

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

These words from the prophecy of Amos are a fitting summary of our two celebrations today. Harvest Sunday and the start of Black History Month.

At Harvest, we celebrate God's provision in the food and drink we enjoy, and ask God's blessing on all those who produce and deliver our food. We also recognise the injustice that so many lack food and good nutrition, not only across the world but in our very own community, on our doorstep. We meet to pray for justice and a fairer distribution of all that God has given us. As we celebrate Harvest, we pray for justice in the way our food and resources are distributed, and especially justice for those who lack what we enjoy.

At the start of Black History Month, we celebrate the role and contribution of black history and black people in our nation, in our city, and not least here at St Peter's in our own church family.

It might seem tokenistic to focus only one month a year on the contribution of black history and people, but Black History month is designed to foreground black history to remind us to be attentive day in and day out to the histories and people who make up our communal stories that are sometimes or deliberately overlooked.

Black History Month is not only an invitation to look *backwards* to pay attention to the role and contribution of black history and people in making us who we are as a nation, a city, a church family, but also to look *around us* to consider whether we are paying attention to the lives and concerns and experiences of black siblings, and to look *forwards* to consider how close we are to a society and a community where the experiences of young black women and men are no different from those from any other background. It too is a question of justice.

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Both Harvest and Black History Month invite us to reflect on what justice really means, on what justice might look like in our society and in our communities. Sometimes we think of 'justice' transactionally, as punishment for bad acts, just desserts for immoral deeds. 'Let justice be done.'

In Christian teaching, justice is something more profound. Justice isn't so much a set of transactions, a punishment for this or that. Justice is relationship, justice is about being in right relationship. To live in a world of justice, to live in a world where justice is rolling down like waters, is to live in a world where we're in right relation - to creation, to each other, to ourselves.

Justice in Christian teaching sees relationships restored, and people and communities in right relation with each other. Such a world of balanced relationships entails a fair distribution of food, a removal of false divisions between people, the absence of individuals and communities facing the prospect of potential unrealised or discrimination simply by being labelled as somehow 'other'. Justice is right relationship, and a world of justice is a world in which we are enabled to thrive and flourish as we are created to be.

Justice then goes further than charity. Charity sees us giving from our surplus or our means. We're able to share what we have with the people and causes of our choosing. We sometimes might even quietly enjoy being able to be charitable, feeling and being seen to do good in our community.

Justice hits us deeper. For those of us with power and privilege, when that power and privilege preserves an imbalanced relationship, justice can feel like a loss when relationships are restored. We can feel we're losing some of our power and privilege and control, and this might feel uneasy. Unlike charity, where we get to choose and we get to feel good about being charitable, justice might bring us up short.

Our readings this morning help us here. St Paul writes 'do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.' To live in a world of justice is to be concerned about those around us, to ensure we are in right relationship with them, even if this means we feel we lose some of the power and privilege we enjoy.

Again it might be easy to say we want to live in a such world, and perhaps harder to live the reality of what true justice means. Again our Gospel helps us here. Which of the two sons does the father's will? Not the one who says he does and does nothing, but the one who initially says he will not and actually does. As Christians, we're called to be a people who don't simply claim to seek justice on our lips, but to really live justice in our lives.

Today, we also celebrate the baptism of *N*. In each and every baptism, the Lord is adding to our number those whom he is calling, and is bringing a new person into a restored relationship with the whole of God's family as the Church. In baptism, we are reminded that the Christian life is about the restoration of relationships which is justice.

As we celebrate *N*'s baptism, we pray that they and all the baptised might live a life of restored and restoring relationship, that their life might be one which experiences the fruits of justice, even as we celebrate the fruits of the earth. Today we pray for *N*. and for all God's children might live in a world of justice, a world of relationship and restoration.

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Amen.