

# Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation Links Conference: Pilgrims of Hope

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"Commitment to be a disciple of Jesus comes from the heart and needs to run deep," said Columban, Fr Ray Collier, at the concluding Eucharist celebration of JPIC Links (Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation) conference led by David McLoughlin, Emeritus Fellow of Christian Thought at Newman University.



The religious and associates from JPIC Links (in the room and on zoom) heard David McLoughlin remind us that from the Latin *Jubilare*, we get jubilation, a joyous celebration of a happy event! However, the roots of Jubilee are much older and go back to the foundational memories of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. David went on to explain, the root of Jubilee is "yobel" a 'ram' because a

trumpet made from a ram's horn was used to announce the beginning of the Jubilee year in Joshua 6:1-14. A ram's horn was blown on each Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) and every 50 years it announced the beginning of the Jubilee year.

This is a year of restoration, freedom and celebration made holy by God. Traditionally, it marked a return to the first days after creation, when God saw 'it was very good.' It kept alive the ideal of a free people without the need of elites and hierarchies. As such it represented a radical system of continuing social reform, blocking land and wealth from becoming the sole possession of a wealthy elite at the expense of majority ordinary people.

JPIC links chose 'Pilgrims of Hope' as its this theme in line with Pope Francis' call for Justice and hope in this Jubilee year 2025. We know only too well the need to keep hope alive amidst social and economic turmoil, violence and wars, political uncertainty and a rising oligarchy creating widening gap between rich and poor. The vision of Francis - that during this Jubilee year, the poorest, marginalised, refugee - dispossessed peoples would not be forgotten by those with status, citizenship, wealth and riches. Nor should the 'cry of Earth' be neglected. "The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor." (Laudato Si) Francis says, the **cry of the earth** is no different from the **cry of the poor**. On Saturday night our rich sharing on our current ministries celebrated the many initiatives religious are involved in across the UK.

In the book of Leviticus 25:9-12 "You shall **hallow (make holy) the 50th year**, and **proclaim liberty** throughout the land to **all** its inhabitants; it shall be **a jubilee** for you, when each of you shall return to your property and each of you shall each return to your family..." This was a vision of how the society should conduct itself in an ethical framework - with equality, justice, inclusion, restoring lands, cancelling debts and in particular welcoming those who are strangers/foreigners.

Those who listened to Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth when he unrolled the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah and proclaimed jubilee 'the year of the Lord's favour' (Isaiah 61/Luke 4:18-21) knew what he meant: Good News to the poor; Comfort to the broken-hearted; Sight to the blind; Release to captives; Setting prisoners free.

The implication of this vision is that when God comes close, we are released from all the experiences of limit, enslavement and imprisonment that mark and darken human life. This time of God's blessing is marked by setting oppressed peoples free. Jesus who proclaims the message is an anointed, spirit indwelt, prophet messenger and herald of God. As such, Jesus comes with the divine authority of 'Abba' who sends him. Therefore, God is the source of and the authority for the hope of this vision of an alternative society. Particular concern is shown for the stranger - the migrant and refugee; then the widow and orphan (Exodus 22:21 and Exodus 23:11) We are reminded that 'we were once strangers ourselves.' "You must treat the foreigner living among you as well as you treat your own people and love them as much as you love yourself." (Leviticus 19:34)

Jubilee becomes the central theme for Jesus in Luke's Gospel. It was the law of Jubilee that Jesus echoed in his first sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth, choosing the text of the Prophet Isaiah 61:1-2. When Jesus responds to 'teach us to pray' he begins "Abba" - an intimate, close, familial and every day word 'Daddy.' Our hope lies in a firm belief that the God of domestic mess is the God in our midst - loving, close, merciful, forgiving God who 'gives us our daily bread.' The prayer of Pope Francis is: "During this Jubilee Holy Year 2025, may the light of Christian **hope** illumine every person as a message of God's love **addressed to all!**"

Creation is a divine gift; we are called to enjoy and reverence it. JPIC stresses the 'integrity of creation.' For Jesus the natural world manifested the presence of God's Spirit to those capable of seeing. We reaffirmed our commitment to Pope Francis' call for creation justice spelled out in 'Laudato Si' and 'Laudate Deum.'

We left the conference with renewed hope for ourselves and for the world, in spite of what seems like present hopelessness of social and economic upheaval. Our thanks to David McLoughlin for leading and guiding us this weekend and to the staff at OMI Wistaston Hall retreat centre, Crewe, for looking after us so well.