

In the week that a new and controversial President has been inaugurated in the USA it is helpful to consider the words of another US President, Jimmy Carter, in 2002.

"The greatest challenge we face (at the beginning of the 21st Century) is the growing chasm between the rich and the poor people on earth ... more than half the world's population lives on less than us \$2.00 per day and 1.2 billion people have to survive on less than that amount."

Just over 2 years ago I spoke on the theme God's table of "enough for all" (Sunday 28th August 2022).

Focussing on the word "enough" I shared the following story:

At a party given by a billionaire on Shelter Island near New York, American author Kurt Vonnegut tells his writer friend, Joseph Heller, that their host, a hedge fund manager, had made more money in a single day than Heller had earned from his wildly popular novel Catch-22 over its whole history.

And Joe said, "I've got something he can never have." And Kurt said, "What on earth could that be, Joe?" And Joe said, "The knowledge that I've got enough."

Enough!

Since then the fortunes of the richest billionaires have become so inconceivably large that journalists, activists, and artists are trying to come up with ways to visualise them so as to make them comprehensible.

Forbes Magazine lists 600 individuals with personal wealth from \$5B to \$440B US.

That gap has dramatically widened.

Across generations people have conceived political and social solutions to attempt to make a better and fairer world for all. Recently the concept of Limitarianism has emerged, at it's core it argues that:

at some point of earning or accumulating, one has too much.

no-one should have more than a certain upper limit of some goods or resources that are scarce and valuable.

The most widely examined of those goods is money—either in the form of income or in the form of wealth.

But limitarianism is also applicable to other valuable scarce goods, such as the services that ecosystems give to human beings, or the capacity of the atmosphere to absorb greenhouse gases.

It will not surprise you to know that there are those who argue against such ideas.

Equally unsurprising is that no matter how good, or otherwise, such a concept is it will only have limited impact.

The reality is that the practice of justice and equity is most effectively expressed at an individual level.

Today's reading from Luke Chapter 4 declares that the words of Isaiah are no longer a prophecy or a promise to be fulfilled in the future, this is a prophecy and promise fulfilled in this moment embodied in the person of Jesus.

Luke 4 vs 18 & 19

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

If we are daily striving to be like Jesus, to reflect His light in the world, then His spirit also works within us to fulfil this Scripture.

We meet for worship on what the majority of Australians call Australia Day; since 1938 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around the country have continued to mark 26 January as a ‘Day of Mourning’ and more recently ‘Invasion Day’, or ‘Survival Day’.

Recently some of my friends posted the Australian Flag on FB and expressed their support for Australia Day. The implication is that the flying of our national flag is a true indication of patriotism and national loyalty.

If one were to express an alternate view one would be called woke or un Australian.

The struggle for Justice continues.

In our Newsletter there will be a link to a Parliamentary article giving a brief history of the Indigenous struggle for justice over generations.

The Founder of The Salvation Army, William Booth, described the fight for justice in the following way:

Justice

26th January 2025

"While Women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while children go hungry, as they do now I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight, I'll fight to the very end!"

Justice and compassion are continuing themes in Scripture.

Micah 6 vs 8 Amplified

He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
Except to be just, and to love [and to diligently practice]
kindness (compassion),
And to walk humbly with your God [setting aside any
overblown sense of importance or self-righteousness]

It is central to our understanding of living a Christian life that Jesus himself, when addressing the members of the synagogue, focuses entirely on serving others and bringing justice and compassion to the world around them.

I would guess that last Sunday none of us had heard of Bishop Mariann Budde, an Episcopalian priest who has created controversy in the United States by preaching to the new President at the Inaugural Prayer Service.

During her 15-minute sermon on Tuesday, Budde addressed Trump directly, by citing his belief about being saved by God from assassination and said: "In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now."

Budde's plea mentioned "gay, lesbian and transgender children in Democratic, Republican, and Independent families," across the country "who fear for their lives."

The bishop also spoke up for immigrant workers, including those who may not "have the proper documentation," saying the vast majority of them are "not criminals" but rather "good neighbours."

The reaction from a self proclaimed religious nation has been outrage and demands for an apology.

Justice isn't a past or peripheral thing, it's a current struggle that is being opposed by the strong and powerful.

Matthew 7 vs 12

So then in everything treat others the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the essence of the Law and the writing of the Prophets.

This verse allows for the everyday civility of social interaction, be polite, set an example; or a robust response challenging and fighting those ideas and institutions that oppress.

Let me offer some ideas from the Nehemiah 8 reading.

The book of Nehemiah tells the story of Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. When the rebuilding is completed, the people gather in the square.

The first verse says that the people gathered together as one man (person). This indicates a unity of spirit and purpose, no division, no alternate motives.

They asked Ezra to bring out the Law of Moses - in unity they sought wisdom.

Is it too much of a stretch to align these ideas with the verses from I Corinthians (12 vs 25/26)?

²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

A quote from a book called The Justice Project: (1)

But how on earth can a human being be fruitful without clean water, without good food, without health and safety, without a chance to live to adulthood?

God made the earth abundantly fruitful, with more than enough resources give every child a chance ... if humanity exercises stewardship God's gifts, as does the God who "makes his sun rise on the veil and on the good, and sends the rain on the righteous and unrighteous." Matt 5.45

That abundance is God's intent for creation and all people.

Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life

(1) The Justice Project p 32. Baker Books (USA) 2009