

Pentecost 2: 14<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Matthew 9:35-10.8

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

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We are half way through the year and for a good deal of the last couple of months, during the season of Easter, Pentecost and Trinity, we've been immersed in an extended reflection on the character, or nature of God, revealed in Jesus, and communicated through the Spirit.

We've explored how God, as Trinity, is perfect love. The inner life of God is fundamentally relational. Through our being connected to Jesus, like a branch to a vine, we are incorporated into this life of God, our true identity and our home – our place of 'abiding'. We are being transformed into the likeness of Christ and given a renewed MIND (nous) which is characterised by joy and peace. All this happens as gift – as pure grace. We've also looked at how contemplative prayer, the saying of our Prayer-Word, ma-ra-na-tha, is a profoundly simple way of continually reorienting the attention of our restless ego's back to the God who loves us.

In the festival of Pentecost, a couple of weeks ago, we were reminded how the first disciples were transformed from being **paralysed and anxious** into being **free and bold** – moving out into the world in loving service. The lectionary of bible readings emphasises this theme by calling Sundays, for the rest of the year, Sundays after Pentecost. The Taize community calls this 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the year, the 'Time of Church'. Both of these phrases remind us that Christian Spirituality, Christian witness, Christian life, is always a movement of **relationship**; a movement of **love**; and an outward movement of **service**. This service is not one of anxious striving but of gentle listening and obedience to the movement of the Spirit of God within us and between us.

It is no surprise, therefore, that this reading for this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost is focussed on Jesus calling of 12 disciples. There were more than 12 of course, including women, but Matthew is a Jew and he really likes the number 12 because it has strong echoes of the 12 tribes of Jerusalem.

The naming of these disciples in the early church would have given them a clear authority to teach in the name of Jesus. But for us it reminds us that being called as a disciple – that is, a **follower** or a **student**, of Jesus, is personal. Each one of us is called, named and gifted for a ministry of loving service. Or as I heard someone say recently, 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life'.

Jesus SENDS these disciples out to **do things**. Nowadays we would call this 'action learning' rather than classroom learning, although all of them have had some amount of classroom learning as they have listened to Jesus talk about the Kingdom of God and watched him healing people. So now he sends them out to PREACH that the kingdom of God has drawn near (another way of saying that would be the 'loving activity/power' of God; and HEAL the sick; RAISE the dead, CLEANSE lepers, and EXORCISE demons'. In other words – do so some ancient forms of health care.

Notice, once again, how discipleship IS by its very definition a call to loving service. How each one of us does that will be unique to our gifts and talents.

I've been thinking about this notion of discipleship and service as I've watched the protests this week about Black Lives Matter.

It is understandable why there are cries for justice. As Christians – as people who are responding to the Spirit of Jesus, a question to ask ourselves is what might be our distinctive response might be – a response informed by a Jesus-shaped notion of justice.

One thing that is clear is that a Christian understanding of justice will be shaped by those core elements that I mentioned earlier – relationship, love, joy and peace. Notice how these are proactive and creative acts of the divine imagination.

Noisy protest can be a starting point to make a point to politicians, but things must move on to concrete action. From a Christian perspective, justice is always an act of the prophetic imagination...it is something fundamentally creative.

When people yell, ‘we want justice’, what are people **actually** wanting?

In some cases it may be a cry for punishment (principles of social order; moral balance; deterrence). But I suspect there are a lot of other things being sought, under this umbrella cry for ‘justice’. For example, if I have been hurt by someone, I may need to:

- communicate how I have been affected
- to know that the other person has heard/felt this impact
- understand why something happened (and sometimes, ‘why did this happen to *me*’?)
- receive [be offered] genuine, heart-felt, unconditional apology
- ask for [be offered] redress/restitution (could be material; psychological; social)
- prevent recurrence - to me or anyone else
- have clear agreement on the nature of ongoing relationship if any (reset, renegotiate or end)
- receive community validation, participation and support

These needs may be showing up in the ‘extremes’ of structural injustice and murder, like in the Black Lives Movement, right through to everyday small acts of harm in families, communities and workplaces. Our criminal justice system is not very well set up to meet these kinds of justice needs. Fortunately there are some powerful new (or rather, very old) forms of justice starting to emerge. One is called **Restorative Justice**, which involves group conferences where victims and offenders voluntarily meet together to discuss what has happened, how people have been hurt and how to put things right. We are experimenting with Restorative Justice at UWA at the moment. Another emerging field is called **Justice Reinvestment** which invests in collaboratively designed community development to try to support people so that they don’t end up in the punitive justice system in the first place.

These new movements are fundamentally relational and healing. They are theological visions as much as practical ones. This is the kind of justice which Christians could be advocating for and resourcing. When someone cries, ‘we want justice’, we can hear that people are not just crying for vengeance, an ‘eye for an eye’, but are actually expressing a much deeper set of needs.

Restorative Justice and Justice Reinvestment could be the radically required movement of the Spirit for our times....and examples of the emerging Kingdom of God.