

This week, I want to return to the spiritual practices we had begun to explore before the Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. It seemed appropriate that we should look at the practice of **justice** as a Spiritual Discipline but this will need to be done over a couple of weeks. This week, I want to merely orient us to the subject and next week, I will focus on racial and indigenous justice given the events of recent weeks in this country and elsewhere and because next Sunday is National Indigenous Peoples Day.

At its simplest, a working definition for justice is making things right and, for Christians, it carries the belief that we are all created in the image of God. So, following on from last week, when we explored the importance of the Trinity, we start with seeing justice as an essential part of the Trinity. The Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan and Theologian Kallistos of Diokleia has stated:

“Belief in a God who is three-in-one whose characteristics are sharing and solidarity, has direct and practical consequences for our Christian attitude towards politics, economics and social action, and it is our task to work out these consequences in full detail....

When as Christians we fight for justice and for human rights, for a compassionate and caring society, we are acting specifically in the name of the Trinity. Faith in the Trinitarian God, in the God of personal interrelationship and shared love, commits us to struggle with all our strength against poverty, exploitation, oppression and disease. Our combat against these things is undertaken not merely on philanthropic and humanitarian grounds but because for our belief in God the Trinity. Precisely because we know that God is three-in-one, we cannot remain indifferent to any suffering, by any member of the human race, in any part of the world”

Scriptures, particularly our Old Testament scriptures, speak a lot on the subject:

‘Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute,’ (Psalm 82:3).

‘Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and please the widow’s cause,’ (Isaiah 1:17).

‘He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’ (Micah 6:8).

‘But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others,’ (Luke 11:42).

These concerns have found their way into our liturgies, I have provided an extract from the Baptismal Covenant of the Anglican Church of Canada which is said by all baptised believers at special occasions such as a baptism. It is a good reminder of the way of the Trinitarian life God invites us into.

Baptism is a communal event – the focus is on the child/adult becoming part of a community which takes seriously its vows to do all they can to help the candidate grow and mature in the Christian faith. This is the first Mark of Mission for the Anglican Communion.

<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.

This is also picked up here in the *'fellowship and breaking of the bread and in the prayers.'* This contrasts with today's individualistic society where even Christians default to thinking about themselves personally rather than also seeing things with a communal perspective e.g. as a Parish and Diocese. So how are we, as the St Paul's church family, to express this striving for justice and peace among all people, as well as individually? It needs to be part of our narrative and practice.

I believe that the product of fulfilling the covenant to *'persevere in resisting evil'*, *'repent'*; *'proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ'*, striving *'for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being'* brings justice.

The Fourth Mark of Mission is:

- **To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation**

Now it can all feel overwhelming and this is where being part of a community is so important – we don't need to do everything – the task can be shared. However, we are to seek it (work

towards that goal), not wait for it to happen passively - in the words of the old Jewish proverb, 'It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it!'

The vivid images on video of police brutality, such as George Floyd's treatment and death, calling for his late Mother and saying 'I can't breathe,' transformed something from being theoretical to being *real* – we could *feel* it as well as *see* it. That is why there have been protests throughout the world – these have been largely peaceful and feel prophetic to me.

I suspect God's will is that, in much the same way, we are to keep on being unsettled (a hallmark of the Holy Spirit!) and challenged – that is both to refine us and also to enable others to flourish without oppression or injustice.

So what can we do? Well, individually, we can educate ourselves and build relationships with people outside of our usual 'bubble'. As a Church we can also organise activities and facilitate conversations to help deconstruct some of our own understandings and false narratives. This then leads to changed behaviour (what we term repentance) causing us to live and act in the world differently and so it becomes a little more just.

Perhaps this is also what Jesus meant when he said that the Spirit of Truth would lead us into all truth? A favourite prayer of mine to conclude:

***Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.***