

“Let justice roll down like a river” a sermon preached at the evening service at Knox Church Dunedin by Kerry Enright on 23 July 2017.

There are assertions and counter-assertions about the real situation in our country.

The Salvation Army says this in its State of the Nation:

1. We have failed to put a dent in rates of child poverty over the past decade. A commonly used child poverty measure suggests that 20% of New Zealand’s children (or 212,000 children) live in relative income poverty, while perhaps 8% (or about 85,000 children) face severe material hardship. These numbers are little changed from a decade ago.
2. Our efforts to reduce the prison population have failed and we are planning to expand the already record high prison population by a further 18%.
3. Housing investment and speculation have been allowed to distort the economy, make us still more indebted, and create levels of homelessness unseen in more than a generation.

Amos 5:24 – Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream.

We know about overflowing streams.

One of the reasons people find the Bible hard to read is because large parts of it are composed of codes or laws. No legal code makes easy reading. But the law in the Bible is the expression of the belief that God is a God of righteousness and justice, that God is ultimately concerned that the basic principle for our social and political order rests is the principle of fairness.

The Ten Commandments are an example.

The Call to justice is the heart of the message of the prophets.

Isaiah – I will use justice as a plumb line and righteousness as a plum-bob.
Isaiah 28:17

Micah – What does God require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

Let's look more closely at Amos.

Amos lived in the eighth century. He was called to preach against the corrupt religious, political and social injustices of his day.

It was a time people were so blinded by wealth that they did not know they were on the brink of disaster.

So Amos, with courage and devotion, faithfully preached his unpopular messages to a spiritually decaying nation.

Under the reign of King Jeroboam 2, the northern kingdom of Israel was at its peak, a flourishing nation. Amos spoke of the great wealth of the rich, their pride and self-security, their oppression and exploitation of the poor. In this prosperous and high state of living, who would ever dream of calamity? Israel felt strong and secure, and certainly did not expect ruin and destruction.

Israel thought they could take things into their own hands, that they could make and worship what and how they pleased. They thought that with wealth and power they really didn't need God.

And so he says:

"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream."

What does justice mean here?

Justice is the order God seeks to establish in creation where all people receive the benefits of life with God. Justice is truth in action.

Righteousness is the actions and positive results of a sound relationship within a local community or between God and a person or God and God's people.

Righteousness means unrightness, in the sense of adherence to a norm.

Righteousness in the Bible is rooted in covenants and relationships. It is the fulfilment of the terms of a covenant between God and humanity or between humans in the full range of human relationships.

The Accra Confession includes these words:

“We believe that God has made a covenant with all creation. God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the market place. It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalised are preferential partners, and calls us to put justice for the “least of these” at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant.

We believe that any economy of the household of life, given to us by God’s covenant to sustain life, is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and well-being of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation.”

Amos is saying, let God’s justice and righteousness have their due influence on us.

Let justice be duly administered by magistrates and rulers; let not the current of it be stopped by partiality and bribery. Let it come freely as waters do, in the natural course. Let it run like a mighty stream and not be obstructed.

In other words, let a sense of justice and righteousness be within us as our conscience. They go together. There is no true justice without right living, no right living without true justice.

Therefore, we are called to cry endlessly over the injustice of what people do to each other and in our society. It is the Church’s constant call.

To ensure our society never treats life as cheap; to ensure our society always cherishes life.

The Accra Confession says:

We believe that we are called in the Spirit to account for the hope that is within us through Jesus Christ, and believe that justice shall prevail and peace shall reign.

We join in praise to God, Creator, Redeemer, Spirit, who has brought down the mighty from their thrones, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. (from the Magnificat)

This is the Church's prophetic role. To challenge violence in all its forms, to question everything that seeks to overpower the powerless and the weak.

We do it not for party political reasons but because this is what it means to be a church, to be followers of Jesus Christ, to be people of the God of Jesus Christ.

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growing in courage to live the Jesus way



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