

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**‘If you want peace,**  
**you must work for justice’**  
**The 3rd Rubin Phillip Peace Lecture**  
**11 November 2011;**

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Scripture says, ‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.’

May I speak in the name of God, who delights to teach us his ways, so we may walk in paths of righteousness and peace.

Dear Bishop Ruben, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, dear friends, it is a great honour to be with you. I am deeply grateful for the invitation to give the Third Bishop Ruben Phillip Peace Lecture.

My theme is ‘If you want peace, you must work for justice.’

Bishop Ruben has embodied the reality of this assertion for many, many years. His life is itself a sermon that speaks far more loudly than any words I could offer.

Yet, you have nonetheless asked me here to share some words – so let me begin with words of Jesus.

As St John records, the first words of the risen Christ to the disciples in the upper room are these: ‘Peace be with you.’

God’s peace is at the heart of Scripture.

The New Testament Greek word for peace is the same word used in the Septuagint, to translate the Old Testament Hebrew word ‘Shalom.’

It is to the concept shalom we must look, if we want to understand what peace really means.

The shalom of God goes far beyond those thin meanings of contemporary English which convey a mere lack of active conflict or noisy disturbance.

The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel have shalom in mind, when they denounce political and religious leaders for speaking of ‘Peace, peace’ when ‘there is no peace’ (Jer 6:14, 8:11 Ezek 13:10).

Superficial peace is hypocrisy and worse, when it is not allied with justice.

So bad is the situation, says Jeremiah, that society from top to bottom is consumed with greed for unjust gain, by bribery and immorality; with such a total lack of shame, it is as if people have forgotten how to blush!

God’s shalom does not rest upon external appearances.

It entails comprehensive well-being, through and through, that comes from everything being truly 'all right'.

It comes with healing, wholeness, redemption, reconciliation; and abundant, flourishing, life.

As our readings recounted, shalom is found where war is replaced by just and lasting peace. Weapons are not merely laid aside, but nonetheless readily at hand if once again required. Rather, enduring settlement means all sides are confident that conflict is overcome for good – and swords can become ploughshares.

Shalom is also experienced where love is genuine, evil rejected, and good upheld. It comes in honouring others, generosity towards the needy, hospitality to strangers; through forgiveness, and rejecting cycles of revenge.

It comes through subverting wrongs through acts of kindness. Shalom is the good that overcomes evil.

Peace and justice are merely two sides of the same coin.

Without justice, there cannot be shalom, there cannot be true peace.

Peace demands that justice is done, and seen to be done.

This requires injustice to be brought to light, and named for what it is.

Therefore, I am encouraged by the reported remarks of Deputy President Motlanthe this week, that the Government is considering a public interest defence clause within the Protection of Information Bill.

This is absolutely necessary.

Justice and peace cannot flourish where truth is distorted, suppressed, or subordinated to any interests other than the genuine common good, that reflects shalom.

I am proud to be part of the Press Freedom Commission, set up under the chairmanship of Justice Pius Langa, to review best practice and regulation within the print media.

An effective free press, and the ability of all to speak truth to power, is indispensable to successful constitutional democracy.

I want to underline how the South African Constitution provides an excellent framework, within which every citizen can potentially live with genuine peace and justice.

The overarching objectives of the Constitution's Preamble include the following objectives:

- To 'heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights'
- To 'lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law' and
- To 'improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person'.

There is poetry in that last phrase: 'to free the potential of each person'.

It echoes the fundamental purposes of creation and salvation, which is, in the words of Jesus, that we 'might have life, and have it abundantly' (Jn 10:10).

Therefore Christians, faith communities, and all people of good will should wholeheartedly support the fullest possible expression of constitutional democracy, as one very concrete way of promoting justice, true peace and abundant life.

We must also ask what forms justice and shalom peace might take within our own contexts, when made concrete within our communities.

Sometimes it is easier to recognise their absence.

Then we must speak out, and actively oppose all that is unjust.

We must do as Bishop Rubin has done: for example, in relation to land reform, events in Kennedy Road, and Zimbabwe.

Rubin, thank you for showing us

- that people cannot be displaced for political expediency;
- that patronage cannot outweigh human rights,
- that arbitrary detention cannot replace due legal process,
- that we cannot turn blind eyes to international sanctions breaches,
- and that everywhere, wrong must be replaced with right.

Evil must be overcome with good. Therefore, we must provide a positive vision of what we might strive towards.

For, though we must always resist injustice, it will not do only to be 'against'.

We must also be 'for'.

As politicians have found over 17 years of democracy, breaking down is far easier than building up.

The struggle to overcome apartheid was hard, and bitter, and long.

But the struggle to breathe life into the Constitution, so that its heartfelt provisions for the good of all are truly realised by every citizen of our country, is in many ways a greater challenge.

It was never going to be otherwise – especially overcoming past economic injustices and their continuing legacies – particularly in education and employment.

Here I want to sound a warning in relation to yesterday's ANC's judgement against Julius Malema.

Julius Malema is not wrong when he cries out for the youth of today – when he calls for justice in education, in employment, in opportunity, in economic emancipation and empowerment.

But he is wrong in how he thinks these can be achieved; and in leading others to believe in unworkable solutions; and in encouraging protests that reinforce destructive, not constructive, engagement.

We must ask ourselves – what could true shalom look like, for Julius Malema?

What might justice and peace be, for the tens, even hundreds, of thousands like him – that lost generation, who were given an education that left them with qualifications that are little better than useless; and then tossed out into an economy where there are so very few opportunities to make an honest, decent, living, on which they could support a family, and raise children for a better future?

We must promote honest debate around such questions.

It will not do for politicians to promise a brighter future, which they cannot deliver.

Nor will it do to focus their energies on acquiring and retaining power, rather than the tasks for which they are elected.

There must be a sense of urgency in tackling areas of greatest need, where shalom is most lacking.

Justice delayed truly is justice denied.

This urgency must be borne first by government and the public sector, whose primary responsibility it is.

But it must be shared by the rest of us – churches, faith communities, civil society – and by the private sector, the media, academia, everyone.

In a democracy, citizens must ensure that politicians have the great weight of public opinion pressing them to do what is right.

We must demand public accountability; and require good governance not only throughout government, but in all our dealings with one another – for example, as in the King Reports, and in the application of their principles to every area of nation and society.

When it comes to offering more concrete engagement than merely saying 'do better,

do better', Jesus' life and teaching provide many resources for us to understand the shape of shalom for today – at every level from the global to nations, businesses, neighbourhoods and families.

For example, St Luke's gospel records how Jesus, after his baptism, and wrestling in the wilderness to understand the true nature of the promised Messiah, comes to Nazareth.

In the synagogue he reads a passage from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, which might be seen as the 'manifesto' for the Messiah, the Christ (Lk 4:18,19).

He read,

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Jesus addresses whatever impoverishes, whatever imprisons, oppresses or blinds – including whatever blinds us to the truth of how things really are.

He brings true enrichment, freedom, liberty, clear-sightedness.

Churches must meet the challenge of providing deeper theological reflection on economic issues, especially resourcing those who deal with these in their daily lives.

We need only to read our Bibles with fresh eyes, to recognise there are far more verses about money, riches and poverty, economic justice, business ethics and so forth, than about prayer!

So let us intentionally ask, within our own context, what is poverty; and how does this understanding impact on policy-making? ?

How do we promote true values, that are not measured in financial greed, rampant materialism, conspicuous consumption, and credit-card living?

How do we avoid temptations to corruption, and the enrichment of connected individuals and elites, and so forth?

What does economic justice mean for balancing short term gains with long term consequences?

Or for post-colonial Africa, and the future we say we are trying to build?

What does it mean for selling raw mineral resources to China;

or foreign investment in agriculture that results in exported food and biofuels while our own people go hungry?

– two sorts of new economic colonialism in which greedy politicians and business people are too often complicit.

And what about energy usage, and activities that impact upon the climate and other aspects of our environment, including COP-17?

I hope I will see you all – together with your friends, neighbours, colleagues – in the King's Park Stadium on 27 November.

I hope you are collecting signatures to ensure we have a petition of over a million names, calling for clear, just yet ambitious, legally binding commitments, to safeguard our planet's future.

We need better overarching global economics – based on just stewardship of a finite world; and not fatally flawed theories of limitless resources and growth.

We also need a better theology of work – fundamental to human dignity, and part of what it means to bear the image of God who laboured fruitfully in creation.

One of my father's great sayings was: "Ha hona kgomo ya boroko." You cannot get a cow through laziness.

He taught me the value of hard work, to be grateful for opportunities to work, and to earn that cow!

Now it seems that having connections and partying with the right people are the best way to get a cow – though this contributes nothing to growing a healthy economy for the future.

We must understand what promotes and sustains economic injustice.

The Scottish Poverty Truth Commission recently proposed four fundamental causes:

'First, poverty is structural, being systemic to the distribution of power, resources and educational opportunities in society.

Second, it is a form of violence that comes from a deficit of empathy between those who have much and those who have little.

Third, it is intergenerational, with its life-crippling seeds getting passed on in early childhood.

And fourth, it is sustained by blindness to the full humanity of one another, showing it to be a pathology of the rich and not just a deficit of the poor.'

Powerful language.

They go on to say that quick fixes are not enough. We need an evolution in human consciousness and identity, rooted in acknowledging the truth of where we are, and where we need to go.

'Truth' they say, 'is an active power for change. Reconciliation is what brings us back together again in our common humanity ... Truth and reconciliation are about seeking that which gives life. Life as love made manifest.'

Yes indeed – life lived as love made manifest will inevitably be directed towards the justice that brings lasting peace.

Tonight in Pinetown, we are challenged to consider how to make love manifest within this Church and the wider community.

This evening is a fund-raiser to resource your ability to make God's love manifest, promoting justice and peace, in Pinetown.

We need to do more than talk about poverty, and put our money where our mouth is!

As Archbishop, I have encountered poverty on a scale I had never imagined – for all the hardships of my childhood in Alexandra and Pimville.

Yet, in absolute destitution, I have encountered sacrificial giving that blew my mind – and, frankly, left me ashamed of the comforts I enjoy.

Here are two examples.

In Zimbabwe, in October, I gave an apple to a man begging – and then watched him share it with four others.

In Mozambique, in June, a woman gave me two small pigeons – of the four she possessed, she gave me two. And she gave me two newly laid eggs.

I was left speechless by the power of seeing before me what Jesus showed his disciples in the temple.

The widow gave her tiny mite, her few cents – but she gave generously, sacrificially, of all she had.

It was immeasurably greater than any gift offered from our comfortable surplus.

This woman, this man, demonstrated the enormous courage of their faith – their belief that God's shalom will indeed uphold them, if they live with the unconditional generosity which Scripture teaches.

Jesus, who gave his whole life, is our model, our inspiration, and as the one who, in saying to us 'follow me', also empowers us to live like him.

Here again, I want to pay tribute to Bishop Rubin – and to Rose also – for living with great courage, in the face of great personal tragedies; but never afraid to keep on speaking and acting to bring the live-giving, enriching, good news of Jesus Christ wherever there is poverty and oppression.

Rooting ourselves in Jesus – 'putting on Christ', and 'having the mind of Christ' – will help us pursue more fully a life bringing justice and shalom peace.

Christ is our model, for modelling to the world how all should live.

We need not just to say, but to show, for example, what Christ-like leadership means.

Jesus the Messiah, King of kings and Lord of lords, came 'not to be served, but to serve'.

Service, not self-interest, must be our goal too.

Alongside courageously speaking truth to power, and raising our voices on behalf of the voiceless, we must also affirm the powerless.

We must not speak or act in ways that patronise, that imply we know better than others what are their wants and needs and aspirations, or that take over their struggle.

Rather, we must walk with others – listen, support, create space and opportunity, and then stand back.

We must honour others with the dignity and respect we like to receive; and with the humility of knowing that to feed the hungry, tend the sick, house the homeless, clothe the naked, is to serve Jesus Christ himself (Mt 25).

Dear friends, Jesus calls us to follow him, in loving our enemies and blessing those who persecute; in bringing his good news to the poor and proclaiming liberty to the oppressed; in overcoming evil with good.

And, best of all, we are not to do this in our own strength – for, how could we?

Jesus – the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, by whose wounds we are healed – he is the one who guarantees the victory of justice and righteousness; he alone is the Prince of Peace.

So then, as our Old Testament reading exhorted us, O house of Jacob, O people of Pinetown, O citizens of South Africa, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

May it be so. Amen.