

Friday 5th October 2018. Service for the Judiciary.

Text: Micah 4:8 Galatians 5:22 & 6:9-10a

INTRODUCTION

“Act justly, love mercy .. Do not grow weary in doing good.

. for we will reap a harvest if we do not give up... Let us do good to all people”

It was the second day of my summer holiday, sitting by the river in York, enjoying a pint of local ale, on one of the many glorious days we have enjoyed this year...

... I am starting to relax, contentedly sitting on my own, doing nothing, gazing at the river

- There is a chap also on his own at the next table

.. Of course, I am not going to speak to him,

... I’m on holiday, I spend all year making “polite conversation”,

and anyway I’m a southerner .. I don’t talk to strangers ...

This chap, a local man, did not have any such inhibitions

.. I won’t attempt the accent but if you pitch it somewhere around a “Geoffrey Boycott” cum “Compo”, you’ll get it about right..

.. he catches my eye and says “Up here on holiday are you ?”

.. I couldn’t deny it

Then, my new acquaintance goes straight for the question I dread – especially on holiday. He asks “What do you do ?”

... I want to say something like “Oh I’m a writer and a public speaker.. I do some counselling and community work” .. but I am not brave enough, so I admit, “I am a vicar”

My new friend is not phased by this response, as many people are ... instead he is in with his next question, “Where are you from ?” ... I tell him... Westcott in Surrey...

Now my fast-becoming best buddy, is truly animated:

“Oh Surrey” he says, “I’ve just come back from there. Different world”, he says .

. And he goes on to complain about the lack of decent jobs locally and what he sees as being the “Surrey mindset” ... “It’s not that they have a sense of entitlement down there” he said, “But they don’t have any sense ..”

... An outsiders view... Unfair, of course

... Unfair in seeing Surrey as being uniformly wealthy, when we know about the poverty and struggles that exist

... Unfair, too, in suggesting we do not have any sense beyond our Surrey bubble

But, nonetheless, I felt challenged by this short conversation and my new friend’s perception

...

... Because, of course, we must have eyes to see, ears to hear,

... We must be moved by other people and other places .. we must have sense

I am sure that this sense is here in the professional vocations and volunteering, we celebrate today

... It is, of course, the role of the High Sheriff today, to be moved, to have “eyes to see and ears to hear” .. to have sense

And it is the Church’s role, and actually why I am a vicar

.. to care, ... to aim, even with repeated failure, “to not grow weary of doing good”

... For the Christian worships a God, who in the words of the prophet Micah that we heard in the first reading calls us, demands us, to “act justly and love mercy”

... We worship a God who promises as we serve Him, there will be “fruit” pour out of “love, joy, peace, patience, and goodness”

.. A God who recognises that we get tired, .. tired of caring, tired of having sense

... A God who well knows we often prefer to live in our own bubble but, in the words of St Paul encourages us:

“Let us not grow weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity let us do good to all people”

And all of this sense and impetus, all of this hope, for me, for the Christian, of course comes from the enigmatic, utterly beguiling person of Jesus Christ

.... Believing in Him that there is Good News, strength and hope for all For poor and for rich ...

... Him whose life and teaching has enriched our society for millennia.

HAVING EYES TO SEE,

So, let us have eyes to see, ears to hear, let us have sense. We know that there are many needs and concerns across our country and in our county. Just some issues:-

- We know that there 4 million people in Britain suffering from depression, and further issues of mental health...
- Loneliness, another growing social problem. In her book, “Radical” Hilary Cottam writes, “We are suffering from an epidemic of loneliness. More than a million people describe themselves as lonely.”....
- Family breakdown – 45% of teenagers do not live with both parents. In addition to the huge social cost, the financial burden of this to the taxpayer is estimated to be £48 billion a year....
- There is the recently reported high rates of self-harming amongst young people in this country, and repeated surveys that show high levels of unhappiness amongst children and young people in the UK, compared with other countries....
- In education, we hear that the number of children being expelled from school in England is rising, after falling for years....

- Issues of stagnant real incomes, inequalities and poverty in this country.

... In 2016 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation added a new category to its classification of income groups

– the category of destitution, identifying that in Britain today, 1.25 million people including three hundred thousand children are struggling to eat, keep warm and clean and find a bed for the night....

- We have too the challenge of the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War and surely cannot fail to note that in 2015 Germany took in 890,000 refugees, while Britain has offered just 20,000 places over 5 years.

... Many issues if we care to have sense, to see and hear..

RESPONDING TO THE ISSUES

Of course, then, we surely try to so do

- In the fabric of our society we have to recognise the upholding of the Law is inextricably entangled with such issues...

In a speech in the House of Lords earlier this year John Bird, the founder of the “Big Issue” suggested “that instead of simply looking at criminals as wrongdoers, we see them as an educational failure”

pointing out the links with exclusion and failure at School generally, with poverty and crime.

We give thanks for all have sense, who uphold justice **and** mercy, engaging with the issues that confront us..

- In our local situations, we see so much of how we try to respond to the issues around us....

... In Churches, other faith groups and volunteering generally, we try to be alongside the mentally ill, the depressed, and the lonely,

... we run cafes and toddler groups and youth groups

We run food banks in response to chronic poverty and we try to help with debt counselling and, indeed debt relief

- *In my own small village of Westcott we try to do these things;*

- *We try to aim that no-one need be lonely or isolated*

.... *We try to intervene if anyone is facing eviction due to arrears*

- *at least two households are still in their homes*

because we chose to have sense to see and hear and to help

Even in Westcott we have had three young people living for a short time in a caravan on the Vicarage drive after they had spent 6 months living rough on Box Hill,

One of them recently released from prison,

all three of them recently moved out of care.

In myriads of ways we can give thanks for all the religious and non-religious practise that makes a difference in local situations

- In education we give thanks for all the dedicated work that goes on, that recognises the links with learning and social issues.
... We can give thanks that Jim Glover is continuing the High Sheriff's focus on Inclusion

In Law & Order, in local religious practice and volunteering, in education, and more, we give thanks that we do have sense, and we can thank God that difference is made.

THE CHRISTIAN VALUES THAT HAVE SHAPED OUR NATION

So much to give thanks for, in caring, knowing that a harvest is reaped if we do not give up and yet, as we have seen there are still so many challenges...

..In his recent book "Reimagining Britain", our Archbishop Justin Welby celebrates that, in his words, "Christianity is the foundation and inspiration of most of our ethics, values and actions"

... with Love being the base of all, where Love means, as used by the Apostle John, the "active pursuit of the well-being of others, without seeking return"

- Love that, for the Christian is embodied and exemplified in the person of Jesus Christ..

Archbishop Justin calls for a fresh re-imagining of what Britain could be like, based on Christian values, and especially the outworking of such Love.

We will surely find that there is blessing if we live in such a way. The poor will be blessed

... whether they are poor in income, life opportunities, social relationships or simply in spirit

But the rich, all, will be blessed too

- In the book I quoted earlier, "Radical" by the award-winning "social designer", Hilary Cottam, she describes her work in developing what she calls "social capability"

– supporting people who are in need to create their own change.

... She gives numerous examples of the benefits to those individuals as this happens, but also the benefits to others around, to the whole of society

... Just one example: "Ella", a single mum with a chaotic life; delinquent children and the sort of family you would not want to be neighbours with

- *"Ella" herself described her family life as "hell" .. 73 professionals had been involved with Ella, at a cost of £250000 a year.*

... By supporting Ella and her family to create their own change, transformation was achieved – Ella's children stayed in school and she got job she had dreamed of – working in an office..

And Hilary Cottam also points out the direct benefits of getting involved in supporting others

- She highlights that long-term studies show that wealth, career, even health and relationships are not the key to how you fare over your life-time.

....the studies show that if you want a good life “Inner characteristics”/emotions are the key

... emotions such as joy, love, hope, forgiveness, faith

- Characteristics/emotions that, of course develop as we engage with people and situations

...Her list of characteristics/emotions is very similar to the “fruits of the Spirit” St Paul describes in the Galatians reading we heard “love, joy, peace, patience, and goodness”

- *As we engage with others, we are blessed in finding the presence of God*

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there will always be a need for rest and refreshment, for taking holidays, sitting at a pub by the river, doing nothing .. even trying to avoid being drawn into a conversation

... we all grow weary

But we cannot grow weary of “doing good”, we cannot give in to temptation to live in our own bubble – Surrey or otherwise

- There is too much need, there is too much good that you are doing, and we can all do more of together

... And in being committed to such good, we actually find Truth and Life for ourselves

We find the God of Love and we see the outpouring of His fruits of “love, joy, peace, patience, and goodness” for others and for ourselves

... we reap a harvest for others and for ourselves if we do not give up.

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