



Go Deeper, 8th October 2023

Poverty.

Dear Miners,

Outside my house, new gas pipes are being laid. One morning, we turned on the tap to find there was no water. A digger had smashed the water mains. Totally unprepared for this I had only the water in my kettle. Nothing was provided for us until midnight. The gas was turned off too, as it was leaking into the watery trench.

I was frustrated at every angle – no shower, no way of cooking, no way of washing up or doing laundry - even a supermarket shop was impossible as the driveway was blocked by the gas board's machinery! It felt as though everything I wanted to do was being thwarted. Trying to get hold of the various utilities on the phone took ages.

On Sunday I used the example of two 12-year-olds (Bill and Ben) whose experience of a normal school day is vastly different. Ben's financial poverty permeates every aspect of his day– beginning with the fact his electricity was cut off, meaning he has no clean uniform to wear, his phone is not charged, his alarm fails and he is punished for arriving late having had no breakfast... If you picture Ben's emotions and behaviour as a bottle of fizzy pop, with every little pressure, that bottle gets shaken up until it will inevitably explode. Ben is not going to function or flourish whilst he's hungry, stressed, embarrassed and angry.

At the end of my frustrating day without utilities or transport, we walked to the pub and had a hot meal in cozy surroundings. Neighbours left bottled water on our doorstep and offered the use of their car. It struck me how incredibly fortunate I usually am – how cossetted, even, that after one short day of frustration, we could end with a lovely meal and the knowledge that things would be ok in the morning. It left me grateful, but conscious of my privileges.

Rather than questions, this week maybe we could begin by prayerfully contemplating our day to day life – what we take for granted, what we have not fully appreciated, what we are grateful for or frustrated by....

- In your mind's eye, go slowly through your average day from waking up until bed time. (You might pray a thank you for every blessing you discover.)
- Go through the day again, but this time imagine the stumbling blocks poverty, injustice and bureaucracy might put in your way at various points – e.g. what would happen if your electricity was cut off? Or you had no bus fare? Notice how you feel. Pray for those whose days are filled with stress and frustration brought on by poverty



- How might others react to you as you go through the day? How long before your feelings start to leak out – or even explode? Perhaps ask for forgiveness for times where you have judged others or failed to understand.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said that Christians “shouldn't just be pulling people out of the river. We should be going upstream to find out who is pushing them in”.

I am not sure exactly what going upstream for you or I might look like, but I suspect that must begin with starting to understand a little more deeply exactly how stressful and dangerous poverty is.

Every Blessing

Lizzie Reynolds

Deeper Stuff

The term “Liberation Theology” was coined in 1973 by a Peruvian RC Priest, Fr Gustavo Gutierrez, who saw liberation as political and social – the end to the causes of poverty and injustice. Liberation would free the marginalised/oppressed from, “those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity” as well as restoring the relationships between God and humanity and humanity with itself.

Liberation theology's key principle is, “the preferential option for the poor.” This is a commitment to prioritize the material needs of the poor, as well as their knowledge, experience and spirituality - A principle grounded in the conviction that God is not neutral but is always on the side of those who most struggle to live.

The story of the Israelites being freed from poverty and enslavement in Egypt is one that has long been a source of hope and inspiration to those who are marginalised and experiencing oppression – the Spirituals sung by slaves on US cotton or sugar plantations being just one example of this. The singers were not singing purely about freedom from sin.

- If you were to read the Bible through the lens of someone experiencing poverty, what stories or passages or people might you turn to for hope and inspiration - and why?
- More broadly, where in how you practice your Christianity might someone experiencing poverty find hope that Jesus cares?
- What dangers or pitfalls of might lurk around preaching a message that poverty is something God is opposed to?