

# TOGETHER

[NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk](http://NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk)

## God's Justice - not ours.

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

Our lent reflections continue alongside many across the country, on the subject of Justice. It's been a real eye opener as the many themes of justice in the Bible challenge what we may think justice is from a worldly perspective. We've been trying to reflect on what God's Justice might look like. (Actually it's been particularly poignant as we've also been watching all that's been unfolding in the Ukraine and praying for those affected. Who could have known when the studies were planned that it would be so relevant?)

As you may know, we began with a definition of justice. How would you define justice? Many of the folk in our groups used the word 'fairness'. It made me think about the statue that stands on the top of the Old Bailey, in London. The statue, entitled 'Lady Justice' is of a figure who holds in one hand a set of scales (the balance of fairness as calculating justice) and in the other a sword, symbolic of the tools for enacting justice where necessary (punishment?) For many of us justice is a calculation, if something is done that is wrong (unfair) by someone, then a punishment is due. In that sense the scales are re-balanced by a penalty. Actually we see this desire in society whenever there is a high profile crime; there is often a public outcry for justice that calls for a tough punishment to be handed out. But what if that's not the purpose of justice? What if it's not about punishment but something deeper?

In the Bible we see many different themes of justice but none so powerful as the person of Jesus. Jesus comes to Earth to bring justice (to right the wrongs that began at the start of creation with humanity turning its back on God). Not just that, but also to right the wrongs that have spiralled out of that rebellion and created the unjust world we live in now; the same world that Jesus walked on 2,000 years ago. Early in his ministry, Jesus read an ancient prophecy about himself from the Old Testament that said he was sent to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoners, to set the oppressed free and we can see that if we read of his time on earth (in the gospels). Jesus spent time with the marginalised, the outcasts, those who were unjustly treated. But he also spent time with sinners (like me and you).

This is where he and Lady Justice part company. It's interesting that he and Lady Justice, from a distance, look alike - both cruciform (in the shape of a cross). But as Lady Justice reaches out her arms to calculate

our guilt and bring punishment, Jesus reaches out and takes a nail in each hand. Jesus chooses to take our punishment and justice becomes less about penalty and more about peace (and reconciliation).

The Easter message is one of righting the great wrong, reuniting us with God by the ultimate act of sacrifice and achieving a new justice where all become equal in God's eyes by his grace and mercy; challenging us to then bring justice in our world as part of God's Kingdom.

This Easter, reflect on what this means for you, personally. God's love, with outstretched arms, meeting us where we are, forgiving us and drawing us into his presence.





# Relationship not Rules<sup>23-312</sup>

Circuit Service Message | Exodus 19:1-6 | Rev Peter Hibberts

## 1. Online Service

**This week (27th March) our online circuit service will be led by Rev Peter Hibberts.**

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](mailto:mellwatson42@gmail.com).

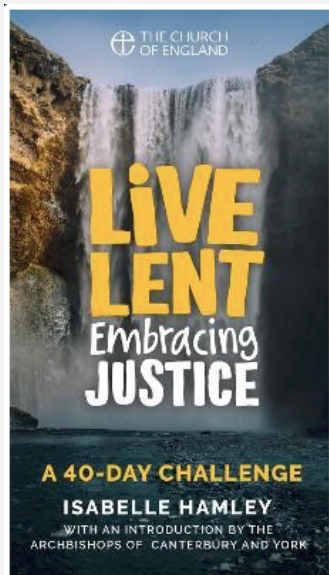
There is also a weekly Zoom fellowship called 'The Gathering' which is part of Southwell Methodist Church and run by Philip and Francine Holmes. You'd be most welcome, contact Philip to connect: [philipholmes8100@gmail.com](mailto:philipholmes8100@gmail.com).

I've followed the Exodus story my lent reflections of the last few weeks and if you been at any of the churches I've preached at (or read articles/worshipped with the online worship) you'll have reflected with me on the journey God takes them on as he builds a relationship with them and builds them together as a community of justice. What we have is something of an re-adoption, despite God having a relationship with humanity in the very beginning, the result of the fall is that when God meets Moses in the burning bush, Moses does not even know what to call God; humanity has become estranged.

What are your family relationships like? The choices we make (and the choices of others) often put pressure on our relationships and sadly, sometimes we become estranged. I'm aware as I write this that Sunday is Mothering Sunday. It's a beautiful but often difficult day. Of course its origins are in 'Mother' churches but equally we see it as a chance to celebrate one of the most important relationships we know, that of mother and child. It's a day where many spoil their mother but equally anyone who has lost their mother, lost a child or become estranged will know it as a painful day. My prayers are with you if you find this weekend difficult.

At the point where we pick up this week's passage, the people of God have been rescued from slavery in Egypt and God has a plan for them that will lead ultimately to this estranged relationship becoming a special one again. The Israelites are at the base of Mount Sinai and we know they are about to receive possibly the most famous basis for justice in history: The Ten Commandments. (Are you, like one of the Southwell Members last week, picturing Charlton Heston?) These commandments are the basis of the law, the basis of justice and the basis of the way that Israelite society (and almost every society since) is built. But let's just hit the pause button. The point of today's message is not a reflection on rules. Often when we reflect on justice we look to the law, something that our studies into Biblical justice over the last few weeks has challenged. The law is important because it helps us to recognise when things have gone wrong, but it's not how to get things right, to make things just. In the Live Lent material that I'm studying both Justin Welby and Ruth Velerio made a similar point, that we seem to have an inbuilt compass that shows us when we've gone wrong (we know when things are not fair) but we seem to lack the compass that shows us how, as the human race, to navigate our way back to justice! That's because rules only get us so far. To have justice we need right relationships. If we are in a right relationship (built on love and compassion) we won't go far wrong. I can't help wondering whether we would see the difficulties we are seeing in Eastern Europe at present if over the decades since World War II we had fostered good relationships between East and West. One of

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



the most damaging post war events was the building of the Berlin Wall. It signalled an inability to live side by side, to cooperate and be in right relationship. Even now, after the wall has been dismantled, the divisions between East and West can be seen (and felt by ordinary Ukrainians caught in the middle). It's so tragic. Similarly tragic are the divisions that we feel in our own relationships and in our church when we can't journey together.

Back to the Israelites though. Before they receive the Ten Commandments, Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive a message from God to the people:

**“You have seen what I did...bore you on eagles’ wings and bought you to myself.”** (Exodus 19:4)

What a beautiful analogy. What a beautiful picture of motherhood. God hears the cries of his estranged children in Egypt, he comes down to rescue them and take them like eaglets on his wings. (I was most disappointed to find eagles don't do this in real life but don't let that detract from the analogy - God certainly does carry us!)

This rescue and the restoration of the relationship is then highlighted in the rest of God's message:

**“Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession.”**

Did you know that you are treasured by God? It was a relationship first given to the Israelites and then, through Israel (and then eternal work of Christ in dying on the cross) to all who choose to be part of it. Of course we still have free will and many times fail and break God's covenant but the cross ensures that we are only ever one step from God's forgiveness and restoration: repentance.

As I shared in the opening article, God's justice is markedly different to the world's justice. It's not about whether we measure up, it's about God's choice to build a bridge between where we should be (justice) and where we are. God chooses to restore us to right relationship and through that relationship we get reacquainted with God's voice (consider Jesus' picture of the sheep knowing the shepherd's voice) and can, through God's Holy Spirit find that compass to help us to act justly. Look with me just a few verses on in Exodus 19:8:

**“Then the people all answered as one, ‘Everything that the Lord has spoken, we will do’”**

If we are to see justice in our world, we must first be in right relationship with God, listening to God's voice and then rebuild those relationships with others. Perhaps we need to forgive and be forgiven, to bear one-another up on our wings.<sup>3</sup>**Amen.**

## Prayers

Loving God,  
Thank you for mums and children and for all the joy of family life.  
Be with those who are grieving because they have no mother;  
Be close to those who are struggling because they have no children;  
Be near to those who are sad because they are far apart from those they love.  
Let your love be present in every home,  
And help your church to have eyes to see and ears to hear the needs of all who come.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen** (From [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org))

Sovereign Lord,  
We continue to pray for all those in need at this time, for those who are suffering as a result the rise in COVID cases, for those anxious about the future and for those in financial difficult. We continue to pray for those who are facing extreme hardship as a result of conflict, we continue to pray for the Ukraine. On mothering Sunday, as we reflect on reports of hospitals in Ukraine being hit and expectant and new mothers being injured or killed we don't know what to pray. We ask that you meet the needs of all who are in these desperate situations and that you give strength to those who work for peace, who bring aid and who offer support. May you also, by your spirit, convict us of how we can help, to help us to GIVE, ACT and PRAY as you would have us. Lead and guide us. Your Kingdom Come on Earth as it is in Heaven. **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](mailto:colin1244@gmail.com). It is for those of any church or none!*

## Songs included in this week's online worship

For the beauty of the Earth [LINK](#)

This is amazing grace [LINK](#)

How Deep The Father's Love For Us [LINK](#)

Lord I come to you (StF 471) [LINK](#)

The Blessing [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. How do you feel around Mothering Sunday? What is your experience of motherhood? Give this to God in prayer.
2. How do you think the Israelites felt being told that they were God's treasured possession?
3. How does the analogy of God bearing you on his wings?
4. How does being described as God's treasured possession make you feel?
5. How do you recognise and follow God's voice?
6. What is God's voice calling you to do?

## 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](http://www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk)

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

March - May 2022	27th Mar 4th of Lent Mothering Sunday	3rd Apr 5th of Lent Passion Sunday	10th Apr 6th of Lent Palm Sunday	27th Mar 4th of Lent Mothering Sunday
Balderton	8:30 am			
	10:30 am	Bates	Dalby	Gibson HC Bates
	6:00 pm	Bates 4:00 pm		Bates 4:00 pm
Charles Street	8:30 AM			
	10:30 am	Mathews	JS with Hope at B'gate	Falla Mathews
	6:00 pm	Falla	Falla	Bates Falla
Collingham	10:45 am	LA	West	Bates US LA
Elston	10:45 am	Ward T		Hardy Ward T
Hope Community	10:30 am	Falla HC / at H'ville	Falla with NMYBB at B'gate	Winnington Breakfast at H'ville / 9am Falla HC / at H'ville
Long Bennington	10:30 am	Gibson	Bates	Morley Gibson
North End	6:00 pm	Ward	Bates	Falla Ward
North Muskham	10:30 am	Winnington		Hibberts Winnington
	2:00 pm		Hibberts Café	
Southwell	10:30 am	Hibberts	Hibberts	Ward T Hibberts
	Other	Hibberts Fringe / 6pm	Hart 4pm	Hibberts PicC / 2pm Hibberts Fringe / 6pm
Sutton-on-Trent	10:30 am	US at Parish Church / 4pm	Hucknall T	LA Breakfast / 9am 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](http://www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk)

