1) "Two men were fishing in a river.

2) Late in the afternoon they started cooking some of the fish they had caught.

3) Suddenly they heard the cries of a man being swept down the river.
4) Immediately the men jumped into the river, swam out to the man, and were gradually able to pull him ashore.

5) As they were on shore catching their breath, they heard the cries of a woman being swept down the river.

6) They jumped back into the water, made their way out to the woman, and slowly brought her to shore.
7) They were exhausted but happy to have saved both people.

8) Then they heard to cries of a child being swept downstream.

9) One of the men started back into the water to get the child; the other held back.

10) "Aren't you going to save the child?" asked the first.
11) "You go get the child," responded the second, "I'm going to go upstream to find out why so many people are falling into the river."
Charity is happy to spend all day pulling victims out of the river. Social justice asks: why are so many people falling into the river? Is there a pathway or a bridge in need of repair? Is there someone throwing people into the river? When there is a pattern of people repeatedly falling victim, social justice seeks to discover and remedy the root causes of the problem.

Charity does the important work of meeting the immediate needs of suffering people, for food, clothing, housing, medicine, etc. Most everyone today approves and praises charity.

Social justice, on the other hand, dares to ask troubling questions.