

## Latimer's Curate

This curate has recently become aware of a strong current in the Anglican Church. This current holds that our role is to liberate people from all forms of oppression. This becomes the reason for our existence in the church and the existence of the church in the world. As a minister of the Anglican Church I never realised that I needed to learn how to be a liberator - someone who saves and frees people from the oppression that they are under. A cross between Pope Francis, Desmond Tutu and Karl Marx.

Curates have many things to learn. For instance, how to do a baptism without dropping the baby, how to understand the lectionary and how to preach without sending people to sleep. However, one thing of which I was pretty certain was that the main thing I needed to do was help people to restore their relationship with God. Ultimately, that is something that only God can do but I can play a part in helping people hear the good news about Jesus and grow in their relationship with God. This is about telling others about the true liberator and saviour who will rescue them from their bondage to sin and death.

So where does this focus on the being a liberator come from? Firstly, as New Zealanders we love to go for the underdog, whether it is on the sports field or in a film where the hero comes out against the odds. What is it that makes this desire to cheer for the underdog so strong? Maybe it is the way we see ourselves as a small nation, an underdog on the world stage succeeding against the odds. Maybe also it is the general lack of respect for authority that seems inherent in our culture and the underdog is generally seeking to break out against some greater power. I think that this love of the underdog is one of the reasons that our church loves to stand up for injustice and speak out against social problems.

Secondly and more importantly, this desire rightly flows from the care and concern that God has for the weak and vulnerable. Time after time we see in the scriptures a God who crafts laws so that Israel would not neglect the weak and vulnerable and we see God condemning those that do. We also see Jesus speak strongly about the need to radically change the way that we express God's love to those around us, especially those whom the world sees as unlovely.

However, this was not all Jesus spoke about. He came into the world to save humanity from its enslavement to sin. To stop the vulnerable from being preyed on by the real oppressors; Satan and death. This is the only thing that makes sense of the story that unfolds in the Bible. God is certainly concerned about injustice towards the weak and vulnerable, and acts to ensure that justice is done. However, in that action he addresses the root of the problem - our sin. Injustice and oppression will only be finally dealt with when sin is gone. Without sin being dealt with then any solution to injustice and oppression is only temporary. And as Jesus said "What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life?"

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Yes, as a church we need to be speaking out against injustice and oppression. There are clear commands in the bible to love our neighbours and a mandate to care for the weak and the vulnerable from both the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, God has shown his love and compassion for such people by sending his Son to die for us (for we are all weak and vulnerable before him). And yet this should not become the interpretive lens with which we view the Bible or our Christianity. Otherwise, we will make decisions about our lives and our ministries based not on a holistic reading of the word of God but on our personal perceptions of oppression and injustice.

We need to be most concerned about telling people about the good news of Jesus and what he has done on the cross and what that means for them. We need our church to be committed to evangelism just as it is committed to social justice. We rightly spend central money on coordinating social justice. But we must also have the same commitment to evangelism, so that all might be freed from the greatest oppressor of all.