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Justice as worship and witness

Reflecting in week two of the LIVE LENT course 'Embracing Justice' - article by Rev Peter Hibberts

Those of you who are following the Live Lent course this year (by app, booklet or fellowship group) will be familiar with the journey we are making, during Lent, in exploring God's Justice. Each week we have daily readings and then, as part of the fellowship groups, we have a video interview between the author of the book and someone for whom justice is an important part of life; together we explore. Last week we joined the Archbishop of Jerusalem and asked how our understanding of justice might be led by biblical understandings of what God's justice is. We located ourselves in Micah 3:8 and considered Justice as a relationship, rather than a calculation or retribution. We considered how God's justice is more restorative; seeking reconciliation and peace as the outcomes rather than punishment and retribution.

This week, in the notes, we follow the transformation of the Hebrews in Exodus from an oppressed people, through a wilderness reset (leaving behind the mentality of oppression demonstrated by the Pharaoh, that could have led the Hebrews to become oppressors) and building a new community of justice in the promised land. (Perhaps the promised land is not just a physical place but also a mindset as God, starting with the Ten Commandments, teaches them [and us] how to live as a society where justice is the way we worship God and relate to one-another.) We are in the company of Ruth Valerio, an environmentalist and theologian, social activist and author. Ruth is Global Advocacy and Influencing Director at Tearfund.

Ruth defines justice as 'seeing wrongs righted' and argues that we need to find *our* place in this work. She reflects on the Genesis journey as one where we see God's plan for us but also what it looks like when things go wrong. (The Old Testament chronicles what it looks like when things go wrong whilst also following the golden thread of God reaching out and putting things right that ultimately takes us into the New Testament with the final reconciliation achieved by Jesus on the cross). Justice then becomes the putting right of that relationship and is the story of the rest of scripture (and history). She reflects on how much time Jesus spends with the marginalised of society. If you want to find Jesus, look for injustice and there he is found.

It's a challenging study, both in its depth and in the subject matter tackled - particularly in the light of the events unfolding in Eastern Europe, but it also challenges us individually so let me share the challenge with you. In a world of injustice, what part is God asking us individually to play and as a church in righting wrongs, in tackling injustice. How do we, in our worship of God, answer the challenge of Isaiah 58, to spend ourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfying the needs of the oppressed? If we carry the image of God, how are we reflecting the image of God's justice in our world? How do we, like Jesus locate ourselves in the margins of society? How are we practical rather than just theoretical?

Ruth Valerio calls us to **give, pray and act**. Opportunities to give can be found below, we can act in many ways including reaching out to the marginalised in our society and beyond; and of course we must pray that God's Kingdom comes, on Earth as it is in Heaven.



1. Online Service

This week (13th March) our online circuit service will be led by Rev Peter Bates.

Find it on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>) why not invite a friend to watch it with you and share the link with them on your social media or by email! (Also available to watch back at any time).

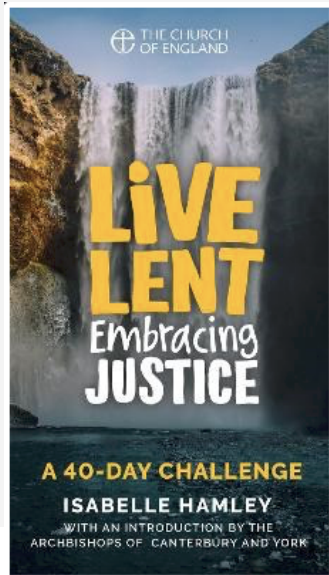
2. 'Zoom' Opportunities

If you're feeling isolated, are not ready to be face to face yet, or can't, but are happy to meet on Zoom, there is a weekly coffee time at 3pm on a Monday run by Charles Street but open to all, email Mel Watson for more details: mellwatson42@gmail.com.

There is also a weekly Zoom fellowship called 'The Gathering' which is part of Southwell Methodist Church and run by Philip and Francine Holmes. You'd be most welcome, contact Philip to connect: philipholmes8100@gmail.com.

For your Lent Course Booklet follow this [LINK](#) or get in touch (peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk). For more study group or course details see below.

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Hope and Blessing ³⁻²²

Circuit Service Message | Luke 13 v 31-35 | Rev Peter Bates

Are there times when we feel that we have lost control of our life and destiny? When we have set off on a path that promised so much and it has turned out not to be what we thought it would be. We are lost and looking for some direction, some encouragement to help us think that we are heading in the right direction. Abram was faced with this dilemma; he had been led by God to leave his homeland and at first, he settled in Haran but God had called him to journey on further to the land of Canaan. The promise that God had made to him was. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you." This promise seemed a long way off as Abram contemplated his future. God spoke to Abram again but you can hear the weariness in Abram's voice as he responds to God. "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless?". Abram is being honest with God, he expresses his frustration, and his doubts that God can actually deliver what he has promised.

God is gentle with Abram, he asks him to step outside his tent and look at the stars, and then tells him that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. God is pointing out to Abram that he is the creator of the universe. If he can create billions of stars in the sky surely, he is able to keep his promise to Abram that he can give him a child.

When we think of the troubles, we face we usually think in human terms, and sometimes these problems seem too huge for us to get over, and yet, if we allow God to take control of the situation, he can bring something good and wonderful from it. Let us keep our eyes on God no matter what problems we face and our faith will grow as we see God at work in our life. When Abram looked at the stars in the night sky, he believed that God could deliver what he had promised. When I am out at night I sometimes stop and look up at the stars and it always lifts my spirit as I think of how amazing God is to create this wonderful universe of ours.

As a Christian our path is not always easy. There are bumps in the road, twists and turns so that we do not always know where we are going but one thing, we can do in all the uncertainty of life is to trust God for our future. God is waiting to bless us and sometimes he just needs to lead into the right place.

In our passage from Genesis, God asks Abram to bring him some animals. Abram then sacrifices the animals to God. Sometimes in our Christian life God will ask us to bring something before him, it could be our problems or it may be something we can give to God so that he can use it to bring blessing in our life. As we give these things to God, he will work out his purpose for our life, and we will learn to trust God in everything.

As we turn to the New Testament reading from Luke, we see Jesus heartbroken because the people of Jerusalem have rejected him. Jesus can see this rejection will lead to the fall of Jerusalem, and so much suffering will come on the people because of their arrogance and pride in rejecting Gods Son. The desire of Jesus heart is for the people to turn to God and be changed by him, to open their lives up to God his Father so that he can mould them into the people he wants them to be.

We too can desire something with our whole heart and sometimes our hearts desire is fulfilled, at other times we are left heartbroken. But even then, God can bring healing to our lives and show us a new way, a new path on our journey. Even though Jesus was heartbroken because most of the Jews rejected him, it would be from Jerusalem that his heart's desire would be met because it was from this city that his followers would be sent out to all the corners of the earth to tell people of God's love for them. Eventually Christianity would become a world-wide religion no longer contained within the boundaries of Israel.

The lesson we can learn from these two readings is to come before God with our heart's desires and to leave them with God to work his purpose out through us. Abram trusted God's word to him, and Jesus had that wonderful relationship with his Father to trust him completely even when physically it didn't seem possible. I am sure there have been times in our lives when we have brought our problems to God and God has worked through them. Let us take encouragement from our own experience that God still does amazing things today.

Prayers

Dear Lord, we thank you that you have made your presence known throughout history. Your mighty deeds in delivering your people from slavery in Egypt, your work through your chosen people Abraham and Moses, culminating in the appearance of your Son here on earth. We thank you for the people who you have raised up in recent times to glorify your name. You are Almighty God who is continually working your purpose out for your creation.

We praise and worship you today because you are faithful to us, even when we have not always been faithful to you. You work through us even in our weaknesses. Help us to trust in you as Abraham did, to walk the path that you have set before us, with open hands and open hearts ready to receive from you all that you want to give to us. **Amen**

We pray for the people of Ukraine who have suffered so much in the last three weeks. We cannot believe this wanton destruction is happening in a world that knows the devastation of World Wars. We pray for the people who are trapped in the cities which are being bombed mercilessly. We pray for the Ukrainian people as they battle against the aggression which Vladimir Putin has unleashed on an innocent country. We also bring before you those who have fled their homeland to seek refuge in other countries.

We pray for our government and leaders of other Western nations as they try to help Ukraine. Give them wisdom and guidance so that they can bring an end to the War which Putin has started. We pray that as individuals and as a nation we can be generous in what we give in supporting the Ukrainian people. **Amen**

EMAIL PRAYER CHAIN

If you would like to join a prayer chain and receive prayer requests or to submit a prayer request (with permission of the recipient) please get in touch with Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com. It is for those of any church or none!

Songs included in this week's online worship

Colours of Day (StF167) [LINK](#)

Blessed be your name (StF 41) [LINK](#)

There's a light upon the mountains (StF 188) [LINK](#)

Before the throne of God above (SoF 1187) [LINK](#)

To God be the glory (StF 94) [LINK](#)

Discussion Questions

Church is best done together but we know that this isn't always possible - particularly if you're housebound, isolated or even shielding. But why contact a friend and arrange to watch the church service online or read the newsletter simultaneously and get in touch by telephone afterwards to talk about it. Below are some questions that might help you to reflect together!

1. Do you take encouragement from Abraham's story?
2. What speaks to you in the story?
3. Are there other biblical characters that you can identify with?
4. Have you felt the same as Jesus did about a church or a place?
5. Have you been promised something by God and has it been fulfilled?
6. How did you feel about the whole process?

In-person worship across the circuit during the next four weeks...

March - May 2022		13th Mar 2nd of Lent	20th Mar 3rd of Lent	27th Mar 4th of Lent Mothering Sunday	27th Mar 4th of Lent Mothering Sunday
Balderton	8:30 am				
	10:30 am	Bates HC	LA	Bates	Bates
	6:00 pm			Bates 4:00 pm	Bates 4:00 pm
Charles Street	8:30 AM				
	10:30 am	West	Falla	Mathews	Mathews
	6:00 pm	Falla HC	Bates	Falla	Falla
Collingham	10:45 am	Dalby	Hart	LA	LA
Elston	10:45 am		Hibberts HC / 2pm	Ward T	Ward T
Hope Community	10:30 am	Falla Breakfast at H'ville / 9am	A Trowbridge at B'gate	Falla HC / at H'ville	Falla HC / at H'ville
Long Bennington	10:30 am	K Trowbridge	Pearce	Gibson	Gibson
North End	6:00 pm	Bates	Hibberts	Ward	Ward
North Muskham	10:30 am	Morley HC		Winnington	Winnington
	2:00 pm		Falla Café		
Southwell	10:30 am	LA	Hibberts	Hibberts	Hibberts
	Other	Hibberts PicC / 2pm	Hucknall HC / 4pm	Hibberts Fringe / 6pm	Hibberts Fringe / 6pm
Sutton-on-Trent	10:30 am	Hibberts Breakfast / 9am	Bates HC	US at Parish Church / 4pm	US at Parish Church / 4pm

For full detail of service across the circuit March to May 2022 visit the circuit website:

www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk

Give, Act, Pray for Ukraine

If you would like to donate to Ukrainian aid you can do so via 'All We Can' the Methodist Relief and Development Fund:

<https://www.allwecan.org.uk/donate/ukraine/>

Lord God, we ask for you to be with all – especially children who are suffering as the crisis in Ukraine deteriorates. Lord for those who are anxious and fearful. For those who are bereaved, injured or who have lost their lives. And for those who have lost loved ones. from <https://www.worldvision.org.uk>

For more details of how you can support practically in your area see the Circuit Website 'News' section for updates:

www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk

