

Thought for the Day, 22.10.20

**‘I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity’
(Isaiah 61.8)**

Whenever any major disaster occurs (Hillsborough, the Grenfell Tower, the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, etc.) it's usual for an enquiry to be set up and a report to be published on what went wrong. People who were involved say they want answers, and, if the report exposes culpable behaviour, they also want justice.

There's much talk of justice today. But what do we mean by it? In some cases people seem to be seeking revenge, or perhaps compensation. At other times justice is understood as not letting the criminal get away with his or her bad behaviour. If we are seeking justice, we look to the law courts to dispense it, but sometimes we look in vain.

Recently I have been reading through the Book of Isaiah. I have been struck by the repeated emphasis on justice. It is central to God's character (*The Lord is a God of justice* - 30.18); it is what he requires from his people (*Maintain justice and do what is right* - 56.1); it is what his Servant will bring to save humanity (*He will bring justice to the nations* - 42.1).

When it comes to God's justice we are all in the dock. But Isaiah realised that God's Servant would not be the bringer of justice by coming to teach us to do better. Moses had already taught God's law. In the magnificent chapter 53 the prophet sees that humanity would reject the Lord's Servant, who would suffer terrible injustice, but through him God would bring redemption for all humankind: *It was the lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer...By knowledge of him my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities* (verses 10-11).

How could this be right? At a human level, the crucifixion of Jesus was clearly a terrible miscarriage of justice, but it was the will of God that he should be our Redeemer and die for our sins. God's justice is saving justice - at the expense of his own dear Son. Meditating on this Paul wrote to the Romans: God did this *to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus*. (Romans 3.26).

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