

ARCHBISHOP HOLGATE CAROL SERVICE AT YORK MINSTER

You sometimes hear people say that Christmas is just for children. Well, it is and it isn't! It isn't because although adults often behave badly God still loves them and promises them peace on earth and for eternity through forgiving their sins. But Christmas IS for children for this very special reason: the Christmas story is about how God himself became a child. Jesus shows us that God was once a young person! Sometimes children can be made to think that it's only when they're grown up that they really matter. Yet Jesus didn't have to wait until he was an adult to be the Son of God. He was God's Son and special as a baby, as a child, as a young person. And so are you!

One of the very first sentences that a child comes out with is 'That's not fair'. If the sweets are not shared out evenly or you miss a turn in a game or someone adds the score up wrongly a cry will go up loudly, 'That's not fair!'. It seems we're all hard-wired to spot when there's an injustice especially when it affects US. That's how God has made us. What's special about God's Kingdom is that Jesus inspires us to shout out 'That's not fair!' not just when injustice affects us but also when it affects other people.

Jesus was born into a world that was very unfair. As we've already seen tonight Herod was a monster. He tried to get rid of Jesus by murdering hundreds of children. So when Jesus grew up and was urging his followers to welcome into their lives the Kingdom of God he told them very clearly this message, 'Never neglect justice and the love of God'.

Not so long ago I spoke at a school prize-giving. I began by saying: I'm not here tonight to tell you to follow your dreams or even to be the best possible person that you can be. What I'm about to tell you will not make you rich or famous or popular. But as you go through life: in all your dealings simply be fair and so make the world a fairer place.

I was taken aback when the young people started clapping. It filled me with hope. You see, when you hear about all the terrible things that are happening in the world you can feel really down and low. You can feel paralysed because there's nothing you can do about it. But there is something that you can do as young people of the Kingdom. Wherever you are, whatever you do, just be fair and in so doing this, time and again, you will make the world a fairer place.

I don't know if you ever watched the Coronation Service of King Charles. It began with a young person saying,

'Your Majesty, as children of the Kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of Kings.'

The King replied,

'In his name and after his example I come not to be served but to serve.'

Welcoming the Kingdom and serving Jesus the King of Kings is about 'acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God as a child and as a young person.

People loved hearing Jesus tell them stories so let me end with one.

Imagine a rich relative invites you and your family to go on a luxury cruise with them. There are just 2 conditions: you're never to ask where you're going or when you're going to get there! It's a mystery cruise. You get to Liverpool and there standing there on the River Mersey is this luxury ship. You're shown to your cabins on A Deck and soon you're in the sunshine.

After 6 weeks the thought has begun to cross your mind, 'I wonder where we're going and when we might get there ..'. But you've made a promise and keep the questions to yourself.

After 6 months you can no longer keep the questions to yourself. You greet your host and ask him.

'Is there a problem? Cabin not comfortable? Food not to your liking?'

'No! It's all wonderful'.

'Then eat, drink, be merry!'

And you do your best!

After 10 years the dream cruise has become a nightmare. You scream at your host, 'Where? When?'

Ridiculous? No, not really. Here we are on this planet Earth like a ship cruising through space and every one at least once in their life wonders about the destiny and the timing of the journey.

Well, you say to your host, 'How many are on this ship?'

'A thousand'

'What? It feels like only a couple of hundred.'

'Yes, well it is only two hundred here on A Deck. But in the hold of the ship for the last ten years are 800 and they've been on bread and water.'

Ridiculous? No, not really. Here we are on this ship called planet Earth hurtling through space and 20 per cent of us are on A Deck while 80 percent live in very different circumstances.

Jesus, the great and humble child of the Kingdom said, 'Never neglect the justice and the love of God.'

So as you go through life simply be fair in all your dealings and so make the world a fairer place.

The Right Reverend Bishop James Jones KBE