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## Sermon: Compassion and Anger - the two hands of justice-building

Wed, 2020-07-08 17:24 -- Ruth Wilde



### Sermon for Sunday 5th July 2020, on the lectionary reading Psalm 145

Thank you for welcoming me to your church this Sunday. It's still your church, even if it's via Zoom! It will be an interesting exercise for all churches to see what is worth keeping of this brave new online world and what is not. Some disabled people I know have told me 'welcome to our world' - they actually feel more included by the online services than they feel generally in churches. Something worth bearing in mind as we work for the inclusion of all?

When I was looking at the readings for today, I was drawn particularly to the psalm. I think all of the psalms are very human. They combine a very real sense of God's love and compassion with that very human desire for justice. Often this means that a beautiful, poetic psalm about the depth of God's love for every person and *everything* can suddenly turn into a battle cry against the 'wicked'! This psalm is an ode to the wisdom, compassion and faithfulness of God, until in the final paragraph, the psalmist explodes into 'but the wicked he will destroy'! We didn't get to that part in the reading today, but it comes after the section we read. It makes us uncomfortable to hear that line at the end doesn't it? Especially after so much lyricism expounding on God's glory. It feels so violent to suddenly blurt out about destroying the wicked! These kinds of lines at the end of psalms sometimes make me feel like laughing out loud, because they are so discordant; and perhaps also because laughter is one way of dealing with discomfort.

When we feel uncomfortable though, it is often because something has rung true that we are either afraid or ashamed of. There is something very revealing about these final parts of many psalms. In this case, I think

we are ashamed of our own 'ugly' emotions of violent anger and hatred. We all have moments when we feel so angry about injustice that we want to lash out. The more we care about justice – and it is a very honourable thing to care about – the more we have those feelings of (sometimes violent) anger towards those who harm others. If it can be used constructively, anger at injustice is a feeling which can motivate us to bring about change, but we must learn to balance it with compassion.

A friend of mine once said to me 'there are two hands of peace and justice building: one hand says a firm and strong 'NO' to injustice and the other one opens wide and says 'I am open to you as a person – to the good in you?' that hand is open even to those 'wicked' people who have done so much harm to others, even to those most in need of God's revealing wisdom and transformation. We must learn to channel our anger – at injustice, at exclusion, at marginalisation of those who are different – into an ever-flowing stream of compassion mixed with justice. One cannot work without the other. And that includes compassion for ourselves – we cannot do the work of justice if we do not care for ourselves. Without self-care, we would just get burnt out. We can't love others unless we first love ourselves. That's why the command is to love our neighbour *as ourselves*.

In today's psalm, God's hand is opened wide to all of us. In verse 16, it says 'You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing?'. That open hand is also an invitation to us to join in God's work of compassion and justice. We are called to open our hands too – to every person who comes to our church and every person we meet in our lives. God cares particularly for those who are 'falling' and 'bowed down' by society, as the psalm says; and so should we! God raises them up. To do the work of justice and inclusion is to do the work of God's kingdom: that's why it's so important.. Inclusion is not just a side issue for God.

In the final paragraph of the psalm, it says 'God, you are just in all your ways, and loving toward all you have created?' – again, there is that combination of justice and compassion. In God, we see the essential intertwining of both hands – the firm 'no' and the open 'yes?'. We too must learn to balance the two hands of justice building: we must accept our 'ugly' anger and channel it into building a more equal, compassionate world.

Amen.

*This sermon was preached by Ruth Wilde via Zoom to the congregation at St Clement with St Peter, East Dulwich. You can also listen to the sermon [here](#)[1].*

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[1]

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