

My daughter's Moral Monday field trip

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On Monday evening, my daughter and I joined several hundred others outside the Capitol in Raleigh, North Carolina. We were there for [the latest in a series of Moral Monday rallies](#) organized to oppose the legislature's policies toward (among other things) social programs, education, environmental legislation, and voting rights.

The statehouse is a solid 90-minute drive from our house, so it makes for a long evening on a school night. My daughter was more engaged than I thought she'd be; I fully expected to have to bribe her with the promise of ice cream on the way home. But she got a kick out of holding the signs she and her friend had made in the car. "Support our teachers!" one said; the other: "I like my teacher. Pay her more!" Every time someone came by with a camera, she held her sign extra high and grinned.

As a first-grader, her life revolves around school. She doesn't understand the complexities of teacher tenure, but she loves her teacher and she gets it when we talk about making sure the school has all the support it needs.

My daughter doesn't know what Medicaid is, but she knows what it means to go to the doctor and get medicine to help her feel better. When the speakers at the rally were decrying our state's rejection of Medicaid expansion, I whispered to her: "I think everybody should be able to go to the doctor when they're sick; don't you?" She nodded.

Whenever a new speaker came to the microphone, she wanted me to pick her up so she could see over the crowd. I smiled to see her singing along with an old civil rights protest song (and I was tickled to catch her humming it at home the next day). She clapped and she chanted. I had to pull her away from the post-rally march when it was time to head home.

One of her favorite refrains these days is "It's not fair that life's not fair!" Usually, this is in response to my declaration that she may not watch *Frozen* for the third time in one day. I'm sure, in those whiny moments, that she's thinking of only the grave injustices of being six; she's not contemplating public policy. But I'm glad she understands this basic truth: life isn't fair, and that's not fair. That's why we work for justice.

I've never been a huge fan of political rallies. I prefer a quiet conversation among friends. A public protest generally means there's a bad guy. This time it's the legislature, and I don't want my daughter to come away with the notion that the government is the enemy or that our lawmakers are bad people. I don't like the "us" vs. "them" divide this exacerbates.

But when the "them" won't listen and the most vulnerable folks in our state are getting left behind, then I'm grateful for the witness of modern-day prophets like [William Barber](#), the state NAACP president who has spearheaded the Moral Monday movement. They call the "us" to action on behalf of others—no matter what political party is in power.

As the rally wrapped up, Barber led a group of protestors from the mall toward the Capitol. As they passed by, my daughter gave them a thumbs up.

We peeled off from the crowd at that point, needing to get home to homework and bedtime. “Why can’t we go that way?” she said, pointing to the building where the protesters were heading.

“I don’t think they let kids in there,” I said, committing the sort of white lie justified by parents everywhere: *we have to go home to bed* was not going to cut it as a reason to leave the fun, and the truth was they weren’t letting *anybody* in.

She was immediately indignant. “But they’re supposed to be making things better for kids!” she cried. “They should let kids in!”

I’m glad my daughter's learning what justice looks like. I'm glad she could see the church at work. (I pointed out many clergy as they marched by.) [Ninety-five years ago yesterday](#), the 19th amendment gave women the right to vote. I’m glad that my daughter will get to exercise that right—and that she’s learning, even now, that she has a voice.