

THE SEVEN SONGS

THE FIFTH SONG – THE SONG OF THE INVOICE

"God will call the past to account...God will bring every deed into judgement including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" -Ecclesiastes 3v15 & 12v14

The Fifth Song began to play for him, the song of tragic reaping, of laws that could not be broken without consequences. It was the song of payment due that cries out for recompense and for justice. A view of the world that has no ultimate arbitration or court of appeal will leave the human spirit profoundly dissatisfied. Not only was popularity chasing after the wind, we were never satisfied, never content. Moreover we have an inner sight that the rights were righted and the wrongs ended in ultimate failure.

There's no justice! (or is there)

In those days, Tom the Teacher spoke much about reckoning which comes in human affairs. The cry for justice in an unjust world is a cry that must be answered somewhere, sometime.

After he first heard the cry against the injustice, he recognised it everywhere. He saw it on the faces of the street kids whose scrap--paper lives cried out for a clean sheet and a better world. The incessant demand that victims should be compensated, damages awarded, fines levied, crimes addressed and for sentences to be brought must not be silenced.

Always there was a cost when something wrong had taken place, always a price to be paid. But Tom saw that he lived in a world where the invoices were often wrongly addressed. To ensure that everyone reaped their own harvest, there would have to be a final reckoning and a final sorting. He had seen a dark vision of a world under judgement, where natural systems and death and disease were allowed to run rampant because this was the world that humanity, the guardians of the planet, had chosen. And the absence of a restraining hand was itself a form of judgement, the primary original judgement.

Justice – it was the sigh for respect for the dignity of the human person.

Justice- it was the demand that 'something must be done'.

Justice- it was the unequal weight in law given to women or a system that allowed less pay.

Justice – it was the cry of the defenceless children.

Justice – it was demand that we cover not over with the fair cloth of equality of all before the law but get underneath to see the dirty linen of how it works in practice.

On his journey, Tom was puzzled. Why do the social, political and economic activists demand justice from an inherently unjust system?

As had been well said, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

A crime had to be accounted for properly and entered in the ledgers of justice. Payment always became due. To give no compensation would proclaim that what happened to an accident victim did not matter. Not to bring the crime to court proclaim the crime could be overlooked. Perpetrator and prisoner must pay their debt to society, they insisted. Where justice was absent, people were discarded; without compensation, they could not move on.

The instinct for payment and demand for justice went very deep in human life. It was, concluded Tom, a spiritual theme, to be included in the way people looked at the world.

The constant cry for compensation and a reckoning, 'they must not be allowed to get away with it' was a spiritual theme, the Fifth Song he was hearing in the world.

But how often he noticed that the invoice was addressed to the wrong person. The wrong people were paying for the sins of others. So final justice was needed, to ensure the invoices were correctly addressed. Or re--addressed.

"It's the song of reaping," said Tom in the next town. "Always the invoice comes. But there is a justice in the universe that ensures we will each pay for our own wrong- doing. Without final justice to sort out the wrongly directed invoices, payments extracted in this life will remain forever distorted".

It's not fair!

It struck Tom the Teacher one day with puzzling force.

Whence came the rudimentary call for justice that children are born with? He was watching children play. "Its not fair", they shouted periodically. Fairness was a demand, a protest never far away.

"And think" he said "about films and stories you are comfortable with. How restless we are unless good people triumph and the bad get their reward. How we worked to settle scores!

Someone in the audience had worked for a Company that had been found out and had covered over the means by which it balanced the books.

"Do we not feel instinctively that if a Company demonstrates integrity and respect, it is a better place and we would rather work for it?" Tom said.

Balancing the books was rarely done in this life, he reflected. All the while we were running up bills.

Resolution of issues; accountability for what has happened. Such was the stuff of life. But what happens at the end of life? And on what basis is justice apportioned – and by whom?

Is anything wrong?

Up and down the world he went, calling people to take a long hard look in the mirror. "The Creator's laws lie trampled under our feet," he cried. "As a family rallying round an addict in protective conspiracy, the whole of humanity is in denial".

Tom thought again of the Ten Laws.

The Eighth Law put the spotlight on dishonesty in buying and selling, extortion, misuse of employer's time, stealing the rights of the poor, failing to repay debts, fraud, people borrowing and failing to return what is borrowed, embezzlement.

Some form of stealing was acceptable, they said; whether stealing from a shop, avoiding paying tax, keeping the money if given too much change, driving a car without tax, fare--dodging on public transport, taking the office stationery or mis--using employer's time. In many a community, benefit fraud was celebrated as beating the system. But they were not so happy to be amongst those who had their homes broken into each month. And they were not queuing up to pay the heavy weights thrown into the annual shopping bills to cover the rising cost of shoplifting. Fear of burglary meant that half the population installed extra security. The cost of breaking the Eighth Law was putting a greater burden on everybody.

The Ninth Law confronted the constant struggle for truth. The power of the lie was photographs touched up to remove or add someone so the camera did lie after all. It was the age of spin--doctors, manipulation of truth in self--interest, public cynicism and mistrust of politicians. Few believable figures were left now. The struggle for truth was fought on a large canvas amidst damaged ethics and dodgy deals. But the battle for truth was also fought on a smaller canvas with everyday lies put out by everyday people living everyday lives in a self-serving version of event. No one wanted to be lied to. The lie created mistrust.

Tom saw millions defeated in a search for contentment. Unknowing wanderers in a maze, always wanting more, never having enough; needing, grasping, an incomplete life. They never did find the end of the maze. The belief had taken hold of millions that without money and the status and power it brings, there can be no fulfilment. They were snared in a deep and on--going desire for what others have, an obsession with piling up luxury goods

aroused by what you see and could be yours so easily, seduced by advertising that converted a want into a need. The Tenth Law was protesting strongly, warning of the reaping that would follow such sowing.

The Tenth Law searched beyond words and actions to the inner cupboard where true identity is revealed. An attitude of wanting, wanting always wanting had led to selfishness and envy, a rotting degradation of human relationships and to profound discontent. Human beings made in the mirror of divinity with a destiny beyond time and beyond this life were gripped by the siren call of instant gratification, the fatal attraction of getting and achieving. What then? It was back to fighting the emptiness once more. Tom grew pensive. Was the desire to grab the root of all broken laws, the mainspring of a broken world?

How often he would hear that indignant protest rising up from the generation who lived at the dawn of the millennium. "No one can tell us how should we live our lives! We have rejected the old parent that dictates what we should believe and how we should behave".

"No mere mortal" said Tom with equal passion. "But the Creator who made us tells us of the moral habitat within which we best live and work. The Ten Laws are not an alien way foisted upon us but are how we should live our lives. They speak to us of responsibility, of a broad country within which to roam freely".

"I am," he added, coming to hear the cry for accountability and payment for our actions as another song amidst the music of the world. Our search for justice tells us something about ourselves and the way things are and should be in the world"

Across the face of the world, the people demanded compensation, recompense, payment. It could not be that crimes went unnoticed. Unrequited actions scraped value off the victims. Something had happened. Action must be taken. The call to account was unyielding.

The injustice cannot go unanswered. Voices wearing scarred faces spoke up insistently. "We pay for what others have done, rarely for our own acts".

"That is true," agreed Tom the Teacher with pathos. "To ensure the justice, there must be a day when the invoices are re-addressed and we pay only for ourselves".

There could be trouble ahead

How long, he mused, will the sinking of the Titanic, the trenches of the First World War or the holocaust of the Second War leave a shudder in the memory of humankind. But was there not another episode, that had trembled through thousands of years, more deeply impressed on the imagination and more far ranging than any natural disaster had ever been.

"The haunting memory was passed on by the appalled survivors to their children with great conviction. Their most remote descendants of the present day speak of it. They have not forgotten".

It had brought an echo that reverberated round his stunned imagination like a ghostly whisper. "They have not forgotten, they have not forgotten. We must rise from our stupor, a forgotten dream of our night. We must remember".

Again, the haunting echo. "We must remember; we must remember".

"Today I tell you of a time when the waters broke. But this was no woman in labour about to give birth. This was the breaking of waters that swept across the world. I speak of an apocalyptic event, a deluge that overwhelmed the human race, a time when waters were unleashed and the planet was convulsed".

"One day came the storm warning. The siren sounded but only one man on Earth heard. Word spread, a huge vessel built for holocaust survivors and time given to see what was coming. But no one was prepared to march to a different drum-beat and no one turned. And so storm clouds of dark-lined judgment became storm clouds of rain, wind and mountains of water. Towns and cities, trees and mountains were lashed by the ferocity of wind. Rain poured down from black clouds, lightning fell with jagged edges and thunder shook the heavens".

" The storm--tossed ark rode out the buffeting. Finally, the shrieks of the wind and the dead were lulled and the survivors were alone. When the angry waters went back to sleep, the world could start again. But it was a different world. The old surface had been re--modelled by the torrent, painfully scraped, clothed with deposit and sediment, the mud and the fury".

"It was then that they saw a rainbow invested with a new dawn. Water had been the destructive force that washed everything to its doom. But now the rainbow sign was to speak of water but also of the sun breaking through the water. A sign of hope silently proclaiming a breathing space is given to us".

"A breathing space?" asked someone, recovering from the story.

"Yes for the next hurricane is long overdue and the storm warning may already be sounding".

And he quoted from the Book that was in his hand. *"They will say, ' where is this coming' he promised? ..everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation"*

"Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall"

The indictment

The evidence had been heard for both sides. It was now time for the prosecution to sum up. Silence froze over the court.

"The accused stands before you, the hunter and the hunted, victim and perpetrator of a profound contradiction. Glory and shame have followed this man about. Every time, he has had opportunity to create a better world for himself, he has spoilt it. Truly, the weeds have filled the garden".

"He learned to accept selfishness in his life in a strutting defiance against the needs of others. The accused argued against the greed that exploits the planet. But he was let down by the greed that corrupts inside, the lust for more that imprisoned him, the covetousness that enslaved him. He became controlled by urgent desires that need to have fulfilment now. It was an unabated thirst. He had so many opportunities. A vast inheritance was his spoilt by that tendency not only to pursue his own interest but to justify what he did".

"Objection. Is there nothing good to say about the accused? Nothing in his favour?" protested the defence attorney. "The prisoner has shown much exemplary conduct. Sacrificing himself for others, call of duty, innumerable works of charity are there in his

record. When evil people have lashed out with the jagged knife of racism, the accused has shouted out for the common decency. When the cloud of oppression was lifted from communist or fascist regimes, the accused cheered the demise of totalitarianism".

"I do not deny", commented the prosecution "that the accused has generally championed decency. He has recognised that it is better to tell the truth than not to, that it is better to be neighbourly than cruel. Nevertheless, the record of the accused is patchy and at best inconsistent. He stands accused of often hating others. Has he not kicked those who were down? Has he not wounded by words?"

"Relationships were often shaped by a selfishness that masquerades as individualism. People were of interest to him if they contributed to his goals of happiness and self-fulfilment. His self-centredness prevented him seeing the needs of others except as objects, to be defined in relation to him".

"In short, I charge this man with failure to live up to his own ideals by breaking the laws. He has definitely been the hunted. No one doubts that he is victim and that people have heaped many unpleasant rubbish loads onto his life. But he is not being charged with that. It is important to be clear on this point as it is to insist that what he has done has brought pain to other people. A life shaped by greed, pride and lust must be held to account. He was also an aggressor and it is for this that he must take responsibility".

It was the Fifth Song, the sound of tragic reaping.