

## 7. Countercultural Mercy



### GATHERING SPACE

I far prefer a Church that has had a few accidents to a Church that has fallen sick from being closed. Go out! Go out! Jesus stands at the door and knocks. (Pope Francis)

Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds. The time has come to pay renewed attention to reality and the limits it imposes; this in turn is the condition for a more sound and fruitful development of individuals and society. (Pope Francis: *Laudato Si'*)

- > In what ways is the message of mercy countercultural?
- > Pope Francis is writing about the need for common action on climate change and the environment in *Laudato Si'*. What other areas of society need a more merciful approach?

### FROM THE SCRIPTURES

**Elijah lived in a shifting world, threatened by abusive power and a culture of death. Isolated in his commitment to truth, he felt like the last remnant of the faithful, surrounded by voices of unbelief (Simmonds). In this way he is an exemplar of those who stand against the prevailing trends: those who stand for truth; those who stand with those made poor.**

But Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat."

He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19)

### FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

- > What sustains you when life's pressures become too much?
- > Where does 'mercy' come into conflict with other priorities in your board experience?

## PRAYER

Be with us as we meet as a board today.  
Guide our decisions and our visioning for the future.  
May we be prepared to challenge restrictive and exclusive mindsets as we build more merciful communities.

**Help us build an open Church which stands against the culture of individualism and greed**

*Living God, hear our prayer*

**Help us close doors against violence and injustice**

*Living God, hear our prayer*

**Help us challenge a culture that devalues the human person – the disabled, the elderly, the refugee, the unborn child**

*Living God, hear our prayer*

**Empower us to stand in solidarity with the environment and all of creation**

*Living God, hear our prayer*

**Remind us constantly that true mercy demands justice for all**

*Living God, hear our prayer*

**Give us courage, in this Year of Mercy, to open the doors of our hearts to recognise the God in all**

*Living God, hear our prayer*

*(Pause for any special intentions)*

## FOR THE END OF THE MEETING

When we want to shut our eyes  
to the culture of economic rationalism, border  
protection and corporate greed  
Remind us, God of Justice  
That mercy does not judge  
It does not discriminate  
It does not take account of skin colour, political  
views or bank balances  
It seeks the best for all  
Because all of creation is a reflection of You.  
Make us ever sensitive to the call of your name  
echoing in the quiet places where you wait  
for us.  
Amen

When the Church attests to God's mercy it  
proclaims the deepest truth about God, that  
God is love and is ever forgiving, and the  
deepest truth about humans, that God is  
always with us. (Pope Francis: *Misericordiae  
Vultus*)

Illustration from Sieger Köder 'Art and Inspiration'. Bible: Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition. Simmonds, G. *The Closeness of God* (2013), p72. Pope Francis: *Laudato Si'*, p97. Pope Francis: *The Church of Mercy* (2014), p22.

COMPASSION JUSTICE RESPECT HOPE



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