

6th October 2023

Protest

"Protesting is an act of love.

Saying 'no' to injustice is the ultimate declaration of hope."

Amy Goodman, *Standing up to the Madness* (2008)

When I was in the USA recently, there were two unresolved national disputes regularly in the news. The first was a long-running strike by Hollywood scriptwriters, protesting against exploitation and unfairness in the digital environment of the entertainment world. The more recent, was a walkout by automotive workers, striking over years of reductions in the worth of their pay. It's no different back home, with current strikes on the railways and by Consultants and Junior Doctors.

We'll all have views on the disruption such issues cause us, and the rightness or wrongness of these disputes. But we cannot, and we must not, complain about the right to protest, a right which we should cherish in a free and democratic society. A friend wrote to me recently, with words based on the story of Esther in the Bible. "Enlargement and deliverance will arise," Esther is told, "and it will begin with you." And my friend said, that, like Esther, we are called to see, and protest, injustice. "We are called to make a difference," he wrote, "and we *can* make a difference."

Two years ago, *The Guardian* had a piece by Deborah Frances-White, headlined, "What do we want? The right to noisy protests. When do we want it? Now!" She wrote: "To be loud and annoying is the definition of a protest, so it's shocking that the new 'Police Crackdown Bill' would criminalise this. It's time to raise our voices when we can ..." Well said!

The "BBC Future" website has an excellent analysis of this by Kiera Setiya, a professor of philosophy at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "Our world is unjust and replete with suffering – what can an individual possibly do?" she asks. "Confronted with the scope of human misery, some despair: 'It doesn't matter what I do,' they say, 'since millions will still suffer.' But this thought is confused. We may not do enough ... a protest may not change the world, but it adds its fraction to the odds of change. It's wrong to disregard the increments." If, with Amy Goodman, we see protesting as an act of love, it is, surely, another "declaration of hope."

A prayer for today

Lord, your love compels me to protest against injustice.

Give me the strength to keep doing so. Amen