**Isabelle Hamley**

**Embracing Justice**

*Summary of Section 4*

**Justice and Incarnation** *Restoring the image of God*

Justice in Christian imagination is incarnational, rooted in time and place and linked to stories of creation, Imagio Dei and that image twisted by brokenness and sin. Sin and injustice damage us, to seek justice is to seek to restore the image of God.

**The centrality of the Incarnation**

Creation speaks of abundant life, as does Jesus (John10.10) but this is linked to God, the source of the image of God, or risk creating an idol, based on human desires and values alone.

God ‘walks with’ throughout the Hebrew story – and goes further in Jesus Christ, the word become flesh and pitches their tent, fully present even in the fragility and transience of humanity. Much of Hebrew scripture concerned with living out “vocation of justice and righteousness.” Incarnation is part of this covenantal story – the whole Jesus story, not just death and resurrection, seeing how Jesus relates, interacts, lives and challenges culture, his engagement with the pain of the world.

Philosophers and theologians often ‘dis-incarnate’ and abstract, yet all being is embodied – real people, real pain, real justice – everyone must be seen and heard. Their stories, their realities matter if justice is going to be true justice. Justice and mercy need to go hand in hand – taking the whole of society’s responsibility for creating systems which create the human beings within them. Taking account of human fallibility and brokenness included the judged and the judging.

**Darren’s Story**

Isabelle shares a story of ‘Darren’ who couldn’t perceive his own value or imagine any other way of being than his own traumatized, criminalized existence. Until genuine compassion broke in, in the form of a prison visitor from the Church, who gave Darren a new way of seeing, and how he (whilst taking responsibility for his actions) was so caught up in a broken, oppressive system. Darren goes on to be transformed by a church which trusted, embraced, and listened to him – a partnership of well-being which has led to his own journey to being ordained a priest and serving others.

**Questions**

1. Does anything speak to you in Darren’s story?
2. What questions or challenges does this story prompt?
3. Do you know – or how could you get to know – someone like Darren?

**Learning to see**

Exodus’ turning point – people cry out, God hears and sees their oppression. But seeing is a theme before that in scripture – Hagar declares God ‘El-roi;, the God who sees. When excluded from Abraham and Sarah’s story, Hagar is still seen and heard.

**The woman with a loss of blood and Jairus’ Daughter**

Jesus attentiveness to the whole person seen in the familiar story of the woman with a haemorrhage in Mk 5.21-43. Two halves to this story – one, urgency, crisis, acute need the other chronic pain always there, never urgent. The story has much injustice present – unfairness of illness and who afflicted, access to treatment, discrimination. Also time adds to sense of injustice – making it look like Jesus cannot heal both women.

The story seems to offer question (as has pandemic) as ‘who to prioritize for treatement’ – a child’s life is at stake, a woman’s long held pain. Jesus is not pressed by the urgency of one over the other but makes time for an unnamed, excluded woman. He sees her, hears her, and the fuller healing comes perhaps from that hearing and seeing not just the end of physical symptoms. She tells Jesus ‘the whole truth’ and Jesus commends her for her faith.

Then he goes, in person, to Jairus’ – making the influential and powerful man wait, challenging social order and expectation. He heals, then, in secret – refusing ‘to let a child’s life become a spectacle’ There is in this story an equalizing of status, the high-profile Jairus is told not to tell anyone, the excluded woman is lauded for her faith.

**From seeing to doing**

The story is part of the continuity of justice in Hebrew story. Practical rather than theoretical paying attention to marginalized voices, rooted in genuine encounter and forming a ‘robust vision for justice’ The true ‘other’ is not the woman, but Jesus who turns everything around.

Encountering otherness, painful, risky, stepping into the unknown, and being willing to lose control of a situation, but allow others to inform our response. Not endless relativism, but ‘listening and openness’ whilst we may still hold on to our core beliefs and practices. Humility, knowing we don’t have the full picture until informed by others.

Good Samaritan offers further insight – answer to ‘who is my neighbour’ becomes ‘the other’. When we read we often put ourselves as the Samaritan, but the perspective Jesus encourages is to think of ourselves as the injured person. “It is the despised, shunned Samaritan’s voice that is needed to help you grow towards deeper justice.”

“Who is visible or invisible, heard or not, victim or oppressor, self or other, is complex to identify.” Often intersecting characteristics locate people at certain places in any given context – balance of power and powerlessness is nuanced and complicated.

Scripture places responsibility on powerful to listen well, but reminds us that we all have blind spots, people we don’t or won’t see – the ‘other’. Samaritan story is meant to make us feel uncomfortable, to challenge our perception. It is concerned with ‘macro, rather than micro, justice; it aims to help us think of how to build communities that constantly keep themselves open to developing and extending justice further.”

**Questions**

1. Who comes to mind immediately when you think about justice? Who comes to mind when you think about injustice?
2. How could you find out who may be invisible or unheard in your local community? What about the invisible and unheard in the news, nationally and internationally?
3. Who is ‘other’ to you? Who might you need to learn to see as a neighbour?

**Seeing the big picture**

Good Samaritan challenges binary thinking – the other as a negative version of ourselves.

People are, esp on social media, reduced to one aspect of their life or belief, and soon blocked. How do we hold one another accountable without writing any off?

West concerned with justice and discrimination, passion for diversity and equity. But going further, *how* do we engage in such conversations, and hold one another accountable without superficiality or arrogance. How can all be humanized.

Jesus gives example after example – accountability and grace. With who he choose to spend time with, eat with, speak to. He critiques, but on basis of engagement and understanding. He holds all to account, religious leaders, those caught in offense, tax collectors, those seeking healing. Jesus invites them into a better life. Others treated sin as ‘contagious’, “Jesus, instead practised contagious holiness.”

Jesus refuses binaries, and encourages to look at the ‘macro’ – of God entering the perspective of humanity in Christ. Not condoning failings, but encouraging grace and justice.

Our calling – to see life through the eyes of ‘the other’. Whole scripture story is ‘grappling towards justice’ “a grappling that involves challenge, bitter argument, proactive listening to unheard voices, and a ready suspicion against the perspectives of the powerful, because it is easy for the powerful to impose their own perspective and erase that of others.” Also a wider framework of self-awareness, knowledge of own imperfections and need for transformation.

We often bring unconscious thought to our own perspectives – including our view of Jesus. Our images of Jesus reflect our own unconscious bias. In a room of students Isabelle showed various pictures of Jesus from different times and cultures – the Global North students chose ‘love/acceptance/inclusion” based images, the Global South “crucifixion and clearing the temple” – two sides of justice, justice-sin and acceptance.

**Questions**

1. What would ‘contagious holiness’ look like in the bitter world of current public debates, particularly online?
2. What are your favourite stories or sayings of Jesus? Why?
3. Which do you find difficult? Why do you think that is?

**Pursuing justice in the refugee camps of Lebanon**

Isabelle shares an interview she did with Izdihar Kassis, a Christian leader and founder of Together for the Family in Lebanon, where there are more refugees hosted per capita than anywhere else in the world except Aruba.

They hose a monthly meeting for teenage girls, many of whom are expected to marry at 13/14. One girl burnt herself to death after being blackmailed having been filmed in the bath, she stole money to pay blackmail and was beaten and scarred by her parents, abandoned she ender her life.

The group supports by asking ‘what can we do for you/” and listens and responds to requests from these young women. Giving self-esteem and practical help. They do the work of advocacy for these girls, support, and build relationships. They remind the girls they are cared about, and that God loves them.

Together for the Family (TFF) seeks to ‘transform society through the next generation’, breaking cycle of poverty and violence. Offering a different imagination. Vision starts with love, and acceptance, and listening, and empowering.

**Questions**

1. What would standing in solidarity with the churches in Lebanon look like?
2. Could you, your church, home group, commit to pray regularly for a group of Christians who may feel forgotten and abandoned?
3. How can you find out who is invisible or unheard in your local community?

**Humanizing the other**

How far can image of ‘embracing’ go? In stories we have heard, those embracing were not those who had caused harm. Good Samaritan more complex since prejudice was held against them, but they did the embracing. Easier to embrace when we are one step removed – what do we do when it involves those who have hurt, or committed evil?

Biblical justice is rarely individual but directed at communities and nations. Communities are addressed such as in parable of sheep and goats, not an ‘individual responsibility’ but a collective one. Nations have a whole range of those who make them up, some powerful, some not, some oppressed, some oppressors. Yet justice is a communal vocation, undue burden not to be placed on fragile, hurt, individuals; makes it possible to love those who have failed before they are ready to acknowledge and make amends.

Community justice ‘does not mean it forgoes judgement’ – all are humanized, victims become more than ‘those needing help’ but those alongside whom the community stands, heard, recognized; offenders/oppressors are acknowledged as not just their crimes, but equally broken and needing to be held responsible in community. Acknowledges complexity and connection. Stories should be heard, unvarnished, and in some cases those who hear them should share back what they have heard without interpretation or judgement.

Humanizing applies to all levels of justice and enables individual complex situations to be addressed – as two sides will rarely agree on what justice looks like.

Mercy and forgiveness are essential, restitution and rebuilding the aim. “Forgiveness is writing off the possibility of a better past for the sake of a better future.”

1. Think of someone you profoundly disagree with.
2. Could you ask them to tell you their story, uninterrupted, and find another person to retell that story to, without inserting any of your own judgements within it?
3. How does this experience feel?