



ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF JOHANNESBURG

PASTORAL LETTER

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Dear Saints

I greet you with love as fellow Christians who follow a Messiah whose death for all on the Cross we have so recently commemorated and with joy because we know that Christ has risen and remains connected to us and this turbulent world in which we live.

When I think of those with whom I am in contact, they are not always people with whom I would *choose* to be in touch with or encounter - beggars at the traffic lights, those living rough on the street or in a park, most of them homeless, come to mind. As the economy continues to contract, their number steadily increase.

Following the Palm Sunday procession that I led around the Cathedral to draw attention to the filthy state of our city, I was struck by the reaction of the MMC for environment, Jack Sekwaila, who blamed homeless people for the filthy state of the city as a result of them searching rubbish bins and skips to find cans, bottles and other materials to sell as scrap. He also accused the homeless of destroying infrastructure in the city. Yes, indeed, the homeless are with us, but they are frequently despised, regarded as outcasts and a nuisance – a target for blame.

However, the MMC managed to dispatch a team hours after the video of the march went viral on social media, and the area was cleaned. One has to wonder why it took me leading a procession on Palm Sunday for Council to do its work? As I said then, God has put the mayor and others in their positions to do the job they are charged to do as servants of the city, but Sekwaila's comments brought to mind the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus.

Not many people liked Zacchaeus; many despised him, since he was a tax collector and wealthy. Nevertheless, he was curious to see Jesus and we know climbed up a tree to see Jesus pass by. Jesus, well aware that it would give rise to much grumbling from the crowd and authorities, looked up into the tree, and told Zacchaeus to come down for he was going to stay with him as a house guest. The point I want to make from this parable is that however much the Zacchaeus of Jesus' day and the homeless of our day are despised, for whatever reason, Christ visits with all of us, comes to meet you and me, wherever we are and whatever our station in life.

It is a wonderful story of love and respect and hospitality for it did not matter to Jesus that Zacchaeus was despised; what was important was that he was a person, like you and me and the many homeless and displaced in this city which is the home of our Diocese.

Everyone who lives in the city should be regarded as a guest of the city and should be given the respect one would give personally to a guest in one's home. This may require a major attitudinal shift in the personal views of many, including our local municipal officials but it is necessary because it affects not only the homeless, but people from other countries and those who are marginalised and excluded and judged. If the approach of Jesus were to be adopted by our mothers and fathers who control the fortunes of this so-called world-class African city of Johannesburg we would see a kinder environment emerging - and a cleaner one as we understand the need to clean up the mess we ourselves make.

It is important for us as Christians in general, and Anglicans in the Diocese of Johannesburg in particular, to ask ourselves whether we regard the homeless people, who are also made in the image of God, as our guests. I know many of our parishes actively do so, and I applaud them. I also know that many parishes are deeply committed to a clean and green environment, and I applaud them also. Do not rest on your laurels!

The challenge to us all is simply this: do not litter. I went public on Palm Sunday in a manner I rarely do. It certainly had an impact, but because I went public does not mean that as citizens in general we can ignore our Christian responsibilities.

All must be responsible to the environment and the areas in which we reside doing our civic duty and reminding our elected officials of theirs - providing adequate refuse facilities for their residents, so that people living in the inner city do not feel the need to deposit their rubbish on the pavements.

It also means that everyone should pay their rates and taxes so that the city does not face the additional task of getting people to pay unpaid accounts for services that have already been rendered. The culture of non-payment in some sectors of our society is to be deplored. Each of us should understand that God has put us where we are to make a difference. If we make a mess of the city in which we live, we make no difference. All that happens is that it will seem as if we have no self-love, no self-esteem and no pride in our city.

Our city and country remind me of a ship that is perilously close to some jagged rocks which will destroy the vessel if it hits them. Every day, unemployment rises. We see its impact. We hear of road rage. We hear of more corruption by our leaders. We often fail to be shocked by non-delivery of services and a dereliction of duty by our political leaders.

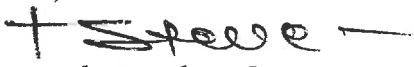
There are many good people in South Africa who are trying to make a difference. We need to be faithful in calling out those who are rocks in a turbulent ocean that threaten to tear us apart, and we need to join those who are committed to making our society into a wholesome, kind, respectful and gentler place in which we can all live together, guests in God's world.

That was the great dream of 1990 when Nelson Mandela was released, was it not? It was certainly the rainbow nation of which Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke in 1994 when we gained our freedom. Surely, as Christians we can't carry on regardless as we see our country heading for the rocks?

What does the Lord require of us? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our Risen God who saves us.

Let us be faithful in the small things so that bigger and better things will happen.

Yours, in love and service.


The Right Revd Dr Steve Moreo
Bishop of Johannesburg

