

Written 'Service' for 17th January 2021 for All Saints and St Marys

The Collect for the 2nd Sunday in Epiphany:

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Hymn: As you still yourself to read and pray today why not listen to this acapella version of a well known hymn 'All Creatures of Our God and King'?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GN9C_lu8qzA

If you want to sing along here are the lyrics:

All creatures of our God and King
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!

Refrain:

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong
Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!

Refrain:

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

And all ye men of tender heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye! Alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and on Him cast your care!

Refrain:

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One!

Refrain:
O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Amen

Old Testament reading

Micah 6:6-8

With what shall I come before the Lord
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly[Ⓜ] with your God.

New Testament reading

Luke 7: 11-17

Jesus Raises a Widow's Son

¹¹ Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."
¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.
¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people."¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

Sermon: Do Justice

Today I want to introduce to you a theme that we will be looking at throughout this coming year – it is **Justice and mercy**. What we have lived through in the last year has brought into

sharp focus these issues – how the coronavirus has been more deadly for those with ethnic minority backgrounds, or those whose live in cramped and overcrowded conditions, who can't afford the safety that space affords or the homeless – those with no home to be safe in. The black lives matter movement opened our eyes to injustices deeply ingrained in our society and our attitudes. In our politicians and law makers - how injustice manifests as hypocrisy and how power can be abused and dangerous – deadly infact. When we are thoughtless and bad stewards of our planet it is the poor and those without a voice who suffer – those in developing countries, our children and grandchildren. Human trafficking, the treatment of refugees, pornography – all reduce people to objects, to be taken advantage of, not valued or dismissed. On Wednesday a number of us attended a study day looking at Living in Love and Faith – the materials the Anglican church as brought out to help us have good conversations about human sexuality and the ignorance, discrimination and prejudice that has been perpetuated through it. As Christians, followers of Jesus, we are called to respond to all these issues and more: to be informed, to examine ourselves and our actions, to repent and ask for forgiveness, and to start afresh. At the root of these issues and many more are issues of justice.

I wonder if any of you have watched the recent David Attenborough series 'Perfect Planet'? I always sit down to watch excited to see images of our beautiful world and be transported for a moment to another place – a paradise I wish I could visit. I've only watched the first one (volcano) and the beautiful flamingos and their cute chicks on the volcanic lake. If it wasn't enough that these beautiful creatures had to navigate the toxic volcanic



chemicals, I was horrified to see what I'd forgotten - that in nature it's a dog-eat-dog world – there are predators, and that life is cheap. So, the predatory ugly maribo storks pick off the weakest chicks as they start their journey off the lake, waiting for them to fall behind from the flock, with seeming ease extending their necks and snapping their deadly beaks round the tiny and gangly chick who is already fighting for life... the injustice in the animal kingdom is upsetting.

Is the human kingdom much different you might ask? We may have made it so but that's not the way that God intended it up to be – it's not in his original design or the way of life that he has set out for us. We are called to live differently. At the heart of this different way is the truth that all humanity is made in God's image. Wait - just check for a moment how you pictured that - did you picture humanity as a whole load of people who look like you? Or did you picture humanity in all its glorious variety and technicolour? Did you think about good, law abiding, conforming people, or did you think about those who are have a criminal conviction, who you consider bad or who have a different lifestyle to you? The **whole** of humanity is made in God's image and is equal before God – and each one is to be treated with dignity and fairness, to flourish, to have life in all its fullness. This is what it means to be truly human in Gods image.

But we take advantage of others – that is the sin of the fall and what plays out in the biblical narrative afterwards. Whether you believe the narrative of Genesis is literal or a metaphor for all human behaviour – injustice creeps in and pervades. The weak are taken advantage of the poor are oppressed, the alien is rejected.

God acts though to stop this – he starts with Abraham and sets aside a people who will live differently – who will live by his rules, by his laws, who will live justly. And as we journey through this year – we will find the roots of biblical justice are in the laws that God gives his people recorded for us in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

We know God's people struggled to live in God's perfect way and we've heard the warning the prophet Micah sounds to God's people. It's as relevant now as it was when it was written thousands of years ago – your religious observances, your sacrificial offerings are not pleasing to God if you cheat each other, lie to each other and are violent.

What God wants is for you to 'Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with him'.

And so over the next 3 weeks Matt and Sam and I are going to unpack those three directives to kick off this year.

So what does it mean to 'act justly' or 'do justice'?

Well, this is a huge subject and I'm only going to be able to just touch on it here in this sermon but here are a few ideas if you wanted to read on further. Church Leader Tim Keller has written a book called 'Generous Justice' which is worth reading. Second hand copies can be bought on the internet. And a website called The Bible Project has a 'theme' video about Justice which you can watch on this link: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/justice>

But lets make a start here:

'Mishpat' is the Hebrew word for justice and it has 2 facets.

We understand justice mostly as **retributive** justice – this is what our law courts and the police enforce – if someone commits a crime or breaks the law there is a punishment that they face. Retributive justice involves judgement and so often that's where we find ourselves, even with those in society who are poor or down on their luck: We make a judgement that somehow, they deserved it, so it is just. I remember the great way Ben defined mercy and grace – mercy he said is not getting what we do deserve, and grace is getting what we don't deserve. God has a different economy. The one who **is** able to judge us, doesn't – he responds to us with mercy and grace. Jesus pays the price for our sin, our wrong doing, he takes the



punishment on the cross, and retributive justice is satisfied. But in his resurrection Jesus acts in **restorative** justice – we are forgiven and restored to a relationship with God, this is called righteousness – we are in right relationship with God. And this not because we have any rights but all because of this grace and mercy!!

So biblical justice reflects God’s character – it is merciful and restorative. And those of us who are recipients of this restorative justice are compelled to do justice like God, so that all are in right relationship with each other – dignity is restored, and fair treatment is the norm, people can flourish and live life in all its fullness. And so, as this plays out in society, we see unjust structures challenged and abolished, corrupt practices spoken out against, those who are vulnerable and voiceless are advocated for. It is put right.

In the bible it is the quartet of the vulnerable who are cited as those who as the primary recipients of restorative justice – the orphan, the widow, the poor and the foreigner. Because the bible was written for a patriarchal society with a land based economy they are those who are most likely to be vulnerable or feel unsafe or at risk of injustice in the society. But I wonder who they are in our society? When Jesus when stands up in the synagogue and reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah he includes the quartet of the vulnerable in his manifesto.



Our gospel passage gives us an example of Jesus doing restorative justice: The woman is alone – her husband and now her son have died. She will face severe hardship in Jewish society without a man to provide for her, she is in deep grief for her loss. Jesus notices and comes up to the open coffin and miraculously gives this young man back his life. Luke is at pains to tell us

too that Jesus also gave the son back to his mother. So, they are restored to each other, the son and his mother, by the grace of God. What good news!!

There are a four steps here that we might note as we begin to think about what it might look like to **us** to do justice:

Firstly, Jesus has compassion – he notices, takes a closer look, gets informed about the situation. He speaks to her – ‘don’t cry’ he says – he offers words of comfort.

When we do justice, we need to approach without prejudice, with open compassionate hearts. We will encounter things that are difficult and painful, unpalatable, things we would rather not hear, that make us uncomfortable, and we might need to go beyond our own feelings and offer comfort to others, the victims.

When we do justice, it will be costly – for Jesus to approach the open coffin made him ceremonially unclean, when we do justice, we will realise that we are soiled, complicit, part of the injustice and we will need to repent.

When we do justice, we will need to act, to do what we can in our power to change the situation. Jesus, being God, had the power that made the universe to harness, we too have power, especially us – middle class western people – but we also can petition God in prayer and harness his power too. All it takes for evil to flourish is for good people to do nothing the quote says – we will need to act.

And then restoration will be the result when we see justice done – this is the gospel in our time.

So will you join me on this journey this year? A journey that might be uncomfortable, might make us weep and get on our knees but will also be the good news of the gospel working in and through us. I'm not sure where it'll take us but I am sure we are being called to make this journey so please join me.

Hymn: The kingdom of God is justice and joy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqCOggQhFyo&feature=emb_logo

Prayers:

Heavenly Father,

We pray that you would give us your perspective, Lord. We desire to see people the way You do, and uphold justice to bring glory and honour to Your name. Help us to set our personal agendas and selfish motives aside, and align the intentions of our hearts with Your will. Help us to see the world as you do, and through your Holy Spirit be sensitive to Your leading in our lives, especially where justice is concerned. Guard our hearts, and alert us to opportunities where we can share your truth. In our daily lives, give us your perspective to see all things and all people through your filter of grace, so we can make a positive impact on our families, our children, our friends and our communities, in your name we pray.

Amen

God of truth and justice;

We ask you to help the men and women
who administer and police our laws;
Grant them insight, courage and compassion,
Protect them from corruption and arrogance
And grant that we, whom they seek to serve,
may give them the support they need;
So may we all be strengthened more and more
in respect and concern for one another.

Amen.

Almighty God,

We pray for our world still in the grip of this Coronavirus pandemic. Heal and restore all those who suffer in body, mind and spirit; comfort those who grieve and mourn loss; strengthen those who nurse and tend to the sick and dying; guide and direct those who make decisions

and govern; inspire those who work in the science to develop vaccines and treatments; give wisdom to us all to live in a way that does not endanger our neighbour and give us patience in this third lockdown.

In the overwhelming need we find ourselves in Lord we ask for your mercy and thank you for the graces we have known and seen in our lives. In Jesus name, Amen

And finally, the words of a Franciscan blessing:

May God bless us with **discomfort** at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with **anger** at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with **tears** to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough **foolishness** to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

And blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you, and those you love, today and evermore Amen