

**Isaiah 61 and Luke 18.1-8**  
**Sermon on Sunday, 8th December 2024**  
**Revd Dr Catherine Okoronkwo, Canon Steward**  
**On Martin Luther King Jr's Preachment 60th Anniversary**

*And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? (Luke 18.7).*

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

Sixty years ago in this very pulpit, Martin Luther King Junior preached his sermon, *Three Dimensions of a Complete Life*. His message spoke to the “length, breadth and height of a person’s life”. The length of life speaks to the inward attention to one’s well-being (mind, body and spirit). The breadth of life focuses on the outward concern for the flourishing of others. While the height of life pivots us to an upward reach and relationship with the Divine.

Sixty years on, and Martin Luther King Junior's message remains relevant and resonates in many ways. Because without being attentive to the “length, breadth and height” of our lives, it is impossible to *know* one’s self, *love* others and *serve* God. The gospel of Luke puts it this way, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10.27).”

In the last sixty years a lot has happened locally, nationally and globally. There have been wars and conflicts, terror attacks, environmental disasters, and a pandemic. There have been changes in political leaders and shifts in global powers and alliances. In many parts of the world there has been an increase in people experiencing unemployment, homelessness, and poverty. Although some progress has been made in certain spheres, we live in a world where people are abused and violated because of their race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, disability, and socio-economic status. And the result of all of this, is that daily we find ourselves confronted by injustices of all kinds.

How then do we become people after God’s own heart? Isaiah states, “For I the Lord love justice” (Isaiah 61.8). How do we become people who bring good news to the oppressed, the broken-hearted, the captives, the prisoners, the mourners? How do we become people who hate robbery and wrongdoing? These questions full of complexity are an incredible challenge in a world that seems to have lost its way.

Many years ago, I had the opportunity to go to South Africa to visit a Christian project which supports the most vulnerable in those communities. We visited a number of families living in impoverished conditions. And one encounter stayed with me. An elderly lady who was the sole provider for her grandchildren (their parents having died of AIDS), invited us into her modest homestead with an incredible warmth and welcome. And before we knew it, she had produced a bowl of fruit for us to enjoy and,

later as we prepared to leave she sang for us in Setswana. From all that she had — her hospitality, some fruit and a song — she blessed us with garlands, gladness and praise. Even though she struggled and suffered through the daily indignities and injustices of her situation, she chose to “display the glory of God” (Isaiah 61.3). Whenever I feel overwhelmed by the task of fighting for justice, I remember this grandmother and what is at stake for our generation and the next.

There are no easy answers for many of the problems we navigate and negotiate, individually and collectively, in our communities today. But we do know a God who has an incredible care and concern for all he has created.

In this Advent season, we find ourselves waiting for the hope and revelation of the Christ child. For those who believe, we prepare to receive the “Good News”, the child Jesus, who was sent to enter into our human experience, gifting us the opportunity to have a relationship with God. Yes, God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to live among us, Emmanuel — God with us!

In Martin Luther King Junior’s sermon, *Three Dimensions of a Complete Life*, he invites us to discover what God has called us to do, who God has called us to become. Wherever we are on this journey of life, in whatever context we find ourselves, I would like to offer that we are called to be people committed to the work of justice. And, if we believe we are to be people who speak and act for justice, then we are called to be people of prayer.

The Luke passage we read gives us hope, “Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart (Luke 18.1).” Through prayer we listen to the deep yearning of our hearts. Through prayer we notice the things in society that disturb us. Through prayer we find God’s help and strength to respond to his Kingdom purposes, according to his will.

For sure, the task of advocating for justice is an arduous struggle, but we are encouraged not to give up. In the Luke passage, Jesus extols the widow’s persistence, so much so, that in the end the unjust judge was moved by her pestering and granted her petition. If an unjust judge can respond in this manner, how much more a just and loving God?

“And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Luke 18.7-8).

Friends, there is work to be done in this world where there are many troubles. And as Martin Luther King Junior, a man of faith, hope and vision had a dream, may we continue to strive for justice. And may our gospel cry be:

“We shall build up the ancient ruins,  
we shall raise up the former devastations;

we shall repair the ruined cities,  
[and] the devastations of many generations” (Isaiah 61.4). Amen.