

CROSSTALK

August 25th 2011

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After a grim week of civil disturbance in many of our cities, it was a pleasure to greet the annual Flower Show and to see how much pleasure its voluntary effort produced. In the riots we saw both sides of human nature: violence and looting on the one hand, and subsequent work to rebuild communities and restore peace on the other. Rabbi Jonathan Sachs has written that in the rioting, in the misdemeanours of bankers and in the politicians' expenses scandal, the soul of our society has been exposed, revealing its selfish and acquisitive nature. Christians understand that God has created all human persons with capacity for good – original blessing, and evil – original sin. Jesus teaches that we have to pay attention to the heart, because it is from the heart that good and evil intentions come. We desire joy in that deep place – and there are no short cuts; it cannot be bought along with a TV. Coming to terms with the fact that we cannot have everything we want in life is one of the steps to that joy and freedom. God is absolute goodness, and when we come before God in worship in church, we are made aware by contrast of our own frailty and capacity for wrongdoing. To grow in that self-knowledge is the challenge of a lifetime. But beginning each day thankfully is the first step towards a joyful life. And when we worship and pray we receive from God the gifts we need to lead better lives. So pray for a considered response to the rioting and for peace in our communities, and commit yourself to grow in self-knowledge and to work alongside others for a just and ordered society.

This is an abbreviated version of Mark's sermon delivered on Sunday August 14th 2011 and to be used in the Chronicle's Crosstalk article later the same month.