

Justice is the Body of Love and Love is the Soul of Justice

Texts: Leviticus 25:23-24 then Romans 8:18-25 and John 10: 11-18

1. Cry of earth Cry of the poor

In May five years ago Pope Francis published his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*. The document was significant because of its urgency, the power of its argument and its insistence that the threat of climate change was a central concern for both governments and for church. Its urgency has not diminished but grown over the last five years.

The core of *Laudato Si* was the call to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Following St Francis of Assisi, he speaks of the earth as our sister 'who cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her'. He speaks of the poor calling out to us for justice and a share at the table.

Laudato Si is a reminder of the network of intricate interlocking relationships on which all life depends and on how fragile it is. It is a call to attend to those relationships in every point of our lives: domestic, working, institutional and international. The coronavirus has taught us what a difference concerted action in the face of a crisis can make. Choices ranging from whom we meet, how we congregated, how we travel, and whether we wash our hands have consequences. The same kind of domestic and political choices matter, too, in the face of the larger crisis posed by global warming.

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement 2021-22: [*Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*](#), affirms that "we human beings need a change of heart, mind, and behaviours". It exhorts us all to care for creation and the most vulnerable people in our worldwide human family.

Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* calls for an integral ecology. An integrated approach to economic, social, and ecological issues: "... we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

2. Justice is the body of love and Love is the soul of justice

Responding to the cry of earth and the cry of the poor is not an optional extra for the Gospel...For it has deep roots within the Old Testament scriptures and is absolutely central to life and teaching of Jesus.

Cry of Earth and Cry of the Poor have their foundations in Jesus's teaching of love and Justice.

John Dominic Crossan puts it like this...

"Love is the soul of Justice and justice is the body of love."

"Love empowers justice, and justice embodies love. Keep them together or we get neither. Distributive justice is the outgrowth of Jesus' belief in a God who offers universal love.

So, the justice that Jesus taught – was a distributive justice. This means that it must be spread fairly among all of God’s children.

“It’s God’s world and God’s stuff and it must be distributed fairly!” Crossan has said.

God’s distributive justice is outlined in [Psalm 82: 3-4](#)

*“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”*

Or the language of the Message:

*You’re here to defend the defenseless,
to make sure that underdogs get a fair break.
Your job is to stand up for the powerless,
and prosecute all those who exploit them.”*

Justice is distributive. In writing how the Hebrew scriptures define justice, John Dominic Crossan writes, “The primary meaning of ‘justice’ is not **retributive, but distributive**. To be just means to distribute everything fairly.”

The Distributive Justice that Jesus taught and lived out in his life means the fair and equitable distribution of God’s blessings on earth.

“Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap; they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!” (Luke 12:24)

“Consider how the wildflowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you— you of little faith!” (Luke 12:27-28)

“[God] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45)

Jesus’ God universally loved even the ravens and lilies; therefore, Jesus envisions God as also concerning Godself with distributive justice for us as well.

Jesus is standing firmly in his own Jewish tradition when he connects love and distributive justice. Consider the following passages from the Hebrew prophets where love and distributive justice are intrinsically connected.

*“In love a throne will be established;
in faithfulness a man will sit on it—
one from the house of David—
one who in judging seeks justice
and speeds the cause of righteousness.”* (Isaiah 16:5, emphasis added.)

*“But you must return to your God;
maintain love and justice,*

and wait for your God always. (Hosea 12:6, emphasis added.)

Calling for distributive justice was a way in which the Hebrew prophets spoke truth to power.

“For I, the LORD, love justice;

I hate robbery and wrongdoing.

In my faithfulness I will reward my people

and make an everlasting covenant with them.” (Isaiah 61:8)

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly^[a] with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

It makes perfect sense, then, that a Jewish prophet of the poor from Galilee who in the first century traversed the region teaching about a God who universally loved ravens, lilies, and all people, too, would live, teach, minister, protest, and be crucified in profound solidarity with those who were suffering from injustice in his society.

If we define politics as the distribution of resources and power, the gospel has real political implications that we must not hide or hide from. The portions of the New Testament believed to have been written by the Johannine community are the portions of the New Testament most preoccupied with defining God as “Love.” They don’t miss this connection between love and justice either:

“How can the love of God be in anyone who has material goods and sees a sibling in need and yet refuses help? . . . Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” (1 John 3:17-18)

Those who believe they genuinely possess an understanding of God’s character *should* be the loudest in the room opposing the injustices of classism, racism, misogyny, patriarchy, bigotry toward those who are different.

To believe in universal love is to work for a distributive, societal justice for those who are the objects of that universal love.

After all, a person’s a person, no matter how small.

God is the life force, the ground of all being that is in and through all of us, animating our beings.

For Jesus, God’s love was at the root of God’s radical vision for a world in which all had enough.

God’s love sustains creation and I sense we are called to be partners ...not masters, to be partners with God in the ongoing evolving creation. The Jesus story of “**God with us**” so we might live courageously and hopefully with reality of creation.

[Tell story]

It’s about love and justice. Do we help the poor, the widow, the fatherless? Do we visit the prisoner, clothe the naked, feed the hungry? This is how God works in the world – through our active participation in God’s distributive justice where

“Love is the soul of Justice and justice is the body of love.”

“Love empowers justice, and justice embodies love. Keep them together.”

Surely this is what Jesus meant when he announced the arrival of the Kingdom of God.
Amen

John Williams,
21 September 2021.

Acknowledgements:

John Dominic Crossan (2009) Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography. See: [Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography: Crossan, John Dominic: 9780061800351: Amazon.com: Books](#)

Herb Montgomery (2018) Justice and the Love of God. See: [Justice and the Love of God | Renewed Heart Ministries](#)