

## **Homily Trinity 16 – Let justice and peace flow**

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We are still in what the Church describes as Creation Season, and the theme for this year is "let justice and peace flow like a river..." and we are also today in particular asked to pray for peace and reconciliation

Matthew's gospel focuses a lot on God's generous compassion and mercy, which is the best clear evidence of God's unconditional and overwhelming love for us and for all people. Jesus is often described by Matthew as having compassion and acting out of that compassion, for example by feeding the 5,000 because he knew they were hungry, by healing the sick, and by walking for us the way of the Cross. We will see God's compassion in action again in our Gospel reading.

Jonah on the other hand does not understand, he had messages for God's unfaithful followers and for Israelites alike. He did not want God to send him to Nineveh in the first place, certainly not with a message of repentance and forgiveness. He wanted the wicked to be punished. We know about the whale who helped to focus Jonah on his task, and now we hear of his irrational rage and distress, that the wicked had not been punished, because his successful mission, had led to the many wicked, did God say 120,000? he did, of them all newly repentant, all children of God, being forgiven and restored this made Jonah really angry, and even more angry when a bush which had sheltered him from the weather is destroyed by the worm.

Truly, as they say in modern Yorkshire 'there's nowt so strange as folk'. So now God has to explain to Jonah, who is like a big kid in his anger, both love and mercy, God's own love and compassion for his children. I suspect though, that we are all more like Jonah, and like the resentful labourers in the vineyard, that Matthew tells us about, than we would like admit.

They too were basically saying, like children in the playground 'but it's not fair' and indeed it's no fair at all, instead it is generous and compassionate. Our faith is like theirs probably still rather childish. If we were treated totally 'fairly' - fairly and according to what we might deserve then few of us would have anything to celebrate. Instead, God treats us with mercy and compassion, so we do not have to earn our place in the kingdom of heaven it God's gift to us, it is solely God's grace and compassion that save us.

So those labourers who had worked hard in the heat all day thought it was outrageous that those who came last should be paid the same. They had after all worked harder and wanted that recognition, and God had returned more than once to the market place, not because he needed more labourers, but because they needed work. Other potential employers appear to have rejected them, but God had a purpose and made a place for them, and he met them in their need. God didn't treat them as second best either. Out of God's profligate love and lavish generosity, out of his outrageous grace, they received the same reward as the others, because after all, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And God's outrageous, generous justice ensures that all get what they need in order to flourish, latecomers as well, all are included, it is restorative justice in the fullest sense of the word, as opposed to the criminal justice which seems to be the only kind of justice most of us consider or know about.

If we carry over from last Sunday, the warning about judging others, we can neither judge the latecomers, nor can we compare ourselves with them. As Christians, people of faith, we should not be measuring or comparing ourselves with other people, nor should we fret that we may be less holy than others, or less appreciated

It is God's decision alone how to respond best to human need and desire, and how to call us to follow. God knows what is needed for people, each one of us, to flourish before we can even ask.

As we consider the theme for Creation season, we realise again just how much we have to repent, our unjust, wasteful and destructive approach to God's Creation. Justice seems still to be in short supply for so many, and our rivers and streams are continually polluted, 'let justice and peace flow like a river' is a wonderful image, but a considerably improved, restored and restorative river of justice is urgently needed. We know that God is calling us to restore, repair and renew the face of the earth, and also to deal justly and generously with those most or worst affected by the reckless behaviour of our own nation and those many other nations who are falling to care for the planet. We cannot say it is not fair, or that we have been trying hard, or that we personally do not profit from harming the planet or whatever excuse we might use.

We are part of the human community on the one hand, and on the other we are individuals each one unique and a part of God's image. In the

world as it now is we need to act both as a collective together, and as individuals.

We should all know by now, that we should know better, consume less, live more simply and share our resources generously, giving thanks for having enough, and if we do have enough then we can share. How else might we be truly living our lives “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” as Paul recommends to the Philippians (1.27).

It is Paul who sums up for us a mature approach to faith writing to the Philippians, ‘For to me, he says, living is Christ and dying is gain’ and so nothing else matters, because we all share in the same struggles together.

The psalmist in Ps 106 sums it up slightly differently  
Remember **me**, Lord, when you show favour to your people,  
come to my aid when you save them,  
that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones,  
that I may share in the joy of your nation  
and join your inheritance in giving praise.

We have sinned, even as our ancestors `did;  
we have done wrong and acted wickedly.  
Remember **me**, Lord, when you show favour to your people,

St Francis said on his deathbed , I have done that which was mine to do,  
may Christ now teach you what you are to do. May he also teach us.  
Amen