

What Next?

The Five Marks of Mission

4th Mark - Transform - given on the 8th November by Duncan White

Remembrance Sunday and the Third before Advent

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

In this last of the specific addresses on the 5 Marks of Mission I am aware that there are some who feel a little confused as to how it relates to them. Well let me put forward my understanding and maybe this will help, hopefully it will at least not make it any confusion worse.

WHAT NEXT relates to the fact that here at St Michael's there has been a lengthy and sustained effort primarily aimed at the physical fabric of the church and there is a feeling that we need to have some kind of plan as to what we do next. Let us remember that our church exists primarily for the benefit of non-members and our physical buildings are not the church but do provide a support centre for our work and the primary mark of mission, of "proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom" – this is something that is the clear duty of every Christian. Now each of the addresses has looked at what that may mean in various ways, using the 5 marks of mission as pointers and what we might need to consider in thinking and praying about any suggestion that we may offer at our planned workshop on 28th November. Please remember, that in this context, there are no wrong ideas, only ideas!

To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation – a simple and straightforward statement OR is it.

Let's look at the second part first. Challenge violence of every kind – how appropriate for Remembrance Sunday or, depending on your viewpoint, - how inappropriate!! Unfortunately without the violence of the 2nd World War (and other subsequent conflicts) it is unlikely that we would have the freedoms that we enjoy today. It is also worth reflecting on how much violence was used in the Old Testament, only for the beneficiaries of that violence to soon forget the responsibilities that came with those benefits.

At least the third part is more straightforward, surely we can all agree on the pursuit of peace and reconciliation, can't we??

These second and third parts would each require their own address to be dealt with to any satisfactory level and each has the potential to provide material for full blown debates, so discretion being the better part of valour I am NOT going to take these any further than the comments I have already given you. Please take these comments away and reflect upon them, printed and e-copies of this address will be available following next Wednesday's Eucharist.

This just leaves me with "transforming unjust structures of society"; society, that is surely us and the structure is how lead our communal lives. It follows from this that the way we lead our communal lives is not right or we would not need to transform them, would we? Put it another way we need to make sure that there is "Social Justice" - surely that's straightforward as well, isn't it? Before you think about coming to a conclusion on that it may help if we define what we could mean by Social Justice – there are of course quite a few opinions on this but these two offer what may be considered as reasonable summations.

Social Justice is based on the concepts of human rights and equality, and can be defined as "the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people at every level of society".

Social Justice - The fair and proper administration of laws conforming to the natural law that all persons, irrespective of ethnic origin, gender, possessions, race, religion, etc., are to be treated equally and without prejudice.

The first of these definitions, it seems to me, is missing a vital element but it is at least implicit in the second definition, any thoughts as to what may be missing? I think that the missing part is Human Responsibilities, the second definition is surely a statement about fulfilling ones Human Responsibilities. Unfortunately so much of our PC society seems to focus on Human Rights to the exclusion of Human Responsibilities.

The 2 Bible Readings that we have heard both speak to us about Social Justice and the way in which this relates to Human Responsibilities.

Paul is very upfront in his 2nd letter to the Thessalonians and is apparently rather harsh, harsh that is seen from our modern perspective, he says "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work." It would be reasonable to assume that here he is talking about the Christian community in Thessalonica and some members who whilst perfectly capable of working and supporting themselves are not doing so and living off the work of others. He goes on to say "Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right." And here he is recognising it is can be easy to slip back into bad habits.

Our Gospel message is clear and simple, having once repented we must change our lives and do only those things which are proper and not rob and cheat. In other words we need only obey the commandments that we have already been given but and this the big BUT we must obey them fully and in keeping with the spirit of their intent and not just the letter.

Harking back to my reference to the Old Testament the failure to keep the commandments is surely what led to the coming of Jesus!? I digress, John is reminding the crowd, the tax collectors, the soldiers and all us of our Human Responsibilities. We may well claim them as Christian Responsibilities but surely these are basic Human Responsibilities.

Two brief gospel passages and final thoughts to leave you with. In John 18:36 Jesus said when he appeared before Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world." If so, "my servants would fight for me".

Going back to our main gospel reading I think it is clear that John was stating there, that Jesus' kingdom was not of the world in which he lived: a world of militarism, male domination, unjust oppressive taxation, inequality of wealth, slavery, rejection of lepers and Samaritans - all of it upheld by violence. Does that world sound familiar, even today??

And in John 14:6 Jesus also said: "I am the way, the truth and the life".

His way was not of that world or our world, but a way and life of non-violence, equality (including slaves and women), a just distribution of resources, acceptance of the marginalized, and love of ones neighbour and even ones enemies. His "good news for the poor" was that the unjust social structures that made them poor would be changed. Changed by us through the fulfilling of our Christian/Human Responsibilities.

Jesus is calling us to make his way a reality in the world in which we live. Amen.