

Let Right Prevail: What do Christians teach about justice?

A true story from South Africa taken from James Krabill, in *Keep the Faith, Share the Peace*, 1999.

A frail black woman stands slowly to her feet; she is something over 70 years of age.

Facing her from across the room are several white security police officers, one of whom, Mr Van der Broek, has just been tried and found guilty of the murders of both the woman's son and her husband some years before. It was indeed Mr Van der Broek, it has now been proved, who had come to the woman's home a number of years back, taken her son, shot him at point blank range and then burned the young man's body on a fire while he and his officers partied nearby.

Several years later, Mr Van der Broek and his men had returned to take away her husband as well. For many months she had learned nothing of his whereabouts. Then, almost two years after her husband had disappeared, Mr Van der Broek came back to fetch the woman herself. How clearly she remembered that evening, going down to a place beside a river where she was shown her husband, bound and beaten, but still strong in spirit, lying on a pile of wood.

The last words she heard from his lips as the officers poured petrol over his body and set him on fire were, 'Father, forgive them'

And now the woman stands in the courtroom and listens to the confessions offered by Mr Van der Broek. A member of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation commission turns to her and asks;

'So what do you want? How should justice be done to this man who so brutally destroyed your family?'



1) What punishment would you give to Mr Van Der Broek? Try to explain your reasons.

(In this question we want you to express your own values and ideas. To get a level 5 you will need to be able to explain your reasons for the punishment you would give and why it would be appropriate)

2) As you may have guessed this woman is a Christian. What punishment do you think she will give?

(In this question we want to see if you have understood Christian teaching on justice and can apply it to this situation. To get level 5 you will need to make some link to a specific Christian teaching that this old lady might have applied here)

The Old Lady's Judgement

'I want three things' she replied 'I want first to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial'

She pauses then continues 'My husband and son were my only family. I want, secondly, therefore, for Mr Van der Broek to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the shanty town and spend a day with me so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining within me.'

'And finally' she says 'I want a third thing. I would like Mr Van der Broek to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive; this was also the wish of my husband. And so, I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and lead me across this courtroom so that I can take Mr Van der Broek in my arms, hug him and let him know that he is truly forgiven.'

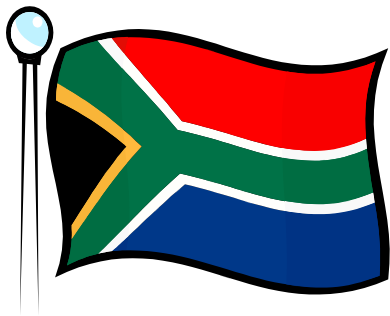
As the court assistants come to lead the elderly woman across the room, Mr Van der Broek, overwhelmed by what he has just heard faints.

3) Write down two good points and two bad points about the old lady's decision.

(The aim here is for you to see two sides of an issue. Try to think about the possible consequences of her choice, both good and bad.)

4) Now give your opinion about the old lady's decision.

(This question is open for you to give your own view, to get a level 6 you will need to give reasons for your comments and consider what it is like for a Christian to live according to their beliefs in a difficult situation such as this)



For the teacher

This assessment task is intended to be a more traditional one lesson end of unit assessment task. It is not, however, intended to be done as a test.

- The students don't need to have studied apartheid or much on South Africa although you may need to add a very brief context.
- The level descriptors of the agreed syllabus should also be explained.
- The task is two staged. Page one should be handed out and completed by all before going onto the second page. I would suggest that you read the source out to the class to make sure they have all understood.
- Question 3 could be done as a class discussion in preparation for answering question 4.