

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY    DECEMBER 18<sup>TH</sup> 2019

Good Morning.

The evening after the Election I was singing Carols in York Minster. All that day commentators had been talking about the seismic shifts in the North of England. The Minster in York, soon to be the venue for the installation of Stephen Cottrell as the 98<sup>th</sup> Archbishop of York, was built at a time when the North was a centre of power. Now it's a region, still proud, but aware that the seat of power has floated from the Ouse to the Thames.

The political rhetoric is now about fairness and how to cut the cake more evenly across the whole nation.

Last year I was the guest at a prize-giving in a large comprehensive school. In my speech I told the young people that I wasn't going to encourage them to follow their dreams; nor was I going to tell them to be the best possible person they could be. Instead, I would give them a message that might not make them famous or rich. I urged them simply - as they went through life – to be fair, and so make the world a fairer place. I was taken aback by the way they applauded the message.

For 25 years I've worked as a bishop in the North of England, first in Hull and then in Liverpool, to remedy the lack of fairness in those parts of the North.

When those in business questioned my involvement I said that as a pastor I was committed to people's welfare. I also acknowledged the pastoral value of their own work because a successful business creates wealth and security for families. A fairly paid job is the best form of welfare.

But fairness can be an abstract concept. We've a right to ask what it looks like in a material world.

The carols we've begun to hear are full of subliminal messages.

They're about the values of Heaven infiltrating the earth - about how once in royal David's city, in a cattle shed, the Lord of Heaven began a life on earth 'with the poor and mean and lowly'.

They're about how in the bleak mid-winter 'earth stood hard as iron' as they waited for God to come.

They're all about God in a material world.

And when this 'holy child' grew up, travelling from North to South and East to West, he left a foot print on the soul of all who followed, and a message, which, roughly paraphrased, goes,

"Be fair – and everything else will fall into place"

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE.