

KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES**Sermon Notes: Cameron Webber,
Doing Justice in Our Community****10 Dec 2023****Readings** 1 Samuel 2:1-11; Luke 1:46-56**Introduction**

As we continue our series on **God's Justice in a Hurting World**, we are getting to the pointy end of the series, and today we are thinking about **Doing Justice in our Community**.

And it is a good time of the year to be thinking about justice. In the traditional church calendar, we are in the season of Advent which is built around the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. With today being the Second Sunday in Advent it's appropriate that we have heard, from Luke's gospel what is usually referred to as **Mary's Song**, and traditionally, from the Latin, '**The Magnificat**' because it begins (1:46) 'My soul magnifies the Lord' or depending on your translation - glorifies, praises, exalts. 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.'

1. The Magnificat's Setting

You know the setting. The angel Gabriel has announced to Mary, (1:31, 35) 'You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ... 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'

And Mary hurries off to see Elizabeth, her miraculously pregnant relative, and after they greet one another, Mary exclaims, (1:46-47) 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.' And as we heard it read, you will have noticed that it is not dissimilar to Hannah's Song which we also heard from 1 Samuel 2.

Both Hannah's and Mary's songs are in response to miraculous pregnancies – 1,000 years apart – and we are reminded of the other miraculous births to women who were barren, particularly at the very beginning of the people of Israel... to Sarah – Isaac; to Rebekah – Jacob; to Rachel – Joseph. And we are reminded that without God, without his intervention, there is no 'people of God', just Abraham and Sarah and that's it.

And as salvation history unfolds through the Old Testament, and we move 1,000 years on from Hannah and Samuel, as we near the peak of the plan, God's at it again. John the Baptist, the forerunner, who will prepare the way for the Messiah, will be born to the barren and now aged Elizabeth.

And then the most miraculous – not a barren womb opened, but, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah, 'the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel' (Isaiah 7:14) which means, 'God with us!'

As Gabriel said to Mary, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.' What a wonder that the eternal creator of the universe enters into his creation. And what's Mary's response? 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.'

2. The Magnificat's Revolution

I remember the Magnificat from back in my primary school days when we attended the local Anglican Church. It was in the "Prayer Book" and it's still in the green 1978 Australian Prayer Book. It's part of the first form of Evening Prayer.

And we've sung the hymn, 'Tell Out My Soul' which is based on Mary's Song. I have clear memories singing that 30-40 years ago in the first church we attended as a married couple.

There is certain poetic loveliness to the Magnificat, to The Song of Mary, as it 'extols God's plan of salvation' (APB). But, as William Barclay says, 'in that loveliness there is dynamite.'

And there is always the danger that we miss the dynamite, there is danger that the words roll off our tongues and we miss their revolutionary nature and significance. I hope you saw in both Hannah's song and Mary's song the themes of justice for the marginalised, and even the complete reversal of rich and poor, powerful and marginalised.

In this lead up to Christmas when words like presents and food and family are on our lips; when tinsel and decorations and fairy lights are hung; when peace and joy and goodwill are the catch-phrases; there is the danger we miss this part of Luke's account of the birth of Jesus; there is danger that we fail to see that the Magnificat is, in the words of William Temple, 'a most revolutionary canticle.'

There is much in this short song to study and meditate on, but let me just briefly draw attention to something of the revolution.

In 1:51 we find Mary telling of the mighty deeds that God her Saviour (1:47) has done. These are things God has done in the past, but they are also things he will do in the future, particularly through Jesus. And what's the first one? (1:51b) 'He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.'

It's easy to be proud; even proud that we have responded to God our Saviour, but God's kingdom has no room for pride, because the proud will be scattered. As we set our life beside Christ's life it becomes clear that there is no room for pride in our own achievements. Without God's intervention there is no people of God. As we recognise that it is only because of Jesus' humble birth, his perfect life, his sacrificial death, that we can be made right with God. It is through faith in him, and humble thankfulness, not pride, is the only response. As the old hymn says, *My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride*.

Mary goes on (1:52-53), He has brought down rulers ... but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry ... but has sent the rich away empty. This is "a most revolutionary canticle." At the very least, The Kingdom of God puts aside all social grades and ranks.

To be sure there is a spiritual aspect and a future aspect to all of this, but as those who have received salvation we are called to live out that salvation and as God's people, at the very least we are to show mercy, lift the humble, feed the hungry. We are called, as we have seen repeatedly in this series, to be for the downtrodden, the marginalised, those on the edge – whatever the reason.

Social and economic reversal: this is "a most revolutionary canticle." God's salvation in Christ brings in a new order of life, where God is at work in individuals and in society as a whole.

3. The Magnificat's Living

So how do we live out the Magnificat? How do we 'Do Justice in our Community'?

It's "easy" to have a personalised, spiritualised, future oriented faith. And we need those aspects, but we don't want faith that is so privatised that we miss the revolutionary nature of the Kingdom of God with its implications for justice and for its social out-workings in the present.

We've seen repeatedly though this series God's concern for justice: the justice that requires that every person be treated according to the same standards and with the same respect. And in particular, that means paying attention to the vulnerable and the oppressed and giving a fair go to the marginalised.

And one way we – collectively as a church – *are* doing justice in our community is through the **Christmas Hampers** that will be packed tomorrow, and then the food items and presents to be delivered to families in Kiama and Berkeley who need a hand; who need a fair go.

I don't know about you, but I have felt the weight of this series with its challenge to actually do justice, and grow in doing justice. So it is encouraging to remember what we *are doing*, and so thank you to those who...

- purchased and wrapped gifts,
- donated money (the target of \$7,000 was reached),
- purchased the groceries and will set up for the packing tomorrow,
- will be involved in the packing and getting them to where they need to go.
- have coordinated this whole exercise and given significant time and energy to enable us to collectively do justice. We have been able to participate in a number of ways and at a number of 'levels'.

Continue to pray for the hampers as they go out – that they will be received as a practical help from the church and that those who receive them will also hear the good news of Jesus.

But the question still remains. How can we be Doing Justice in Our Community? What else can we do, in practical terms, even as we pray, *'Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth, (throughout the world in Australia, in NSW, in Kiama) as it is in heaven.'*

It's easy to be blinded by our own middle-classness and economic security and lose sight of the marginalised and fail to make the good news seen. One of the best ways to show the grace, love and justice of God is through the justice revolution of giving a fair go to those on the edge, flowing from a deep conviction that the very nature of God demands that we, as his followers and partakers in his kingdom should reflect his nature in our actions.

A question I've asked myself is, 'How does the amount I contributed to the Hampers compare with what I will spend on food and presents for myself and my loved ones over the Christmas season? That might not be the right question, it's certainly an uncomfortable one and one we shouldn't brush away too quickly.

If we took really seriously the revolutionary nature of God's kingdom then the way we spend our time and money, the way we use our resources and energy might be different.

A couple of weeks back, Barb posed a number of questions at the 6PM service. They were in the context of the Good Samaritan sermon that Pam preached but are broadly relevant to doing justice in our community.

So let me ask some of her questions (paraphrased)...

- Do we care – when it's easier to not care?
- Are we generous – when we could just be meagre?
- Do we move out of our comfort zone for those of a different socio-economic group, or race, or culture, or religion?
- How do we respond to ...
 - the neighbours out mowing the lawn or walking the dog who seems unwell or distracted?
 - to the shopkeeper when we grab some milk (who does not look like he is having a good day)?
 - to the hairdresser (who is tired and overworked)?
- Every day there are people all around us who are struggling for so many different reasons.....do we stop and lend a hand, stop for a chat or words of care and encouragement?

All of that is part of doing justice. But what else might God be calling us to? Collectively as church, or individually?

When there are systemic issues, it may be necessary to work with others and that may be beyond the church. (There's some time spent on that in the parallel study to this sermon.)

It may be issues that are bigger than our sphere of influence and we need to work with organisations or governments or take our concerns to those who can make laws or policy. Lobbying Governments to see greater justice is part of that. And our democracy enables us to do those things, and we should use our democratic rights and responsibilities to pursue justice for the marginalised.

Steve is right in saying that we are not looking at justice in this series to be political, though there may be times when we get 'political' because that is where the solutions have to be enacted - by our politicians.

And we should work in humble cooperation with others in doing that, and sometimes that will be with people beyond the church. But there will be 'justice issues' where we will not be able to work with those beyond the church because justice always involves judgment and frequently moral judgement. Our convictions about justice and our judgements must stem from biblical categories and from a Christian understanding of humanity.

Our doing of justice flows from our Christian faith and from the conviction that everyone is valuable and equal before the God who has made us in his image. So whether working with others for justice, or confronting politicians or organisations about a lack of justice, we mustn't shy away from or compromise our Christian convictions and biblical understanding. We must be (*Keller*) marked by humble cooperation and respectful provocation.

Conclusion

In the context of Advent, when so much of self can distract, how important to hear again this **most revolutionary canticle** and to be challenged to do justice in our community.

It's a big, ongoing and challenging topic, so I am so thankful that my salvation, my right standing before God, is not dependant on my ability to get it right, on my doing of justice, because in that area, I have left undone the things I ought to have done. I am grateful for the message over the page in Luke 2, that the Angels brought to the shepherds, the 'good news of great joy for all the

people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'

I am thankful that salvation comes from the one Mary sang about as God her Saviour. I am thankful that salvation comes from God's mercy extended to those who fear him - to those who simply believe in Him, trust in Him and all he has done for us in the Messiah, the Christ.

And then in response, to his most revolutionary canticle, I am challenged again to pray that I will grow, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly before God; grow in doing justice in our community and in bringing God's justice to a hurting world.

Prayer