

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

A principal theme in every season of Lent is undoing injustice and oppression in God's creation. We are encouraged to *put right* that which does not measure up with our liberal democratic, Christian values. By *put right*, I mean *right with God* ... the way He would have it be. But what does that mean? Are we all *equal* in God's sight? Are we all equal in remuneration, or educational opportunity, or political advantage? Even if we are, do we each *choose* the same ways of expressing our personality or consuming our portion? If nothing else, God leaves us to exercise personal choice. Yes, there is cause and consequence to consider, but that's how our shared gift and our responsibility takes shape. So, which comes first?

Several commentators in the US at the moment are either heralding a *change for good* with the recent change in Executive Authority, or they are cautioning against a *lurch to the left* in favour of minorities that (according to some) have taken something of a beating in the last four years. Many of those commentators use statistics to make their cases; if 50% of the population are women why are there only 17% of technology jobs filled by women? In this country, if nearly 17% of our population are Maori, why do Maori people make up more than 50% of our prison population? But statistics can be used by either side most often in questionable ways. We need some *more reliable* way of deciding what factors lead to unjust oppression of minorities, and which of those factors might lead us to recognise *God's answer* amidst all the others to these pressing issues.

We often say that it's *the victors that write the history* and in some ways they still do. But in recent years minorities are getting

more traction in causing a rewrite of our corporate memory ... and this rewrite is starting to undo some long-standing injustices. We are becoming more aware that economic exploitation of our environment has long term consequences for the ability of our environment to recover; we are becoming more aware that simply using Te Reo Maori in simple ways everyday awakens us to the beauty and highly spiritual, creation-oriented culture that goes with it, and perhaps even awakens us to recognising the *long-term impact* of historical injustices that have been perpetrated by unscrupulous leaders in our history. We may even be moving on from a culture of generic blame and guilt, to one of recognition of fault and apology ... of putting right.

Simply reciting statistics and numbers is no longer enough. Instead a hierarchy of need is intrinsically linked with the whole idea of justice. *Justice* is an idea that we are each able to make a truly free choice and that we should understand the relevant outcome before we do so. It is built on two foundational premises; that each individual is relatively equally resourced and free to make a personal choice, and that each individual is roughly equally informed about cause and consequence applicable to each option. I'm not so naïve to expect that that works in reality, but if that isn't the case, and more importantly if the constraints denying those conditions are based on factors over which an individual has no control (race, economic depravity, gender, access to information, etc) ... then *systemic inequality* skews the outcome, and we need some way of applying a corrective influence. I'm not talking about politics here, but I am reaching out to my brothers and sisters in Christ, seeking their

help to level the playing field a little ... to put it right ... right with God.

Looking at our readings today, we hear a bit about Noah. But the emphasis in this reading is on God's declaration that He will never again use a flood to make this correction ... and He positioned a rainbow in the heavens to remind Himself of that promise.

What were we required to do as our part of that promise? Nothing! But Peter's letter draws a connection between Noah's flood and the waters of baptism. Our task then is to be baptised and live into that sacrament. When we are baptised, we acknowledge the cleansing action of the flood, and that Jesus came and suffered so that we don't have to. Our salvation is effective *because* Jesus takes on the consequences of our choosing. He puts our failures, our inappropriate choices, right with God ... if we ask Him to, and repent, turn away from those inappropriate choices ... if we choose to live *in Him*.

Living in Him doesn't just mean loving our neighbour (although that's a great start), it also means loving our environment and thinking, acting, choosing differently in the future ... putting right the inappropriate behaviour of our ancestors. Living in Christ delivers a one-sided benefit ... and we are the benefactors. Our part in the deal is to find a way that respects existing differences between each of God's children, whether or not they share our belief structure, and recognise their freedoms to choose differently from us ... from a position of reasonably equity, even if those choices recognise differently the beauty of God's creation, and His Son's place as our Redeemer.

We need to live joyfully, mindful of the alternative ... and instead happily attract others by our actions. **Amen.**