

Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice

Many years ago I was present in a discussion where a group of activists talked about being in what was then KTC, while government bulldozers were demolishing peoples' shacks. Someone, who had not been present at the site, asked whether the activists had helped people rebuild their shacks after the bulldozers left. The answer given was that the group was there to analyse the situation, not to help the shack dwellers who were now homeless. Should they have objectively analysed what was going on with a view to addressing the higher-level systemic problem or should they have got their hands dirty and helped the individuals in their distress?

I have heard of this "either/or" situation reiterated time and again over the years. Either we approach the systemic challenges in South Africa by getting involved at a more political level or we invest our energy in improving the realities of a few individuals. I found myself thinking about this in the past week as I read many different articles describing what was happening both systemically and at the grassroots' level of individuals.

Please join me in bringing this to prayer...

Jesus, as we read of what is currently going on in our government and listen to the desperate cries of journalists for us to see the danger this country is in, and especially what this will mean for the poor, the immigrants, and the youth, we feel desperate, inadequate and powerless. The reality of this is all around us daily as we encounter the individuals begging at traffic lights, others knocking at our doors and so many more struggling to stem the poverty fast encroaching in their own lives. Here too we feel desperate, inadequate and helpless.

And so, Jesus, as is our practice, we come to You for guidance and understanding. You addressed both of these... changing the "either/or" to a "both/and".

You were very clear in Yourself that the ways of God had to be the rudder that guided the ship, and whenever You encountered anything to the contrary, You exposed it and advocated for a return to the way of Love, the way that would bring life to all. And in our following of You we are challenged not to abdicate from grappling with what that means for South Africa and the world today. We need to be held by that rudder as we engage in the bigger picture allowing it to inform us particularly in seeing the systemic injustices of our day.

And then there were the encounters with individuals where You demonstrated to those following You at the time, and to us, what that rudder looked like in practice...that the experience of the individual does matter, is something to be noted as well as engaged with. What was it that You wanted us to learn from this? Was it to caution us never to get lost in a theology that meant nothing to the individual? Was it to realise that, without those encounters, our hearts take longer to change, longer to grasp the depths of Your loving? Or maybe it was grasping that we need those encounters probably more than the vulnerable individuals need them...perhaps for our own salvation? Our hearts can so easily become hardened and it is the individual stories that we find harder to ignore because suddenly they become more personal, leaving us wondering what we would do if we were in a similar position.

And so from this brief encounter in prayer with You, we know that disengagement is not an option, both at the level of systemic injustice and at the individual's experience of that injustice. As we encounter the individuals within our broader family may we advocate for their good in our city, our nation, our world ...and in so doing, deepen Your joy...and ours.

May this become our truth...

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