

In daily life - towards imitation

If you haven't already done so, download and read the Church of England's pre-election letter to Christians, "Who is My Neighbour?", and consider what it means to be a political Christian. You can find it at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2170230/whoismyneighbour-pages.pdf> or a summary at <http://churchinparliament.org/2015/03/30/summary-who-is-my-neighbour-house-of-bishops-letter-for-the-general-election/>

STUDY QUESTIONS – EXPLORING THE INFORMATION

Isaiah 2:1-4. What does this picture of the Kingdom of God say to you? How is justice depicted within it?

Isaiah 11:6ff. What do you make of these images of wild animals lying down alongside domesticated animals? What is God trying to tell us through this imagery?

Exodus 18:13-27. What does this exchange between Moses and Jethro tell us about the nature of justice?

Matthew 6.33. What does Jesus mean when he tells us to "seek first the Kingdom of God, so that all things will be given to you"?

Living it out

What political party do you vote for? Does that party have the pursuit of justice at the heart of its policies? What can you do to promote the cause of justice within that party – or within the local or regional government which directs your community?

Prayer suggestion:

Think about the two definitions of justice – "retributive justice" and "redemptive justice". Pray that God would show you which situations need the former, and which need the latter. That you would have the gift of discernment in knowing when to condemn, and when to reconcile. And above all, that you would be able in all things to seek God's Kingdom, so that all else will be revealed to you.

Joining a group and other resources:

We encourage everyone to join a group if possible. We have daytime or evening groups and youth cells. If you would like to know more, please visit our website, or contact Guy on 01423 504160. There are many great resources to help you pray and enjoy the Scriptures on a daily basis.

www.pray-as-you-go.org A 12 minute guided prayer and meditation to listen to.

<https://www.wordlive.org> Many excellent daily reading approaches, available as an app.

<http://www.sacredspace.ie/> A short guided prayer and meditation to read.

Or download the app from Soul Survivor, with short daily videos: <http://bible.soulsurvivor.com/>

INSPIRE

Everywhere...in everything



Weekly discipleship and spiritual growth resources for all ages, groups and individuals. Follow up material on Sunday's teaching for groups and individuals.

Week beginning: 13th September 2015.

GROWING AT HOME

Three suggested discipleship activities suitable for all ages to help you grow, based on up - to God; In - to each other; Out - to mission

Ears: What have you heard?

Has there been a news story that you have heard this week that made you worried or sad? When you sit down to eat a meal together this week and thank God for your home and food, ask God to work in that situation or story to bring peace and healing.

Eyes: Photo blessing prayers

Stick on your fridge / noticeboard a photo of a friend or relative. Whenever you look at the picture, ask God to remind them of his love for them, and give them a vision of God's purposes.

Hands: Prayer clock

Draw a big circle (round a plate) on a piece of card, and then cut out a separate clock hand / arrow, fixed to the centre with a split pin. Instead of clock numbers, write things around the edge to prompt you to pray e.g. Say thank you / sorry / please / help, or draw pictures of people or things you can pray about. Be creative! Turn the clock's hand each day to a new place and pray.

DAILY READINGS AND PRAYERS.

These daily readings are the same as the ones used in church every morning from 9 – 9.30. Feel free to join us, or use them at home. Read one or both of the readings asking yourself, “What is God saying to me, personally?” and, “How can I respond today?” If you are pressed for time there is a focus verse from the passages. Try reading the verse slowly, three or four times, allowing God to shape your heart and mind through His word. You can use these together with our daily prayer diary from the monthly newsheet.

Monday 14th September. Holy Cross

Readings: Psalm 22, John 3: 13-17. Focus verse: 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Tuesday 15th September.

Readings: Psalm 32, Mark 11: 12-26. Focus verse: 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.’

Wednesday 16th September

Readings: Psalm 34, Mark 11: 27-end. Focus verse: 31 They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” he will ask, “Then why didn’t you believe him?” 32 But if we say, “Of human origin” . . .’ (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

Thursday 17th September

Readings: Psalm 37, Mark 12: 1-12. Focus verse: 6 ‘He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, “They will respect my son.” 7 ‘But the tenants said to one another, “This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.” 8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

Friday 18th September.

Readings: Psalm 31, Mark 12: 13-17. Focus verse: 17 Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.’ And they were amazed at him.

Saturday 19th September.

Readings: Psalm 41, Mark 12: 18-27. Focus verse: 24 Jesus replied, ‘Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

SUNDAY’S TEACHING: RESOURCES FOR GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS.

First thoughts:

When have you needed justice?

This week’s teaching in a nutshell:

Luke 18: 1-14: The call for justice – church and politics

What is justice within the Biblical context? Is it easily defined? The King James Bible translation of this passage in Luke’s Gospel talks of the old woman calling on the judge to “avenge” her against her adversary – and the use of this verb creates a sense of a fundamental inequality that needs to be addressed, forcefully and decisively; the need to defend little old ladies against those who would oppress them; to stand up for the rights of the poor and the defenceless; to avenge them against those who exploit them; and to punish the wicked for their crimes.

It’s tempting to subscribe wholeheartedly to this form of justice, not only because it gives us a cause to fight for, but also because it gives us a sense of our own importance in delivering God’s purpose. We can envisage ourselves as white knights riding to the rescue of the downtrodden, freeing them from their oppressors under the flag of justice and in the name of God.

The problem with this approach is that it separates the world into three constituencies:

- The oppressed, the victims, the poor and defenceless, the little people who must be saved
- Ourselves, the good guys, the superheroes who are responsible for meting out justice
- And the oppressors, the bad guys, the ones who need sorting out and punishing

This definition of justice is therefore one that sifts and separates, which draws a line between the good guys – namely, ourselves and the oppressed – and the bad guys who are doing the oppressing. Justice which says to the bad guys, you’ve done wrong, and you’re not welcome here. This kind of “retributive justice” does feature in the Bible, for those who purposefully and consistently pursue evil in this world – but there’s an alternative reading of the passage from Luke’s Gospel. The verb that King James translated as “avenge” can also (and often does) mean simply to settle a legal dispute. And the noun that is translated as “adversary”, i.e., the one who is oppressing the old woman), can also (and often does) mean simply the other party in a legal dispute.

So justice in this story might not actually be about righting wrongs, but simply about reaching a settlement between two rival claimants. It could be anything: he’s claiming a right of way across land that she says is hers; he keeps parking his cart outside her front gate, blocking her way; his goat has eaten her prize dahlias; and so on and so forth. Because justice in the Bible is as much about the magistrate’s court and the small claims court as it is the drama and glamour of the High Court.

The Bible tells us that God’s Kingdom is a place where all are loved by God, all are equal, where all live in peace with one another, where all have enough, where none are striving to get one over their neighbour for the sake of a social or material gain. The emphasis is on the word “all”: no one is excluded, because God’s love and mercy extends to all His people, as long as they recognise Him and who He is. In many of the passages in the Bible that talk about the nature of the Kingdom of God, justice is not a process of retribution but one of settlement, of equalisation between opposites, which ultimately puts an end to dispute and conflict and leads to peace. It’s a process of reconciliation, of unification and not division, of rehabilitation and inclusion rather than demonisation and exclusion. This is “redemptive justice”, and it’s as much a part of God’s Kingdom as is “retributive justice”. Whatever politics we pursue, we should remember this and maintain it as one of our founding principles.