

Poverty (1): Vulnerability

Scripture

Ex 6.2-9; Lev 19.9f, 13-16; Deu 10.17-19; Pss 9.18; 12.5; 146; Isa 1.16f; Jer 7.4-6; Amo 2.6-8; Mic 6.6-8; Mk 2.15-17; Jn 13.12-15; Act 2.43-47; Rom 12.15f; Gal 6.2; 1 Pet 4.8-10.

Graih

1): William had lived on the streets for many years and was fiercely independent. He was a regular at Graih's drop-in and when he began to appear confused we became concerned. William was getting older and had never been easy to understand (he mumbled a lot), which made discerning how he was doing that much harder. He started to talk about things that weren't true, to walk lopsidedly, to forget where he was. William moved off the streets into a boarding house and we tried to access some support for his mental health. Mental health promptly sent him some appointments, which William in his confusion never read or understood. He missed the appointments and was discharged from the service. When we asked if we could just bring him to be assessed it was ruled out: an appointment was needed. William became difficult to track down or understand. After months of deterioration he was eventually visited at home, assessed and moved into residential care.

Vincent came to Graih soon after moving into a boarding house. He had spent a long time sleeping in a tent after eviction from his flat. He had been evicted after giving all his money to a young mother who lived above him. Vincent was then unable to pay his rent and became scared of opening letters. He was taken to court and imprisoned for his arrears, which entailed eviction and the loss of most of his property. While sleeping rough he foraged in bins for discarded food. Once, when the police saw him they asked what he was doing. Vincent told them he was looking for his tea. The police left without wondering why he might be doing this or if he needed help. In his own words Vincent spent 'fourteen years locking myself away and talking to nobody'. He says the drop-in is 'getting him used to people again'.

2): Poverty comes in many guises: systemic, economic, material, spiritual, mental, physical, social, emotional, relational. Sometimes all of these are present. Sometimes there are only one or two. This poverty leads to vulnerability, where people become marginalised in society and trapped in an isolating downward spiral. One facet of this is access to services. People are denied access because of their problems, because they don't have an address or don't fit 'normal' criteria. Another facet can be substance abuse and addiction, where people turn to substances for the help or healing they need. Near the heart of the poverty that Graih sees is relational poverty. People have no-one else in their lives who can offer help, support or even time to listen. There is no network of friends or family. Often we become the designated next-of-kin for people going into hospital because they have no-one else. Mental ill health is widespread, often linked with physical ill health. Unfortunately mental health remains chronically under-resourced in comparison with its physical cousin. A great variety of factors contribute to the complex of poverty that keeps people trapped, alone and vulnerable, with no-one to turn to and little hope of change.

Questions

1. What is your experience of poverty?
2. Scripture shows God committed to those on the margins. If poverty is more than simply not having money what forms should response to it take?
3. What is your view of poverty on the Isle of Man?
4. What should our response be to local poverty and global poverty? In what ways are they similar or different?

5. How can we ensure that those on the margins do not suffer?
6. Do you think that a response to poverty is a priority for the church? Should it be? Why?

Ideas for further action

1. Invite poor people to come and share their experience with you.
2. Engage with a vulnerable group of people in love and service, for both your change and theirs.
3. Talk with groups such as SUN (Service Users' Network, www.manxsun.im) about mental health on the island and identify ways you can help.
4. Intentionally spend time living or working on the margins. Support one another through your experiences.

Prayer

Father, thank you that you often choose what is weak, poor and foolish in this world to shame what appears wise, strong and rich. Teach us what it means to have your heart for those who are vulnerable.

Jesus, thank you that you delighted in spending time on the margins and told us that we'd see you there. Give us the grace to share such delight, and the eyes to see you.

Spirit, thank you that you are bringing us into a time and a kingdom where there will be no more need, no more wounds, no more poverty. Help us to embody what that looks like in this time and place.

Amen.