

A LITURGY FOR SOCIAL SERVICES SUNDAY
25 JULY 2010

Gathering of the People

Greeting

Theme: Social Justice

Social Services Sunday celebrates and encourages the Church's work in fulfilling Jesus' ministry – living and dying for the Kingdom of God – God's dream for a world of justice, love and peace. And the dream does not die but lives on in us.

Nothing can exist outside the Divine Circle. All are of equal value within the Divine Embrace. It is we who make the boundaries and mark the distinctions out of our own fears and insecurities.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God enjoins His people to protect the widows and the orphans, the most vulnerable, fragile and marginalised in that particular social, political and religious milieu.

Who are the most vulnerable in the Kingdom of God today – globally, nationally and locally?

How do we stand in solidarity with them against the powers that would oppress, marginalise and discriminate so that we all might live liberated into the fullness of Kingdom Life?

Sentence:

"Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."
(Amos 8:24)

All standing, the presiding priest or minister continues

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life. **Amen**

The minister continues

Grace to you and peace
from God our Creator,
the love at our beginning
and without end,
in our midst and with us.

**God is with us
here we find new life.**

The minister continues

Let us give thanks
for the coming of God's reign of justice and love.

**Jesus Christ is good news for the poor,
release for the captives,
recovery of sight for the blind
and liberty for those who are oppressed.**

A poem follows

Some people

Some people know what it's like to wait
for hip replacements
or the bus in the drizzle
or a job

for the phone to ring
or benefit day
or enough white, sliced bread

for TB
or the rent collector
or glue ear to skip the house

for the next quick fix
slow foxtrot
or fight to stop
or love without bruises

and others don't.

(Anne Powell from *Firesong*)

The congregation may kneel for the penitential prayer

For our incapacity to feel the sufferings of others,
and our tendency to live comfortably with injustice
God forgive us.

For the self-righteousness that denies guilt,
and the self-interest that strangles compassion,
God forgive us.

For those who live their lives in careless unconcern,
who cry "Peace, peace," when there is no peace,
We ask your mercy.

For our failings in community,
our lack of understanding,
We ask you mercy.

For our lack of forgiveness, openness, sensitivity.
God forgive us.

For the times we were too eager to be better than others,
when we are too rushed to care,
when we are too tired to bother,
when we don't really listen,
when we are too quick to act from motives other than love,
God forgive us.

PACSA, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
Jeremiah 6:13-15, 8:11

A Collect of the Day:

May it come soon
to the hungry
to the weeping
to those who thirst for your justice,
to those who have waited centuries
for a truly human life.
Grant us the patience
to smooth the way
on which your Kingdom comes to us.
Grant us hope
that we may not weary
in proclaiming and working for it,
despite so many conflicts,
threats and shortcomings.
Grant us a clear vision
that in the hour of our history
we may see the horizon,
and know the way
on which your Kingdom comes to us.

Nicaragua
Windows into Worship, ed. Ron Ingamells, YMCA, 1989
Matthew 5:3-12, 6:9-13

The Readings

A reading from a homily of John Chrysostom.

Do you want to honour the body of Christ? Then do not despise his nakedness. Do not honour him here in church clothed in silk vestments and then ignore him, naked and frozen in the street. Always remember that he who said, "This is my body", and gave effect to his word, also said, "I was hungry and you gave me no food", and "inasmuch as you did not do it to one of these, you did not do it to me". The body of Christ needs no clothing in the first sense but only the worship of a pure heart. But in the second case it needs clothing and all the care we can lavish upon it.

It is vital, therefore, that we become discerning Christians and learn to honour Christ appropriately in ways of which he approves. When someone is honoured the form of honour bestowed is appropriate to the person receiving it, not the donor. Peter thought he was honouring the Lord when he tried to prevent him from washing his feet, but in reality this was far from the case. In the same way give God the honour he seeks and give your money generously to the poor. God does not need golden cups but he does need golden hearts.

I am not saying that you should not donate golden chalices, but I am insisting that there is no substitute for almsgiving. The Lord will not refuse your gift but he prefers almsgiving; and inevitably so, because in the former case only you, the donor, benefits, whereas in the latter case the poor benefit. The gift of a chalice may be extravagant; the giving of alms is sincere kindness which shows love for our fellow men and women.

What is the point of weighing down Christ's table with golden chalices while he himself is starving? Feed the hungry and then, if you have any money left over, lavish his table. Will you fashion a cup of gold and withhold a cup of water? What use is it to adorn his table with hangings of cloth of gold but refuse Christ a coat for his back? What gain is to be had from such behaviour?

Answer me this question: if you saw someone starving and refused to give them any food but instead spent your money on covering Christ's table with gold, would Christ thank you for it? Would he not rather be furious with you? Or again, if you saw someone in rags and frozen stiff, and then instead of giving them clothing you went and erected golden columns in Christ's honour, would not Christ say that you were mocking and ridiculing him? Imagine that Christ is that tramp, that stranger who comes to you in need of a bed for the night. You turn him away and then start laying carpets on the floor, draping the walls, hanging lamps on silver chains from the capitals of the columns. Meanwhile the tramp is arrested and put in prison, but you never give him a second thought.

Let me repeat, I am not condemning generosity; but I am urging you to care for the poor; indeed, to give the poor priority. No one was ever condemned for not beautifying Christ's house, but those who neglect their neighbour were threatened with hellfire and eternal punishment with devils. Beautify this house if that is what you want to do, but never neglect your brother or sister in need. They are temples of infinitely greater value.

Gospel for the Day: Matthew 25:31-40

The Sermon

The Affirmation of Faith

A CREED OF SOCIAL SERVICE

1. Because all people are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26) and have their beginning and end in God, we believe:

All people have worth and dignity, and are to be treated with respect. We seek to recognise the handiwork of God within each person.

2. Because human beings are a mixture of the dust of the earth and the breath of God (Gen 2:7) we believe:

There should be no devaluing of either the physical or spiritual circumstances of human life, but that people in the totality of their existence must be addressed. What God has joined, let no one separate.

3. Because God has made us to be in relationship with one another and share responsibility for the welfare of all (Gen 4:9, 19) we believe:

We cannot turn away from those in suffering or need, but must in compassion recognise our belonging to the one family of God, and hence our responsibility for others.

4. Because the human community has united together in separation from and in defiance of God (Gen 11: 1-9) we believe:

The corporate structures of human life are flawed, resulting in alienation, injustice and oppression.

5. Because God is loving and just (Deut 32:4), and hears the cry of those who suffer (Ps 12.5), we believe:

God is the protector of the poor and defenceless, and the community of God is witness to this.

6. Because God is merciful and compassionate toward a humanity lost and alienated through sin (Psalm 103: 8-14) we believe:

God has chosen to enter the structures of human existence through Jesus Christ, through him making known the divine love and forgiveness, and through his death and resurrection making a way for people to overcome the alienation of sin and be reconciled in relationship with their Creator. We acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and the unique hope of humanity.

7. Because Christ has called us to follow in his footsteps (Mk 8: 34-36) and bestowed on the community of faith the continuation of his mission (Jn 20:21) we believe:

We have a responsibility to make concrete the love of God within our own history and surrounding, declaring in word and deed the purposes and character of God.

8. Because Jesus has called us to love our neighbours (Mk 22:39) and defined our neighbours as those in need (Lk 10:25-37) we believe:

Obedience to Christ requires of us the practical and self sacrificing love of people in need, whatever their belief or condition.

Adapted from: Creed of Compassion by Mike Riddell/BCL (1996)

Intercessions

CALL TO PRAYER

Come to the living God,
Come to stand alongside the poor.
Come to struggle with those who seek freedom.
Come to resist all that offends God's justice.
Come to the living, disturbing God.
(Jan Berry, England, 1990)

A Litany for the world we live in

Voice 1: For exploiter and exploited;
for persecutor and persecuted;
for criminal and victim,
God of perfect love we pray.

Voice 2: As we pray, remove the fear
that makes us strident and vengeful,
and take away the woolliness of thought
that makes us sentimental.

Voice 1: Give us clear eyes to see the world as it is
and ourselves and all people as we are;
but give us hope to go on believing
in what you intend us all to be.

Voice 2: We pray for children growing up
with no sense of beauty
no feeling for what is good and bad,
no knowledge of you and your love in Christ.

Voice 1: We pray for men and women who have lost faith
and given up hope;
for governments who crush people's spirits
and for governments slow to act
in the cause of justice, freedom and development.

Voice 2: We pray for the whole church and the world,
giving thanks for your goodness,
for your love made known to us in Christ,
for your truth confirmed in his death and resurrection,
for your promises to us and all people,
keeping hope alive

All: Let us go to our work and into our relationships
stimulated by hope,
strengthened by faith,
directed by love,
to play our part in the liberation of all people,
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Algoa Regional Council (Eastern Cape, South Africa)
of the United Congregational Church.
Cry Justice, John de Gruchy, Orbis Books, 1986

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Lord,
who is in us here on earth,
holy is your name
in the hungry
who share their bread and their song.
Your Kingdom come,
which is a generous land
that flows with milk and honey.
Let us do your will,
standing up when all are sitting down,
and raising our voice when all are silent.
You are giving us our daily bread
in the song of the bird and the miracle of the corn.
Forgive us
for keeping silent in the face of injustice,
and for burying our dreams,
for not sharing bread and wine,
love and the land,
among us now.
Don't let us fall into the temptation
of shutting the door through fear;
of resigning ourselves to hunger and injustice;
of taking up the same arms as the enemy.
But deliver us from evil.

Give us the perseverance and the solidarity
to look for love,
even if the path has not yet been trodden,
even if we fall;
so we shall have known your kingdom
which is being built for ever and ever.
Amen.

Central American Lord's Prayer (shortened)
Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4

The Peace

All standing, the presiding priest says

The peace of God be with you all
In God's justice is our peace.

E te whanau/brothers and sisters,
Christ calls us to live in unity.
We seek to live in the Spirit of Christ.

The Preparation of the Gifts

The Great Thanksgiving:

We take bread
symbol of labour, exploited, degraded,
symbol of life.
We will break the bread
because Christ, the source of life,
was broken for the exploited and downtrodden.

We take wine
symbol of blood, spilled in war and conflict,
symbol of new life.
We will drink the wine
because Christ, the peace of the world,
was killed by violence.

Now bread and wine are before us,
the memory of our meals,
our working, our talking;
the story which shapes us,
the grieving and the pain,
the oppressor who lies deep in our own soul;
the seeking and the loving.

And we give thanks
for all that holds us together in our humanity;
that binds us to all who live and have lived,
who have cried and are crying,
who hunger and are thirsty,
who pine for justice,
and who hold out for the time that is coming.

And in this we are bound to Jesus,
who, in the same night that he was betrayed,
took bread and gave you thanks;
he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying:

“Take eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way after supper
he took the cup and gave you thanks;
he gave it to them saying:

“Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this as often as you drink it
in remembrance of me.”

**This is the death we celebrate.
This is the new life we proclaim.
This is the vision we await.**

“Eucharist of Liberation” used in a London house church
Living Beyond Our Means,
World Student Christian Federation, 1985
Luke 22:14-23

Prayer after Communion:

We give thanks for this sacrament of love
by which we are empowered to be God’s love in the world.

Final Blessing:

For Peace

We pray for all who suffered violence today,
May an unexpected serenity surprise them.

For those who risk their lives each day for peace,
May their hearts glimpse providence at the heart of history.

That those who make riches from violence and war
Might hear in their dreams the cries of the lost.

That we might see through our fear of each other
A new vision to heal our fatal attraction to aggression.

That those who enjoy the privilege of peace
Might not forget their tormented brothers and sisters.

That the wolf might lie down with the lamb,
That our swords be beaten into ploughshares

And no hurt or harm be done
Anywhere along the holy mountain.

(John O’Donohue from *‘Benedictus’*)