

## Justice: Zoom service 21/06/20

### Welcome:

- Welcome to our service this morning
- I believe this is now our 10<sup>th</sup> Zoom service
- It goes quickly doesn't it
- But it is good we have still been able to meet during these times.

This morning I want to talk about Justice

- This is an important theme in the bible
- And it is also very relevant to current events
- Particularly the 'Black Lives Matter' protests

Micah 6:8 tells us unequivocally

*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.*

- My intention is to have a mini-series based on this verse.
- This morning we will be thinking about justice
- Next week mercy
- And in a few weeks' time: humility

### Reading: Deuteronomy 32:1-4

Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; hear, you earth, the words of my mouth.

<sup>2</sup> Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew,  
like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants.

<sup>3</sup> I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!

<sup>4</sup> He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.

A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

### Prayer:

Father God thank you that you are a holy and righteous God. A God of compassion, mercy, and justice.

We ask this morning you will meet with us, equip us to be your people, speaking your words, sharing your love, and bringing your peace and hope to where we live and work.

Lord many of us are perplexed and anxious. We are fearful of the future. Help us to find confidence in you. To look to you and not ourselves. Be our strength and shield, our hope

and salvation. May each of us know our worth and value in you and in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Open our eyes to see you, our ears to hear you and our hearts to love the ones you love.

In Jesus name

Amen

### Worship:

**Reading:** Luke 10:25-37 *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*

<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

<sup>27</sup> He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

<sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

<sup>30</sup> In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

<sup>36</sup> "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

<sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

**Introduction.**

This is a very famous story - Possibly the most famous story ever told.

- It speaks to us in such a powerful way
- We connect to it emotionally
- There is something deep in our psyche that identifies with the plight of the traveller
- And the selfless generosity of the Samaritan.
- So much so that the name Samaritan has become synonymous with helping others.

This morning I want to begin our thoughts on Justice by sharing another story

- Or maybe the same story told a different way
- This story is true, and it occurred in London in 1765
- Jonathon Strong was a young African man,
- He had been attacked by robbers who had stripped him of his freedom and made him a slave
- He was beaten by his master and left half dead at the side of the road.

We don't know how many people walked past but we do know one stopped to help.

- He was taken to a local doctor William Sharp who ran regular surgeries for the poor
- William's brother, Granville Sharp became concerned by his plight
- He took him to St Bart's Hospital and the brothers paid for his care.
- When he was recovered, they found him employment as a messenger for a local businessman.

But the story doesn't end there.

- Sometime later Strong contacted Sharp again
- His old master had abducted him and was attempting to sell him back into slavery.
- Sharp was outraged and took his case to the Lord Mayor and Strong was freed
- A prolonged legal battle followed
- One Sharp had to fight himself as no lawyer would take the case.
- But by persistence and much legal study he eventually won his case
- In 1772 Lord Chief Justice William Mansfield ruled that English law could not support slavery in Britain
- Therefore, slave owners could not legally force slaves to return to the colonies once they were here.
- Although it was 35 years later, in 1807, that slavery was finally abolished by parliament.
- We are told on hearing this news, Granville Sharp, now 71 fell to his knees and gave thanks to God

So, this morning I want to talk about justice

- I am doing so in the context of the Black Lives Matter protests still going on around the world.
- And I intend to discuss our response to these events
- Based on my understanding of God and of scripture.

I am conscious that I am not someone who has experienced this first-hand

- And therefore, possibly, I am not qualified to preach to those who have.
- And I apologise in advance if anything I say does not adequately express your experience.
- But I also believe racism is not a Black problem – it is our problem
- And I was encouraged in my research for this sermon when I came across an article by an American pastor Bryan Loritts
- Talking of George Floyd, he says,  
*In the aftermath of this tragedy my phone and direct messages lit up by our well-intentioned white siblings asking me how can they help? What books should they be reading? As a pastor what should they say to their people? I don't do well assigning homework when I'm grieving. Even more so, the dilemma of systemic racism in America is not black people's problem to fix. That's like the close friends of the battered wife's husband asking what should they be reading when it comes to solving her abuse? A jolting analogy I know, but black people in America have been in an abusive relationship with whites for four hundred years.*

So, let's be encouraged by these words and talk about justice

- Justice in the bible and justice relating specifically to racism.
- Remember that when Jesus told his parable of the Good Samaritan
- It was in the context of racism
- The Jewish audience held strong prejudices against the Samaritans
- So much so that a 'good Jew' would not walk through Samaria
- Lest he become defiled.

A story about a Jew being cared for by a Samaritan would have been shocking to them

- And the idea he was more of a neighbour than they were, was an affront.
- Something akin to the media reports last week of a Black man rescuing a white supremacist from being beaten.

### **Justice.**

What is it?

- My online dictionary defines it this way
- *“Justice is a concept on ethics and law that means that people behave in a way that is fair, equal and balanced for everyone”*

This concept of Justice is established for Gods people in God’s law.

*“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great but judge your neighbour fairly”.* (Leviticus 19:15)

- And we have already heard Jesus’ understanding of who our neighbour might be.

This is reinforced as the people gather at Mount Ebor

- To make promises to the lord before entering the promised land
- Among the 12 strictures we read
- The Levites were to say  
*“Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”* (Deuteronomy 27:19)

Throughout the bible God demands we behave in just, honest, and righteous ways.

- Particularly towards the poor, the powerless and the foreigner
- Or immigrant as we would describe them today.
- *“Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.”* (Deuteronomy 24:17)
- *“For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.”* (Amos 5:12)

God’s people were to be in no doubt God took Justice seriously

- And they were given three reasons why
- Firstly, because it is God’s nature
- Justice is an essential component of God’s character
- The Psalmist tells us
- *“The heavens proclaim his righteousness, for he is a God of justice.”* (Psalm 50:6)
- And
- *“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom.”* (Psalm 45:6)

Job goes further and says,

- *“It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.”* (Job 34:12)

In Isaiah's prophesy of Jesus, he foretells that the Messiah he will bring justice

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. <sup>2</sup> He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. <sup>3</sup> A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope."*  
(Isaiah 42:1-4)

Secondly, they were to behave justly because it is the right thing to do

- Proverbs 29:7 tells us
- *"The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern."*

The third reason is that they were once slaves and immigrants in Egypt

- *"When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. <sup>34</sup> The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.*  
(Leviticus 19:33-34)

Three reasons for Justice

1. God is Just
2. It is right
3. We share a common humanity

All are just as true today as they were when they were written

- God is speaking to us through the prophet Isaiah
- Just as much he was speaking to them when he says  
*Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.  
Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.* (Isaiah 1:17)

But what about us

- How can we apply this to ourselves and to our situation?
- How are we to understand what justice means to us?
- What about competing calls for justice?
- How do we balance different people's rights?

These are all good questions

- And hopefully we can reach some conclusions this morning
- But this is not something we can ignore
- Or sweep under the carpet because it doesn't affect us.

This morning I want to think about three aspect of justice pertinent to us

- And, conveniently, they all start with the letter V
  1. Vindication.
    - This is about acknowledging someone's pain
    - That their complaint is justified
    - It has not been ignored or dismissed as unimportant

2. Voice.
  - This is about acknowledging identity
  - That their story is worth being told
  
3. Value.
  - This is acknowledging someone's worth
  - This is what the Black lives Matter slogan is all about

### **Vindication**

I want to begin with vindication

- Because before we jump to solutions
- We need to acknowledge the pain
- If I can return to Bryan Loritts (the American Pastor)
- He says

*We are tired of the abuse. We are hurting. And before we rush to solutions let us first stop and "bear one another's burden's" (Galatians 6:2). We must be careful that in our haste for quick resolutions we don't settle for a cheap reconciliation. Solutions can often times become a hand sanitizer of sorts for a guilty conscience. Let us first stop and feel before we try to fix.*

Injustice hurts

- It is one of the first protests of a child
- "It's not fair"
- I remember when I was young,
- My best friend was a Nigerian boy called Isaac
- He lived a few houses up and we hung out together

We once attempted to join a scout troop

- But some racist comment or incident occurred, and we never went back
- If I'm honest I can't remember what happened
- But I do remember the feeling of hurt and injustice of it
- It was one incident 50 years ago and I remember it

I cannot imagine how it must feel to be subjected to this abuse all the time

- Year after year.
- No wonder they are in pain
- No wonder the feelings run so deep.

Bryan is right, we need to stop and say

- Your pain is real
- Your pain is reasonable
- Your pain is recognised
- We are sorry and ashamed for our part in that
- For the times we have not spoken out

Also, vindication means we are going to take this seriously

- We are not going to look for easy answers
- We are not going to look for a scapegoat
- Find someone to blame, call him a racist
- And soothe our consciences by saying 'At least we are not like that'
- Or "We're not as bad as America"

God does not call us to be better than America

- He calls us to be like Him
- And that is a much higher standard to aspire to.
- One that requires honesty and repentance.

## Voice

I don't know how many of you have watched the Simpsons

- There is one episode where Bart is trying to join the local gang
- And is challenged to vandalise the statue of the town founder, Jedediah Smith
- So, he chops off his head

The whole town is outraged, and Bart gets caught

- And is about to be lynched by the angry townsfolk
- He gives a speech and points out that although what he did was wrong
- Everyone was guilty of not appreciating Jedediah
- It was only when he was vandalised anybody cared.

It seemed to me there is a similarity to recent events.

- Hardly anyone had heard of Edward Colston until his statue was cut down
- Now people are marching in the streets to defend our history and culture.
- Why are people suddenly so upset?
- They feel something has been taken from them if their history is not recognised
- They have lost their identity and voice.

Yet, if we are truthful

- Isn't that something we have been doing to our Black communities for years
- Writing out our shared history
- And skirting over the bit of our history we don't like.

But history should not belong to us

- There should not be a black history and a white history
- Just history. The story of all of us.

I have been watching a series on TV called 'Black and British – A forgotten History'

- Written and presented by historian David Olusoga
- It's fascinating and well worth a look if you've got BBC I player or catch up.

The first programme begins with the story of the first Black Africans in Britain

- Do you know when that was?
- It was actually 3 AD!
- About the time Jesus was being born there was an African Community in Cumbria
- A Roman Moorish Regiment stationed with their families in a fort on Hadrian's wall.

Although this was not mentioned in the programme

- It occurred to me that this means there were African descendants in Britain
- Before the Anglo Saxons arrived.

Today when we learn about the Romans in school

- They all have white faces.
- But this is not historically accurate
- The Romans, despite all their brutality were not concerned about colour.
- North Africa was part of their empire from very early times
- And Africans were both citizens and soldiers.

There is some speculation that Cleopatra was black

- This is quite shocking to us but entirely plausible.
- It is difficult to know
- Because it was not something the Romans would think to comment on.
- Colour prejudice was a British invention some 1500 years later

It has been said racism was the cause of the slave trade.

- I think there is a case for arguing it was the other way round
- Racism was developed to justify the slave trade
- As our exploitation increased, we needed a justification for it
- And theories of racial superiorities were developed.

Either way it is one of the greatest moral evils of history.

- And we are left with this legacy of colour prejudice
- That does so much damage to our society.
- I have preached about racism previously
- And would direct you to my sermon on Anti-Semitism
- That is also on the church website.

The point is that we all share the history of this nation

- There is no need for conflict between so called 'Black' and 'White' history
- But we do need to acknowledge the evils as well as the triumphs of our past.
- And removing statues is no substitute for honest reflection
- Nobody can be defined but one aspect of their character or life
- We are far more complex than that

Looking for a racist to blame is an easy way of avoiding our own sinful attitudes

- When my children were young, we were given advice on raising children
- One thing we were told was never to tell a child he or she was bad
- Instead tell them what you did was bad
- Distinguish between the act and the person

I think that is something we could all apply to historical figures

- Some of what they did may have been appalling
- They may have attitudes of their time that are unacceptable today
- But they also did some good.
- And we are not blameless either.

### **Value**

My final point about justice is value

- Acknowledging someone's worth
- This what the 'Black Lives Matter' slogan is all about
- And we should confirm its validity

This is not in conflict with the idea that all lives matter

- Of course, they do
- But 'Black Lives Matter' is a specific application of that wider truth
- One that is pertinent to our inherently unjust society

Justice is not a limited resource

- We should not be competing for our share of it
- It is not true that if we use it all up supporting one group
- Then there will be none left for the rest of us.
- The more we pursue justice the more justice there is.

Amos uses the analogy of justice flowing like a river (Amos 5:21-24)

- And righteousness like an everlasting stream.
- Justice is a renewable resource
- Flowing from God's throne
- And a fairer more equal society benefits all

If we deny value to one

- Then we devalue all of us.

### **Conclusion.**

This brings me to the conclusion

- What are we do?
- How can we bring change?
- I think the first clue is found in Deuteronomy
- Moses speaks to the people before they enter the Promised Land

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup>Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." <sup>7</sup>What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? <sup>8</sup>And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? <sup>9</sup>Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. (Deuteronomy 4:5-9)

This suggests four responsibilities

1. Personal Responsibility

- We have a duty to be examples of justice in our behaviour and words
- What we do or don't do, what we say and don't say
- Will be noticed.
- Will be an example to others and should bring honour to God

2. Parental Responsibility

- It is our duty to bring up our children to live justly and seek justice
- This links to our first responsibility
- Our children will learn more from what we do than what we say.

3. Civic Responsibility

- We have a national responsibility to have just and fair laws.
- To have just and fair systems and processes.
- We have a duty to encourage our leaders to uphold justice
- And bring them to account when they don't

4. Church Responsibility

- The church is salt and light in the world
- We should be examples of a just and fair community
- A place where each and every one of us feels
- A place where we can be ourselves our voice heard
- A place where we are vindicated our identity validated
- A place where we are loved

Bryan Loritts sums this up nicely

- Saying  
*Family, government and church done God's way creates an ecosystem hostile to racism. May we not be like the religious leaders in Jesus' parable on the Good Samaritan, who simply walk on by. Let us stop in lament and medicate the wounds of our people*

**Reading : Psalm 101**

<sup>1</sup> *I will sing of your love and justice; to you, LORD, I will sing praise.*

<sup>2</sup> *I will be careful to lead a blameless life— when will you come to me?*

*I will conduct the affairs of my house with a blameless heart.*

<sup>3</sup> *I will not look with approval on anything that is vile.*

*I hate what faithless people do; I will have no part in it.*

<sup>4</sup> *The perverse of heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with what is evil.*

<sup>5</sup> *Whoever slanders their neighbour in secret, I will put to silence;*

*whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, I will not tolerate.*

<sup>6</sup> *My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me;*

*the one whose walk is blameless will minister to me.*

<sup>7</sup> *No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house;*

*no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.*

<sup>8</sup> *Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land;*

*I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the LORD.*

And all the people said

“Amen”

**Worship:****Blessing:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and for evermore.

Amen