



The Church's prayer for Sunday 4th July

Transform

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change,
The courage to change the things we can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 4th July

A New Testament reading from Ephesians 6:10-17

The Whole Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

A Gospel reading from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4:16-21

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

A reflection from Sue Nelms, member of the Lordsbridge Team Chapter

Mark of Mission 4 – To Transform Unjust Structures of Society

Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. Amen. Our theme this morning is the Anglican Communion's Fourth Mark of Mission – transforming unjust structures of society and we have had two wonderful readings to help us consider this.

I had what is called a sheltered childhood. It was wonderful – we lived in the middle of nowhere and I had so much freedom to go out on my bike and explore, a bit like my very own Famous Five adventure, but without the other 4. Life was easy and I wouldn't have recognized an unjust structure of society if it had jumped up and bitten me on the leg! And if it did exist, it certainly didn't happen in the lovely countryside that I lived in but rather in far flung parts of the world that I knew nothing about.

Life is very different today. In 1985, events such as Live Aid and groups like Band Aid drew our attention to the changes in climate leading to famines that can strike parts of the world, causing mass starvation and migration in places like Eritrea, as shown by reporter Michael Burke. After the initial horror, we may have ended up sharing the sentiment of the line in Band Aid's "Do they know it's Christmas" song that says "Tonight, thank God it's them instead of you." Harsh, but probably true for many. More recently, we have seen refugee crises, people sailing across dangerous waters in totally unsuitable dinghies in search of safety and not always successfully, children starving in war zones and again, after the initial shock, I wonder how much of an impact such events really made on us.

But then, suddenly we encountered the pandemic and everything shut down, giving some of us time, lots of time even, to think about things. We heard the story of George Floyd, whose death became the catalyst for the 'Black Lives Matter'

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



movement, bringing to the attention of white people across the world the constant fear and injustice that so many people of colour live with.

We heard of the murder of Sarah Everard and this time people were made aware of the dangers that so many women face when they go out of their homes, even women who take all of the right steps to try and protect themselves as Sarah did.

We started to think about the status and treatment of women in general, puzzling that we still find it something to comment on when a woman becomes 'the first' to achieve something in what was previously considered a male domain.

We discovered that many families in our own country were struggling to survive, with thousands of children going hungry as parents suddenly had no work and therefore no income. More recently we have heard of the terrible treatment of children living with haemophilia, Down's syndrome or other medical conditions and that of unmarried teenage mothers.

We see discrimination against so many people on grounds of race, age, religion or belief, sex and disability to name a few and I suspect that many of us wonder what on earth we can do about such huge issues, perhaps reaching the conclusion that we are so little and the problem is so big so we do nothing.

So how do today's readings speak to this situation?

In Luke's gospel we have that mind blowing scene of Jesus standing up to read from one of the sacred scrolls in the synagogue and reading out these words:-

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And then he sits down, telling them that this prophecy had just been fulfilled in their presence.

Imagine being there that day and feeling the impact of that. And for Jesus it was not an empty statement, because for the rest of his life on earth that is exactly what he did do, and it was uncomfortable viewing for those in authority, who neglected to help and support the very people that God wanted them to because it was so much easier to keep them out of sight, out of mind.

But Jesus did exactly what he had been commissioned to do. He encouraged his followers to look after widows and those most in need. He fed those who were hungry. He reached out to the people on the margins of society who were forced to

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



live outside Jewish social norms, people like the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years and was therefore ritually unclean, the beggars who sat outside the temple, people living with leprosy, gentiles. He encouraged us to take notice of children, to become open-minded and as eager to learn as they are. He told us to look outside of our normal society and reach out to the people we find there.

That work didn't stop when Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead either. In John chapter 20 verse 21, in the locked room where they were hiding away after the resurrection, Jesus came to and said to the disciples "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you" thereby handing over the charge to the people who had accepted his words and God's love, and as that commission passed down through the generations, finally it has arrived at us.

It can be scary standing up against the unjust structures of society, but the good news in our second reading this morning is that we are not on our own, totally unprepared and unsupported in this work.

In his letter to the Ephesians, part of which we heard this morning, the apostle Paul, who was never backward at sharing the gospel, encouraged everyone by telling them how God is with us when we stand up for right. You see we are not just dealing with issues of right and wrong or good and bad people. Rather, as Paul points out, we are called to stand up against the spiritual forces of evil and it is these forces which thrive on the misery caused by unjust societies.

To stand up against these actions, we are given God's total support and the tools on our side - truth, righteousness, desire to proclaim the gospel of peace, faith, salvation and the word of God - all described in our reading today as the armour of God. A suit of armour is useless if you leave it on the floor though; it can provide no protection if we don't put it on and use it. In chapter 8 of John's gospel, Jesus said 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' What people living under the oppression of unjust structures of society need is to hear the truth. If they never hear the truth they can never be free. If we do not show them any form of righteousness, they will never be free. If we never proclaim the gospel of peace, the word of God, they will never be free.

This morning's mark of mission, that of transforming unjust structures of society brings together some of the other marks that we have looked at during this series. Safeguarding creation increasingly involves transforming unjust structures as we realise that our actions impact on the lives of people completely unrelated to us in a

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM OF CHURCHES



far-off country. Responding to human need often involves challenging unjust structures. Nurturing new believers may free them from restrictive practices and proclaiming the gospel will set them free.

We may be scared off by the phrase 'Marks of Mission' thinking 'I don't do mission' or similar. Well Jesus himself told us how to do things. When asked which of the commandments in the law was greatest, He replied "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Matt 22.36-39).

Such love includes telling, teaching, tending, treasuring and transforming and my prayer this morning is that we will all be equipped to reach out and love our neighbour as ourself.

Amen