

7. Responding to injustice with compassion

'Your kingdom come' is a call to be alert locally, nationally and internationally to the mission of God, and to be sensitive to people's needs. It is a call to respond. However, we need Godly focus and clarity to avoid being swamped by every issue

Core Texts

Matthew 25:31-46, Deuteronomy 5:12-15, Leviticus 25, Isaiah 58, Mark 3:1-5, John 11:32-37, Galatians 3:28, Romans 8:18-21

Core Teaching

❖ Sabbath Principles

- A call to holiness through justice [Det.5]
- Anticipates Kingdom of justice & Peace
- Worked out in society through Jubilee [Lev.25, Is.61]
- Jesus' healed out of Sabbath principles of justice & Peace

❖ Overall Response

- Includes relationships with people, communities, ecology
- It's about the spiritual, the moral, and the physical
- It affects us as individuals, groups and a church.

❖ Specific Responses

- Lament: identify with feelings of those facing injustice
- Prayer: begins with lament and then moves towards action
- Action: [Matt.25] - Personal support
 - Direct action by an individual or group
 - Support an individual or personal contact
 - Support an organisation or a cause
 - Campaign with others at specific times
 - React to a catastrophe

Some Initial Questions

- Review Missionary Support – Central vs Individual & Group?
- How to improve prayer & practical support for causes, catastrophes and individuals
- How to respond wisely with resources to appropriate needs?

Value 7 – Responding to Injustice with Compassion

- Can you remember the 4th of the 10 Commandments? [Keep the Sabbath Day Holy] What is that commandment usually taken to be about? [Rest from Work]. Both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, where the 10 Commandments are listed, the section on the 4th commandment is by far the longest. Let me read you the text of it from Deuteronomy [Deut.5:12-15]...
- We could, and maybe should, do a whole series of sermons on the principles of Sabbath, because it is so much more than a prohibition from work. At its core is a call to holiness through justice and a time to recall God's graciousness in taking us from exile into hope. In this way Sabbath sets the tone for our living in relationship with God and our world. Sabbath anticipates heavenly justice and peace. We are urged to ensure that our rest is not a pious and selfish holiness but a source of passion to bring equality and justice to all people, slaves and free, and to all creatures and all creation.
- That's why in the Kingdom of God, inaugurated through Jesus Christ, *there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female* [Gal.3:28], and why all creation longs and groans for the return of Jesus [Rom.8:18-21]. This is the big picture and its why in John 3:16 when Jesus says *for God so loved the world*, the word for 'world' is 'cosmos' rather than just humankind. Advent Sunday, celebrating Jesus' first coming and anticipating when he will come again, is an ideal time to be thinking about *Responding to Injustice with Compassion*.
- You could argue that this is what God has been about since Adam and Eve fell, and he certainly made it part of how he intended his people should live. The deepest injustice and offence is that inflicted by sin and as Jesus tackled its cause so we respond to its consequences.
- The Israelites were not only given the 4th commandment but also given the Sabbath principles to be worked out in their society and in their relationship with the land. Thus every 7th year the land was given a year of rest and every 50th year (7x7

- +1), was a year of Jubilee when all debts were cancelled and obligations wiped clean; when those who had acquired land, goods and slaves were to restore property and people back to their rightful state [Lev.25]. That's why Jesus' coming is often referred to in terms of *Jubilee* and he himself gave his famous manifesto by quoting at Nazareth from Isaiah 61.
- What was Jesus' take on the Sabbath? Read Mark 3:1-5. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath the pious people thought he was working against God's will whereas Jesus knew he was acting out of the direct Sabbath principles of justice and jubilee. Freeing a man from a withered hand was an act of restoration entirely consistent with Sabbath. You can actually see it as a picture of Jesus' whole ministry, which was to bring true Sabbath rest and restoration for all people.
 - Going further on, the writer to the Hebrews urges us not to miss out on the rest God offers now and in eternity [Heb.4:9-11]. Isaiah 58 says that what we do in a Sunday service has no validity, no Sabbath meaning, if we are not also engaged in kingdom work for those in need of justice. Images of the completed kingdom of God in Isaiah 2 and Revelation 21 & 22 show a place in which there is permanent justice and peace.
 - I've laboured this because I need to grasp this truth strongly for myself and we need to hold it to heart as a church. I want to argue that this Value of *Responding to Injustice with Compassion* has dimensions that are local, national and international; it's about human relations with people, communities and ecology; it's about the spiritual, the moral, and the physical; it affects us as individuals, groups and a church. None of our values exists in isolation from the others, but this Value is the primary place where I think we need to consider the whats and hows of our Missionary support, our campaigning, our reactions to calamity, our support for key individuals, our giving/, and our praying.
 - What might be our responses to injustice? Well, before I consider some actions I'd like to make a plug for two other
 - Support an organisation or a cause [eg TEAR Fund, A Rocha, Biblelands...]
 - Campaign with others at specific times [eg Temporary housing on Brookwood Fam, Clearing International Debt, writing to MP]
 - React to a catastrophe [eg Tsunami, Earthquake]
 - As a word of caution this Value, like *Loving our Community*, has a health warning attached to it! We can so easily take on everything that we achieve nothing. When we are driven by guilt or competitiveness we are losing the plot! When Judas complained that the cost of the ointment poured over Jesus could have been better spent for the poor Jesus reprimanded him. When faced with a Caananite woman asking for her daughter's healing, Jesus was reluctant because it fell outside His mission at that time. Our calling is to act out of the compassion & command of Christ. Wise & Godly stewarding of our resources, of every kind, is not easy but is essential.
 - As a church we'll need to decide the extent to which these actions are centrally organised or taken up by groups and individuals. For example, many people, myself included, are dissatisfied with the way we approach our mission support. Its time for a review and, I'd suggest we may centrally support fewer thus leaving groups and individuals to support others.
 - We need to improve our support for causes, catastrophes and individuals as part of our organised and instinctive prayer and giving. We often use the body image for the church to indicate different active functions, but the various parts of our bodies are also sensitive in different ways and in different degrees. Those who are sensitive to injustice in its different forms need to alert us all.
 - *Responding to Injustice with Compassion*: it's about Sabbath principles being worked out in the Kingdom of God through Christ's Church by the Spirit. We are called by the command and compassion of Christ, amongst other things, to lament, pray and take action.

responses that I believe are scriptural and helpful. The first is Lament. There are times in the Gospels when we read that Jesus' first response to a situation or need was to be troubled, to weep and to lament: you might consider his approach to Lazarus' tomb [Jn.11:32-37] or when viewing Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives [Lk.19:41-46]. At these times Jesus is identifying with the pain before taking what action he can. His compassion, seen in tears, being troubled or even in anger, motivates his response.

- I've been finding as I've prepared each of these Values sermons that God has brought across my path a person, DVD, Video or book that has widened my viewpoint. This time it's been a book called 'Praying in Exile' by Gordon Mursell [explain circumstances]. I've already read it once and I'm in the process of re-reading it because I want to reflect longer upon what the author says. He draws attention to the many parts of the Bible, often written by those experiencing injustice, that are given over to lament. He describes a lament as: *the way you respond when faith and experience collide painfully with one another. It is supremely the prayer of the powerless, of those not in control of what is happening to them* [eg Ps. 13]
- He quotes from modern-day refugees and shows how their complaints and cries often parallel parts of the Bible. The Biblical passages of lament can be true sources of connection for those who are themselves facing injustice. They are like refuge huts on a mountainside which you come across when lost and exposed, which tell of others who have been & sheltered here before, which give a place of honest reflection before God, and in some way, which break through the sense of isolation. In a similar way for us, too, Biblical passages of lament can connect us beyond facts with the feelings of those who are facing injustice. Through lament passages we can in some way sit with them.
- For example, on the Sunday after 9/11 we read and I preached from Psalm 10. It's a prayer of political protest for a victimised community. Other possible connections might be.

- Psalm 55 for a Victim of Urban Violence
- Psalms 42 & 43 for a Minister facing testing
- Psalm 71 for an elderly person fearing the future
- Psalm 59 for a victim of racism
- Psalm 88 for someone suffering AIDS
- Psalm 56 for someone facing stress

By the Spirit, these passages can take us into prayer with deeper understanding.

- And Prayer is another valid and essential response. Prayer that begins with lament and then moves towards action. Prayer is a crucial step. Prayer without lament lacks compassion, and action without prayer risks misdirection. We've made prayer a central part of our values and said we want it to be central to what we are and what we do. I'm not going to go back over what has already been spoken on the subject, but prayers for people and places facing injustice, against those who perpetrate injustice, and for those with the power to restore justice, are all valid and essential. As I've already hinted, our response to Injustice is as much part of the spiritual battle as it is a call to practical support.
- And Jesus was crystal clear that practical action is not something we can opt out of. Read Matthew 25:31-46. Those who respond in this parable, do so out of Sabbath compassion not with an ulterior motive to win souls. Indeed their blindness to the presence of Jesus is, perhaps, surprising. It's not clear whether they have responded individually or together in groups. Jesus is commending their compassionate responsiveness to his heart and the needs they see. What practical actions might we take and to what?
 - Personal support [eg someone at work treated unfairly, sheltering an asylum seeker]
 - Direct action by an individual or group [eg Visiting prison, Ramsays > Mercy Ships, Becky C > Africa]
 - Support an individual or personal contact [eg Bob Bailey, Ann Huggett, Richard Levett, Tony H-A, Tim Benson, Richard Wheatley, Jon & Jo Parsons]