

Just like Jesus

A YBA journey starting 2021 - What lies behind the YBA's initiative?

Our conviction is that **justice** is a central theme in the Bible and is embodied by Jesus in his life, teaching and ministry. We believe that justice demands the highest possible profile in the ministry of the church and in the work of Christian **mission**. All too often this conviction has been misunderstood, being seen to compete with other important gospel themes. We see justice as an over-arching motif, not competing at all, but refining and shaping every aspect of our life and mission as Christian disciples.

The 'God of Justice' appears everywhere in scripture. In the Hebrew scriptures of our Old Testament, it is clear that time and again through history – not just in our own time – God's justice has been the subject of much misunderstanding. Despite that, however, a powerful theme of God who is justice (inseparable from God's righteousness) and who acts justly (with unquestionable integrity) comes through with consistent force. It is in the Book of Genesis that we find one of the most powerful arguments for the just and equal treatment of all people; we are, it says, all made in the same image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26).

In the New Testament, the message is no less clear than in the Old. In the Gospels, Jesus's dealings with people have all the hallmarks of God's justice and integrity. He is 'The Righteous One', and his justice is shown without favour to everyone he meets: Gentile and Jew, woman and man, poor and rich. The story of a meeting between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4 touches almost every aspect of God's justice at work in the world. Jesus's compassionate integrity transcends all the entrenched attitudes that typically lead to the typical injustices of his day. He crosses all the boundaries of gender, ritual impurity, ethnicity and social convention, affirming this woman's dignity and offering her the unconditional respect she justly deserves.

It is, of course, 'acting justly' that ultimately cost Jesus his life. From the earliest days of his recorded ministry, Jesus commitment to justice is seen to arouse bitter opposition: from his own Jewish community who see him as undermining the authority of its religious leaders and, with that, the authority of God; from the Roman imperial powers who see him as another minor political activist, subverting their rule of law. What none of these contemporaries could see was that, in conspiring to bring about his unjust death, they were unwittingly colluding with God's even greater act of justice, transforming a death on a cross into the event by which God reconciles the world to Godself, through death and resurrection bringing to birth a new community of reconciliation tasked with the continuing mission of God's justice in the world.

In the New Testament epistles, Paul the Apostle famously makes 'The Righteousness of God' a central theme in his most developed theological account of the gospel in The Letter to the Romans. In recent years biblical scholars, working on Romans, have given fresh attention to the complex cluster of words that gather around 'righteousness' and 'justice'; these include righteous, righteousness, justice, justify, justification, etc, all sharing common linguistic roots. Amongst other things, this has led some to suggest that it might be better to think of these 'righteousness-words' rather more like verbs than nouns; righteousness is a very **dynamic** business. You might put it like this: the core-business of the God of righteousness is 'righteousness-ing': not merely being just, but 'justice-ing', doing justice and empowering all those who share in God's mission of justice, whenever and wherever it arises.

In making this statement, therefore we are not commending another add-on, another potential burdensome task for already busy disciples; rather, we are inviting people to tap into a core dynamic (a 'power' word) of God's life in the world: something that will energise and inform every aspect of a disciple's life. We are all being invited to engage in God's work of 'righteousness-ing' or 'justice-ing', empowered by the energy and inspiration of God's Spirit.