



Do Justice

"Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the August edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

The border

Now we are at Alert Level 1, the border has become the front line in the coronavirus war. The way things are developing in much of the rest of the world the border will continue to be the front line for months if not years. Breaches of the border take two forms – a breach that results in new cases amongst the resident population of New Zealand and a breach that does not. Up until now we have not had any breaches that have resulted in any person already living in New Zealand being found positive for coronavirus. Since we came down to Level 1, all the positive cases to date have been people travelling to New Zealand from affected countries. Considering the number of New Zealand citizens and permanent residents that have returned since we reached Level 1, this is a remarkable achievement.

When New Zealand moved very rapidly from Level 2 to Level 3 and then Level 4, it was made very clear that this was to limit the spread of the virus, to minimise possible deaths from the virus and to ensure that our hospital system was not overloaded with coronavirus cases. We were asked to keep in a form of isolation for at least four weeks so that the virus could not get established in our country. The team of 5 million understood the situation and generally followed the rules and new case numbers steadily dropped so that restrictions could be eased to the point where, at Level 1, life is almost back to normal.

In many other parts of the world, the actions and messaging of governments was not as concise and clear as we experienced in New Zealand. Concern about the economic impact of lockdowns and the potential loss of profit by corporations limited the speed and comprehensiveness of the actions taken. As a result, we are now seeing the impact of these policies in many countries around the globe. Dollars were more important than the national health. Now further action is having to be taken in many countries as the virus either continues to spread or re-emerges in a second wave of infection.

It has been reported that around 50,000 New Zealand citizens and permanent residents have returned home since the beginning of the crisis.¹ The vast majority of these New Zealanders were living in countries that decided that action taken

to protect the national health should be limited to protect the national economy. Restrictions were being removed before the virus was under control and the virus continues to spread.

Much has been made of the so-called breaches in the border over the last few weeks – breaches when special exemptions of the isolation rules have been allowed and breaches when returnees have wilfully broken out of their isolation facilities. The number of people ignoring the rules is tiny, less than 10, compared with the number of people who have returned home since we went to Level 1. To date the virus has not returned.

Yes, our tourism industry has been badly hit by the actions taken to combat the coronavirus and it is unlikely that visitor numbers will return to anything like the numbers experienced in recent years, but this applies to the whole world. However, it is worth remembering that one of the reasons the virus was able to spread from country to country so quickly was because of global tourism.

Similarly, schools, universities and other educational institutions have been affected by the loss of fee-paying overseas students. This may well be rectified in the not too distant future once cast-iron processes are set up to ensure any arriving student is isolated for 14 days and cannot bring the virus into the country.

Let's just settle down and accept that our border will be closed for a considerable time and be thankful that most of us have warm homes, enough to eat and are safe and healthy. And let us move quickly to ensure that those who do not have a warm home or enough food and cannot live in dignity are properly catered for as we plan our recovery from the pandemic. We cannot return to the old normal.

End of Life referendum

Next month we will be asked to vote on letting the End of Life Choice Act 2019 become law or not. This is not an easy choice as anyone watching a close relative or friend die will attest to. However, life is something we are given by God and is not something we can take away. Palliative care specialist Dr Wendy Pattermore made some interesting points recently on the choices we make. Below are some of her comments:

Life is something most of us enjoy. Even without the resources to travel to the far ends of the earth, we have beauty around us and

¹ <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/thousands-return-home-but-there-enough-jobs-go-around-v1>

relationship between us. This makes life sweet. We go with each other on life's rollercoaster of love and disappointment, joy and sorrow, fear and bravery.

I heard Jane Fonda talk recently of old age being the "Third Act". The Third Act in the play or story is where everything is revealed, the important stuff comes out. But then there is the "Denouement". This is the closing of the play – the resolution of the action, bringing things to an understandable end.

Life has a denouement. It is called dying. It can be shorter or longer. But it is always important. It is the completion of life. It is where things are resolved. Or would be if we let it happen – it leads to a satisfactory end to the sometimes glorious story of one's life. The denouement can be sad, or scary or hard – but it is important. There is work to be done in those closing lines – we need to set up the next episode, the sequel. We need to pass on clues and advice, we need to encourage bravery and fortitude for the future.

We must not cut it out because we, or the producer decides the play is long enough. The curtain comes down or the credits roll – but the people watching feel that it is unfinished, they don't quite know what they are expected to think or do.

This is what assisted suicide is like. It cuts off the story before the end, before we find out the important stuff for the next actor to know.²

Is social justice biblical?

Darrell Lackey grew up in the USA Southern Baptist tradition and evangelicalism in general. In a recent post he looked at some of the differences in Christian thinking in the USA. He started as follows:

Running through the theological framework of fundamentalism and evangelicalism, perhaps even the Protestant tradition, is the discernible need to dichotomize everything. Of course, it's a feature of modernity. Whether it's works vs. grace, scripture vs. tradition, biblical justice vs. social justice etc.³

Lackey then goes on to discuss a view he often encounters that life and scriptures teach that social justice is different to biblical justice. Christ did not come just for "the triply oppressed" or the "most marginalized people". He came for the sinner, which means Caesar, you, and me. He then asks, "Why are these (the oppressed and marginalized) and those who don't fall into those categories opposed to each other, or separated?"

Over recent weeks we have seen this dichotomy playing out in the world news. The counter to the Black Lives Matter campaign has been that "all lives matter". We even have the recently elected Leader of the Opposition stating that she is a person of colour – white colour and seeming to imply that she as a person of "white colour" is somehow discriminated against in the same way persons of black colour or brown colour are treated.

Jesus makes it very clear that he has come "to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:16-21 NIV).

Today the captives are those who experience racism and sexism; those who experience economic injustice in the gap between the rich and the poor; those whom the education system, the criminal system and the health system fail and discriminate against, not because they fail as individuals but because they do not get a chance to succeed because of their position in society.

Lackey concludes by saying, "Social justice is biblical justice. When we strive for social justice, when we act for the 'least of these,' when we love our neighbour (which includes social justice) we are giving them Jesus. We are following scripture."

Electoral forum

The Living Wage Movement over the last eight years has regularly organised electoral forums around the country when candidates for public office have the opportunity to state their position on the Living Wage. Details of this year's event are below:

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FAIRER
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**Living Wage Electoral Forum
Auckland**

Thursday 20th August 2020

St Matthew-in-the-City
Join us for some food at 6:00pm
Event starts at 6:30pm

**Hear what the political parties are
promising about the Living Wage.**

² https://www.cmf.nz/euthanasia_referendum Comments by Dr Steve Withington and Dr Amanda Landers are also worth considering.

³ https://www.patheos.com/blogs/divergence/2020/07/15/biblical-justice-is-social-justice/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Christians+For+a+Better+Christianity&utm_content=43