited until they got there, and paid them—with a generous tip—to take the guy to a hospital.

- Of course this is the Good Samaritan story. Which one of these people is the good neighbor? Which of them embodies the values of justice and equity?
- Have you ever been asked for money by somebody down-and-out? What did you do? Did you help? Did you squirm with discomfort and apologize that you don't have any cash or change on you?
- Every single time, I'm torn between wanting to help and feeling resentful. I can't afford to help everyone who asks! How do I know they'll really spend the money on food? What if they actually just spend it on booze or drugs?
- Maybe I'll pretend I don't see that person in need. Convince myself that if I don't notice them, then my conscience is off the hook.
- Challenges:
  - reflect on attitudes towards those who are different
  - recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every individual, regardless of social standing, ethnicity, or background
  - move beyond the boundaries of our own communities, extend care and compassion to all who are in need
- reminder of our collective responsibility to
  - actively engage in acts of compassion and solidarity
  - challenge systems of oppression and inequality
  - work towards creating a more just society
  - embody the values of justice and equity in our daily lives and interactions with the world

- Equity

- Define "equity"
  - The state or quality of being just and fair. Oy!
- Equity embodies fairness and impartiality
  - ensures that all individuals have access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to thrive and flourish
  - recognizes that each person has unique strengths, challenges, and circumstances
  - seeks to level the playing field to promote greater equality of outcomes

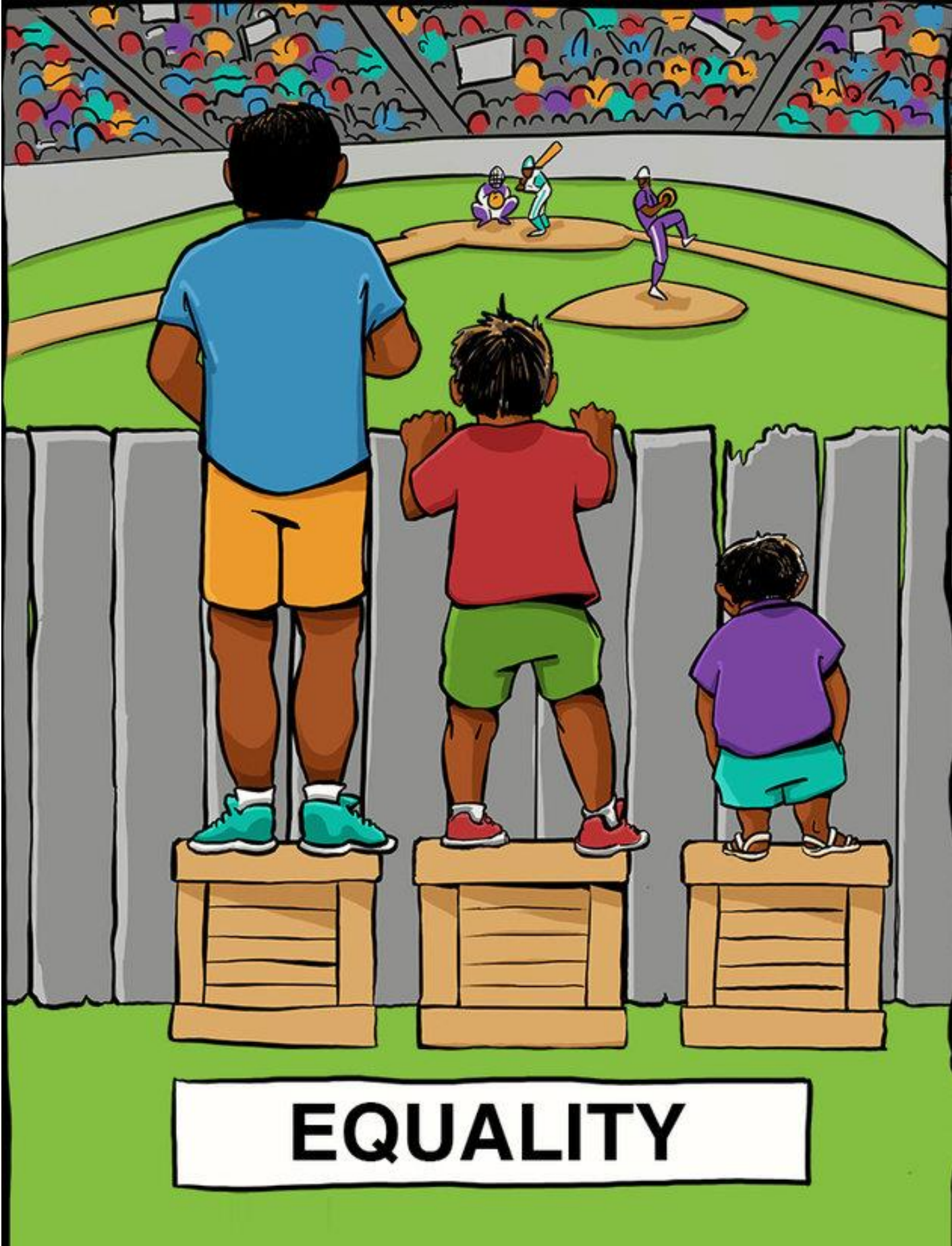
- Equity goes beyond mere equality, which assumes that treating everyone the same will result in fairness
  - acknowledges the systemic barriers and inequalities that exist in society
  - strives to address them by actively redistributing resources and opportunities in a way that reflects the diverse needs and experiences of individuals
- Equity
  - emphasizes fairness in outcomes rather than merely treating everyone the same
    - individuals have different needs, privileges, and barriers to success
  - involves recognizing and addressing systemic disparities based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other factors
    - seeks to level the playing field by providing resources, opportunities, and support to those who need them most
    - goal is ensuring that everyone has access to the same opportunities for success and well-being
- Cartoon about Equality and Equity
  - Equality is giving everyone the same size box to stand on
  - Equity is giving each of them what they need
  - True justice and equity is removing the systemic obstacle (the fence)
- equity is a moral imperative
  - expression of our commitment to honoring the inherent worth and dignity of every person
  - calls us to examine our own privileges and biases
  - to listen to the voices of those who have been marginalized or oppressed
  - to advocate for policies and practices that promote greater inclusion and justice for all
- In pursuit of equity, recognize that true liberation requires both individual and collective action
  - challenges us
    - to dismantle structures of power and privilege
    - to confront systems of oppression

- to work together to create a more just and equitable world
  - Justice without equity is a hollow promise
    - only through the pursuit of equity that we can truly fulfill the promise of justice for all
    - goal: creating a more just, inclusive, and compassionate society, where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and live with dignity
- Individual Actions
  - Personal Ethics
    - shape how we make decisions, resolve conflicts, and interact with others
  - Understand Identity
    - honor unique identities and perspectives of individuals
      - inherent worth and dignity of everyone
    - recognize and address issues of injustice across various social identities: race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and more
  - Empathy and Compassion
    - Try to understand perspectives and experiences of others
      - Listen—Empathize—Validate—Support
  - Self-Reflection and Growth
    - Examine our own biases, *privileges*, and assumptions
    - Confront how we contribute to or benefit from systems of injustice
  - Commit to Change
    - challenge the status quo, disrupt systems of oppression, work towards creating a more just and equitable world
  - Challenge Injustice: both within ourselves and in society at large
    - challenging discriminatory attitudes
    - advocating for policy changes
    - actively supporting marginalized communities
  - Practical Action:
    - volunteer with social justice organizations
    - participate in advocacy efforts
    - support minority-owned businesses
    - engage in dialogue with others about issues of importance
    - Encourage gatherings to provide opportunities for individuals to come together, share resources, and support one another

- Let us be guided by the light of compassion as we navigate the complexities of our existence, knowing that our journey towards justice is as infinite as the stars that adorn the night sky
- Imbolc serves as a beacon of hope, signaling the return of light and the promise of new beginnings
  - Also reminds us of our collective responsibility to work towards a more just and equitable world, both within our communities and in society at large
  - In a world scarred by inequality and oppression, we are called upon to confront the shadows that darken the light of justice, just as the Springtime confronts the shadows of Winter
  - Callieach and Brigid come to their understanding. Move past winter and reach toward the Springtime.
  - Likewise we can move toward Justice and Equity for all. Change is possible.
  - May the seeds of justice we plant today blossom into a future where all beings can thrive in harmony and peace

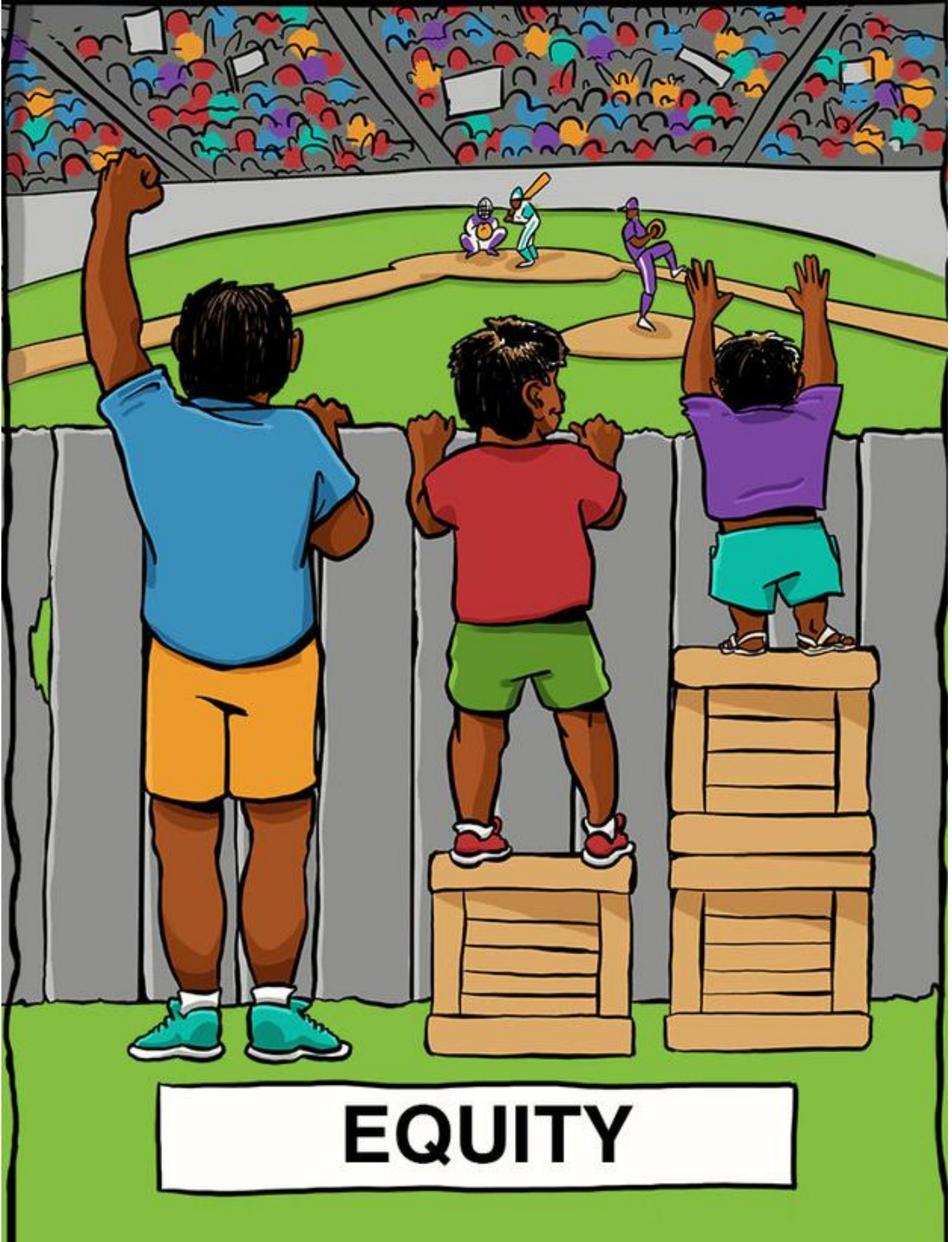
#### Closing Words:

- The Starfish Story "The Star Thrower" – Original Story by: Loren Eiseley
  - One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?"
  - The youth replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die."
  - "Son," the man said, "don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make a difference!"
  - After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, "I made a difference for that one"

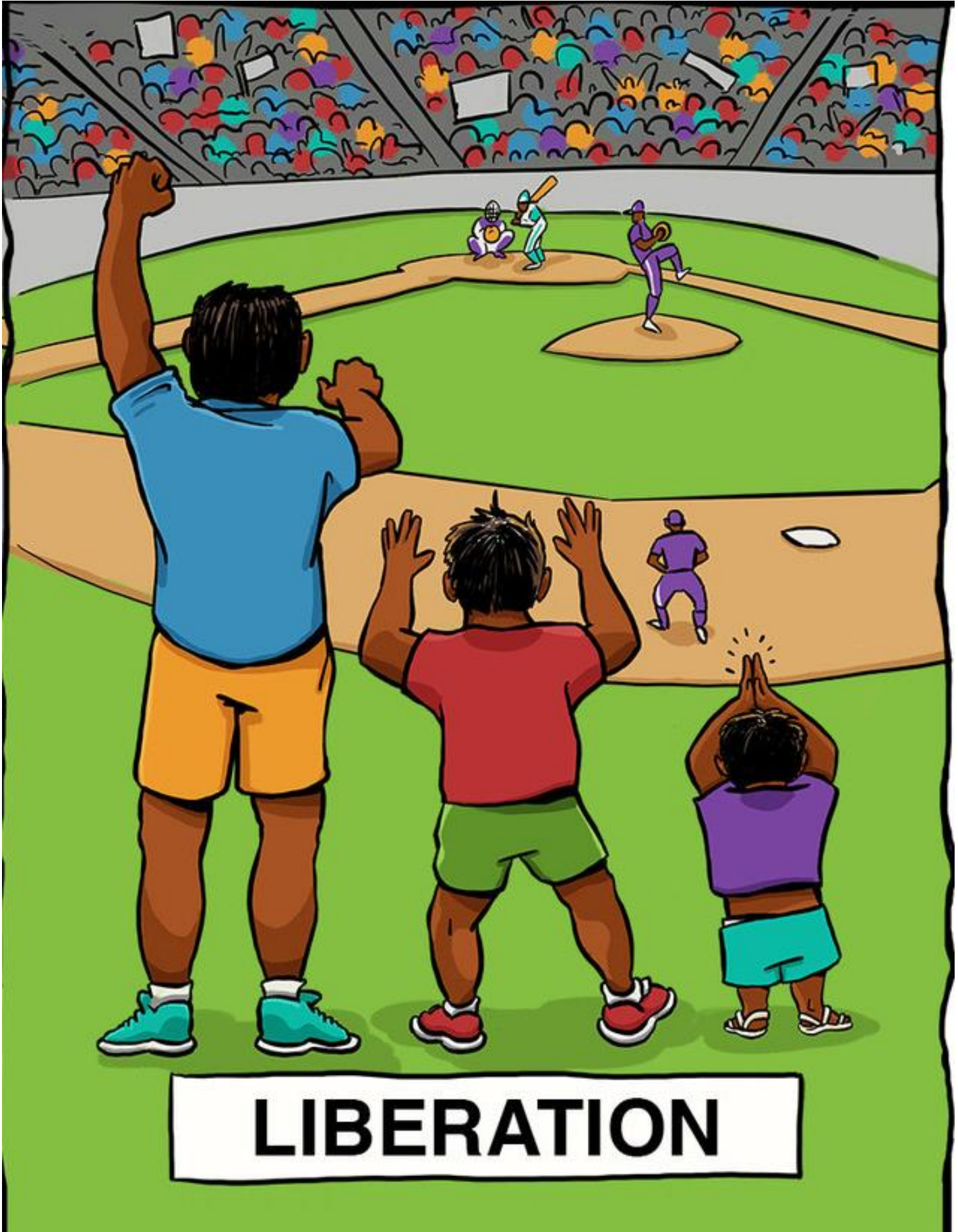


**EQUALITY**





**EQUITY**



**LIBERATION**