

St Georges July 2021

To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation.

Kia ora, ata marie. Ko Sarah Scott Webb ahau. So great back here with you St Georges, see number familiar faces.

For those who don't know me, by way of introduction, I live Christchurch with my husband Kieran and daughter Tessa, and have a long connection with this church - many years ago I was the first youth pastor here, and it was from here in 2005 that I was sent to as a mission worker to Cambodia. It was while I was there, that the Lord exposed me to the realities of human trafficking and called me specifically to serve Him by doing whatever I could to stop it.

Fast forward 15 years in the non-profit sector and I now serve as a mission worker with SIM International, where I co-lead their anti-trafficking ministry, For Freedom. We co-ordinate SIM's global response to human trafficking, support workers involved in anti-trafficking ministry, help our teams respond to situations of trafficking in their communities. Our focus is on preventing human trafficking and protecting those most risk in communities SIM serving in, and I operate in a strategic, advisory, support role for our workers on the ground.

It is from this background I bring you this mornings message, the first in this new series looking at the "Marks of Mission: Mark 4 - *To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation.*"

Justice is important to God. Our readings this morning illustrate this.

Our gospel reading from Luke 4:18-19 shows us very clearly transforming injustice is one of the main reasons Jesus came to earth. To bring freedom for the captives and to set the oppressed free. To transform captivity into freedom.

In our old testament reading from Amos 5 we hear the voice of the Lord crying out in frustration at how wrong we've got it, with our focus on everything else....when all he really wants from us is to seek justice. Sometimes the Message version gives a different perspective:

MSG " I can't stand your religious meetings. I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I've had all I can take of your noisy ego music. When was the last time you sang to ME? Do you know what I want? I

want justice, oceans of it. I want fairness – rivers of it. That’s what I want. That’s ALL I want.”

Throughout the Bible we hear over and over again, through more than 1400 scriptures, sometimes, like in Amos with very strong language, that justice matters to God. This is why this Mark of mission is so important. Justice is the very heartbeat who He is, very heartbeat who He called us to be. People who bring his transforming justice to a hurting and broken world. That excites me!

When I first read this “mark”, a couple of things really stood out. One was an overriding sense of YES, this is so what we as the church need to be doing. Living out our biblical mandate not only for bringing justice, but bringing the transformation that comes through relationship with Jesus to all spheres of life.

And the 2nd thing that stood out to me was around language, the choice of verbs used here: transform, challenge, pursue. These are not passive words, not told to ‘think about’ injustice, or ‘observe’ peace and reconciliation. Told to transform, challenge, pursue – all very active, proactive, assertive, strong verbs; verbs that require us to act, to go and do.

We cannot transform anything without engaging with it.

We cannot challenge anything by staying silent about it.

And we cannot pursue anything, by staying still.

I think this Mark of Mission is telling us that if we are to bring God’s kingdom here on earth, we need to be actively engaged in doing so. Not sitting back as bystanders.

This Mark of mission is a challenging one, its very easy for us to hear stories of injustice and find them too overwhelming, too big, too scary, we don’t know how to respond or what to do - I hear this a lot from churches I work with. It’s a very common response. Yet as Jesus’ disciples, his followers, who are called to do all He did and more, this is what we need to be doing. We need to choose to engage in God’s mission of justice.

This Mark of mission gives us 3 places to start:

1. To transform unjust structures of society

To transform something means to “make a marked change in its form, nature, or appearance.”

To transform unjust structures in society, we need to identify what they are, we need to engage with them, and be prepared for a long slow relational journey of transformation.

As believers, we are all called to make significant change, transform, those structures and systems in our world that are unjust, that seek to oppress and exploit others. What are the big structural things in our society causing homelessness? Child poverty? Family violence? Addiction? How do we engage with and transform them?

At For Freedom addressing unjust structures of society - systems and structures that keep people oppressed - is a big part of my role. Trafficking/slavery more personal sin/experience. Systemic, result systems - societal structures this Mark talks about - deeply built how do life. Like sexualisation culture, feeds system objectifies women/children; Like pornography consumption –rocketed COVID, global lockdowns; Like insatiable desire West cheaper &cheaper products buy. These things deeply ingrained in society, key drivers trafficking slavery.

If we are to see freedom for the prisoners and the oppressed set free, we need to be addressing, transforming, changing, these societal structures that are keeping them captive.

For me, some examples of what this involves include being part of a team looking how address increase pornography use, not only mission workers, church members but also local communities. Yes personal sin, dealt with personal level, but fed huge global industry/system, this unjust structure drives HT . And that needs to be transformed. And messy and horrible though it is, that means engaging with it, understanding it, and seeking to journey with those caught up in it.

I'm also part of a group identifying the unjust structures being caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and figuring out how we can mitigate their impact upon the most vulnerable in our communities. Throughout the world, widespread unemployment, economic downturn, death, illness, education disruptions, all caused by the pandemic, are causing massive social impacts, amongst which is a huge increase in human trafficking. How do help our teams protect the vulnerable and bring Christ's transforming justice?

Outside SIM, Global network AT leaders, involved AT more 10 years, what need to do differently within the global AT movement. What are systemic challenges world, these unjust structures, that are feeding global culture exploitation and slavery? And how do we tackle them? How do we engage with them? How do we transform them?

I love this systemic layer of my role. Because although addressing unjust structural stuff has no easy answers or quick fixes, it is this layer that shapes how society functions. And it is only when transformation occurs at this level that we will see permanent change.

2. to challenge violence of every kind

Human rights campaigner Ginetta Sagan once said "Silence in the face of injustice is complicity with the oppressor" and this is the uncomfortable truth in this mark.

To challenge - another strong verb that means

- to dispute (argue, debate, discuss, disagree with) the truth or validity of something, especially as being unjust, or unacceptable.
- to take exception to; call in question:

I read this definition and think "how can I challenge the truth about something if I stay silent?" How can I challenge violence of every kind if I don't speak out against it?

This mark is telling us that as believer's, we need to dispute the validity of violence of any kind, we need to debate it, discuss it, argue against it, take exception to it, to call it into question.

To do this we have to speak up.

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV)

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

When we speak up for the rights of the vulnerable, it means stating our position, saying enough is enough, we disagree with this injustice and it needs to change.

To challenge means we cannot stay silent and we cannot stay neutral.

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.

[Desmond Tutu](#)

Around the world, violence of every kind has erupted as a result of stresses and pressure brought by pandemic. We are seeing huge increases in : societal violence, civil violence, racial violence, gender-based violence, sexual violence, family violence....

And this Mark of Mission says we need to challenge this. We need to speak up against injustice and violence. Defend the rights of the vulnerable. We can't do this by staying silent or by staying neutral.

3. and pursue peace and reconciliation.

Our verse of the day, Amos 5:24 " Instead (of noisy hymns of praise) I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living"

Sometimes justice does come like a flood, knocking everything out of its way and bringing justice strong and fast and sometimes leaving damage in its wake.

But most often, justice, the justice the Lord says he wants, comes like a river....like an endless river, a never failing stream.

In Old Testament days, like when Amos was writing, the river was the source of everything, it was the source of life. Not only life-giving water but it was where the most fertile ground was, where the richest food grew. Where people and animals and communities came for refreshment, for healing, for restoration, for rest, to find peace, to fill up supplies and get the sustenance they needed to continue their journey. **Justice for Amos was like a river, a stream....gentle, peaceful, life giving, restorative, healing place of relationship and community.**

And this is what this Mark of mission is telling us to be, a healing place of peace and community. And not just to aspire to....but to pursue...

When we pursue something, it takes effort, and focus, and determination. It means

1. To follow in an effort to overtake or capture; chase.
2. To take action regarding something or carry on an established activity or project.

And we are to do this, we are to pursue peace, the peace of God that passes all understanding. And reconciliation, with each other, with those we have hurt, and with Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

Mark 4 is big ask, its an exciting ask, but I want to encourage you church to press into it. To seek to transform the unjust structures in our society. To speak up against violence of every kind, and to fix your eyes on Jesus, as you pursue His peace and reconciliation.

Church as I close, my hugest thanks to you for your ongoing support of me, and of my ministry with For Freedom. Anti-trafficking is a difficult space to serve in, and I cannot do it without the support of people and churches like you, and for that I am so very grateful.

If you would like to sign up for my very irregular prayer letter, or find out more about For Freedom, there is information at the welcome desk.

May God bless you as you bring transformation and justice to our broken and hurting world.