



Psalm 82, Luke 4:16-30

What was it all about? 10 months of silence, of hard work, of prayer, of listening, of having to deal with people who are incredibly different to you and that you might not have chosen to spend 10 months of your life with, of demand in retreat to encounter yourself (often the most difficult person to meet).

What is all about? Where does it leave us? Does it make you better people? I hope so, but that is really not what it is all about. Does it teach you to get on better with other people and love them as yourself? I hope so, and I hope that being part of this extraordinary community, which is so much more than we ever dreamt, will live with you forever. But that is not what it is all about. Does it deepen your faith and knowledge of Jesus? I hope and pray that it has! And that is beginning to approach what it is all about but even that is not the full picture...

Psalm 82 is described by one commentator as the key Psalm on justice and divine authority. It is short – (for those of you who have spent the year saying psalms, that is probably a relief!) – and it is to the point. The scene is the divine court, where all the Gods are arrayed. Yet it is Yahweh, the God of Israel, who takes his place in the seat of Justice in the divine council. He is the One who sets the standard for what is to be said.

Imagine a council where you have sat down and you think you're a participant and suddenly you realise that someone of infinitely greater authority is among you, and they stand to give judgement and the judgement is against you. That is the scene that we are given in this Psalm.

All the other gods are condemned for one cardinal sin – that they have not done justice.

In this Psalm, we are told that justice is embedded in creation, it is part of the very foundation of God's creation. And so when justice is not done, the foundations of the Earth are shaken.

They shake.

How they must have shaken in the last few years, as throughout history! How they must continue to shake.

How they must shake when toddlers are separated from their parents and put in cages. How they must shake when ISIS kill people for their faith. How they must shake when the poor are neglected, the weak are marginalised, brides are taken, money is stolen, judgement is sold, elections are rigged, opponents are tortured, and all the elements of the Common Good are put aside in return for special interest and selfish ambition.

All around the world, justice is neglected. In all the countries from which the Community comes there are elements of justice neglected and denied. In so many places, in so many ways.

We recognise what is said in the Psalm. This is why we say the Psalms, month in month out, the whole Psalter. They speak to us today. And Psalm 82 speaks today to us of the gods of today. Those gods who are condemned. The gods of money and power and sex and trafficking and torture and injustice. And we recognise as the Psalm ends that the cost of injustice is destruction.

Let that be what we need to know in those countries represented here today, that the cost of injustice is destruction.

But the reading from Luke gives a different impression. Here once more is an assembly – it's in a Synagogue – a hot, crowded, small building, in Palestine. And again there is the surprise entry of a powerful person, the most powerful person who was and is and is to come. And here he is cloaked by the invisibility of humanity. Jesus stands up and is seen, not as God, not as the supreme authority of all creation, but as the son of Joseph and Mary (although some people in that congregation will have had their doubts about Joseph) and as the carpenter and the carpenter's apprentice. The figure stepping forward is not a figure whose power and authority is undoubted but whose power and authority is not even begun to be believed.

Yet judgement is given. It is given in different ways but the same judgement and with the same authority.

He claims to be the one who will do justice when others will not, who will bring in the year of the Lord's favour, when all hope of the Lord's favour is extinguished.

And the result is that his hearers seek to kill him, for he says that those who do not listen to him will find that he goes to others. And he calls to mind the Old Testament. And God reached out beyond Israel to the widow of Zarephath, and to Naaman the Syrian.

How does this relate to my opening question of what has this year been about?

At its heart, it is this. My hope and my prayer for each member of the Community is that you have grown so close to the One who made this proclamation, that His call becomes your call and His cause your cause.

Secondly, that that hope of what you will be and do, in however long you have on this planet, is fulfilled not because you heard the call and identified with the cause in a vacuum, in a utopia of individual possibility, but because you heard that call and you identified with that cause amidst the intricacies and complexities of living together, and doing the washing up, and irritating each other by repeating the same stories, of rubbing up with different cultures and understandings, and different churches and customs, and different styles of worship and with different life experiences that give different hopes.

It is because of that, that this identification with this cause, is not based in something 'up there', 'out there', but is based in the incarnation, in the reality of a lived life with others. Because that is the reality of our lives.

This call to follow the One who brings justice, who is the same as the One in Psalm 82, this call comes in lived out, incarnational form and therefore draws all who have shared in it to a lifetime of seeking justice, of being to the world what Jesus has been to you so that you indeed might be Jesus to the world.

For we are called, each of us, not only to proclaim the call of Christ to discipleship and obedience, to conversion and faith, but prophetically to show what that means, and in this Community of St Anselm, that is what we seek to happen day by day by day.

Of course it is a never-ending journey, struggle and trial. Of course it's full of ups and downs and supreme joys and great sorrows. Of course it is utterly demanding, it demands every inch and scrap of your lives, and we will not see its end until the final justice of the God that we see in Psalm 82 who stops the shaking of the world, because it brings in justice forever.

So what is it all about? It is about being the agents of Jesus Christ, secret agents in some ways, public in others. Caught up with the vision of God for a world in which all need to find salvation in Christ and a world in which the justice that is part of the foundation of creation might be seen in the lived experience of human beings. It is, as Peter says in his first epistle, that we become part of God's holy nation, God's royal priesthood who mediate the coming of that kingdom, that world.

What you, the community, have done for us in this year, as each year, is beyond measure. What you will do in the future is unknown. Yet I am profoundly confident that those who follow Christ will be caught up in the cause of justice, and that final justice which comes with reconciliation with God, and will live out that cause in the reality of love for those who are the victims of injustice. And will live out that cause in proclaiming the good news of Jesus to those who live without the love and light of Christ.

Thank you for this year, thank you for being part of our community. Thank you that you have participated in a way that, God-willing, will continue forever in this community here and around the world.

May God strengthen and bless you as we go from here.

Amen

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