

2021 07 25 Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice

A few days ago the South African police revised the total number of deaths related to the unrest in Gauteng and KZN to 337 and in the Western Cape taxi violence, 82 murders have been reported. On the ground the reality can be seen in the story of a factory worker, who, unable to get to work because of the violence, is bracing herself for a drop in salary this month from R5,300 to about R3,800, on which she has to support two children, two siblings and her mother. A construction worker, unable to get to work since Saturday last week put it in the simple raw reality of these words, "I normally use a taxi to travel to work, but ... I don't want to die."

South African playwright and academic, Nadia Davids, lamented the recent surge of violence, saying, "Violence is South Africa's twelfth national language. A language built up carefully, systematically, over hundreds of years in every possible space – personal, political, public, individual and collective. It's a language we need to stop being so fluent in."

Heather Robertson, the editor of Daily Maverick's weekly newspaper, wrote recently, "No political party, no economist, no billionaire, no clever member of the commentariat has come up with any plan that has narrowed the gap that lies at the heart of everything that is wrong about us."

Can we, as the church, do anything to make even the smallest of dents in this massive multidimensional challenge? The start is, as always, to come to the rock of habitation to which I can continually come" as the psalmist said, the one who walked this same road as we did, yet in total love and connectedness with his and our God.

Please pray with me, and I would encourage you to really join me; if anything of what I pray resonates with you, please join yourself to it in a collective cry to God.

Jesus, as we turn to you, we recognise that you too grew up in a society with similar, perhaps even worse cycles of violence, economically, socially, spiritually and physically by the sheer brutality of the Roman empire in its methods of maintaining its so-called pax Romana, Roman peace. Please guide us with your lived and learnt wisdom as we pray.

You challenged the social order, teaching us to love each other, including our enemies; you challenged the religious order, naming it for what it was, a system placing

impossible burdens on people's backs. You challenged the economic order, showing us how to provide for the poor, leaving behind a portion of what we owned.

You told us that we are family and to love our enemies but we confess that we so easily turn our family members into the other, and in so doing sow the first seeds of violence. You warned us to keep our hearts clean so that what emerges in our behaviour is rich and nurturing yet we harbour, and even nurture at times, thoughts of othering, of condemnation, revenge and even violence. You told us to not even call someone a fool because of the violent power of our words, yet all too often we fail to reign in our tongues.

You said blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God, the children resembling their parent, the God of peace. We are reminded of the role of the peacemakers in the build-up to the transition to democracy in the early 90s, the many people who put up their hands to broker non-violence. They too were the miracle-makers and we ask you God, please raise them up again. Raise up each of us too, in however small a role it may be.

Loving God, we have much to call out to you about at this time in our land. Please hear our prayers and supplications, summed up in the all-encompassing lines of the prayer for Africa

God bless Africa and all the world,

Guard our children, Guide our leaders,

And give us peace. Amen