



Lord have mercy

"The great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, duty, mercy, hope." Winston Churchill

I was recently issued with a parking ticket by the Forestry Commission. Or rather I wasn't! I parked illegally in a car park which they had recently taken over and, unbeknown to me they had introduced a new parking charge. It seems that at some point in the day I was issued with a ticket which subsequently got lost before I returned to my vehicle. I was therefore surprised when a few months later I received a letter from them with a notification of the fine due. "Unjust", I thought. Unfair!

Mercy and justice are key themes in scripture that it is hard to ignore. However, I often find myself wondering if I have the right perspective on these. When I think of the Good Samaritan, I find myself thinking that he was considered a neighbour because he showed kindness. Jesus clearly uses the word "Mercy" (Luke 10).

When I think of Isaiah's prophesied Messiah, I think about the new life that he will bring. Isaiah clearly talks about the one who will 'bring justice to the nations' (Isaiah 42:3). And what

about that crucial moment in salvation history: the death and resurrection of Jesus? Do I think in terms of a loving Father's sacrifice and love, or in terms of a just God who "will not falter until he establishes justice on the earth" (Isaiah 42:4)?

But perhaps such polarised thinking is not helpful. Perhaps justice, mercy, forgiveness, kindness, suffering, humility and hope are all inter-related terms. Perhaps they are terms that give us an indication of the means by which we experience God's justice, a justice that is beyond simply punishment, a justice that lovingly brings about change.

Jesus "humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him" (Jorgen Moltmann). We, who once were godless, experience communion with God through the ultimate act of love, the ultimate act of mercy, the ultimate act of justice. These are not exclusive; they are expressions of the kindness of God. He is willing to travel through the cross without faltering to

offer us new resurrection life that is eternally changed.

And our response as those who experience a justice that changes us? Our faith calls us to meet Jesus in prison (Matthew 25) and commends those who remember prisoners (Hebrews 11) with empathy. Our response to God's justice therefore is surely to echo Him in our failure to rest until we too show justice that brings about change. Let us be those who demonstrate such justice; a justice that does not ignore the wrong, but deals with it in a way that changes lives – eternally.

I appealed to the Forestry Commission for mercy. I knew that I was wrong, ignorance did not lessen that fact; however with a refreshing sense of justice they agreed to halve my fine. Hopefully I am now changed ... I have received mercy that will make me park more carefully ... for ever?

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