

## HILLSBOROUGH ANNIVERSARY MEMORIAL SERVICE 15 APRIL 2016

(Check against delivery)

When I came to the city 18 years ago as one of its pastors I was asked to lead the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service. I saw then the grief for the 96 was like an open wound. A wound infected by feelings of injustice and made all the more sore by anger and despair. A wound that would not heal.

But I could also see that out of that pain was born a dignity, a defiance and a determination that one day people would be held to account for the death of your loved ones.

For so many of the families, friends and survivors of that terrible day this has become your life's work. God knows that you would not have chosen such a responsibility. But you wouldn't have had it any other way, such is the worth of those you love to this day – the 96.

What's more, as you've shown so nobly over the years the passion for justice is an irrepressible force of human nature.

When after the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service I was asked to chair the Hillsborough Independent Panel I accepted the responsibility because for me in the end faith is nothing if it's not about believing in a God of Truth and Justice.

The whole Panel and Secretariat, each and every one, were welded together by a determination to disclose first to the families all the documents we could find. And on the day we published our report the response of the Prime Minister in Parliament was to make a double apology firstly for the way the State had failed to protect your loved ones and secondly for the subsequent denigration of the 96.

The quashing of the verdicts of the original inquests by the High Court has led to new inquests, the longest in British Legal history.

Over the last two years, at the Families' request, I've chaired a Forum where they've been able to meet regularly with the investigators.

As much as anybody I've observed them closely. I want you to know they're neither vengeful nor vindictive. Few can fully imagine just how emotionally and physically drained they are after 27 long years, which is why your support to them is such a transfusion of hope and strength into their lives.

And their hope has remained constant – the hope for truth, the hope for accountability, the hope for justice so that the 96, your 96, our 96 might with you rest in peace one day.

And I know that they want this justice not just for themselves, not just for Liverpool as a city, they want these things for the whole nation. Because the search for justice is important for everybody in our country.

The story of your struggle has been about challenging the patronising disposition of unaccountable power.

You hold out to all who've been wronged and dealt with unjustly the hope that injustices can be exposed, that wrongs can be righted and that ordinary people can in the end hold to account those with power. That will be the enduring legacy of the 96.

It's said that when Abraham Lincoln died a friend standing nearby whispered, "Now he belongs to the Ages". So too do the 96. The struggle for justice that bears their names will go down in history. The 96 belong to the ages. And we will never cease to remember them.

Every day for 3 months before we published the Panel's Report I read in my daily prayers a story Jesus told about a widow who kept coming to the authorities pleading for justice. But the Court wouldn't listen to her. Yet the widow wouldn't give up, and kept coming and pleading, "Grant me justice" until in the end she wore them down. Jesus could have been telling that parable about the families of the 96.

My friends, for you too justice has been a long time coming. Too long. For the last 27 years the cry has gone up in this stadium "Justice for the 96". To that plea may we soon be able to add a simple prayer, "For the 96 - peace at last".

So may you their families, friends, survivors and fans hold fast. Until one day very soon we shall all be able to say, "For the 96 – Justice and Peace - at last".

END

The Right Reverend James Jones

740 Words

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