

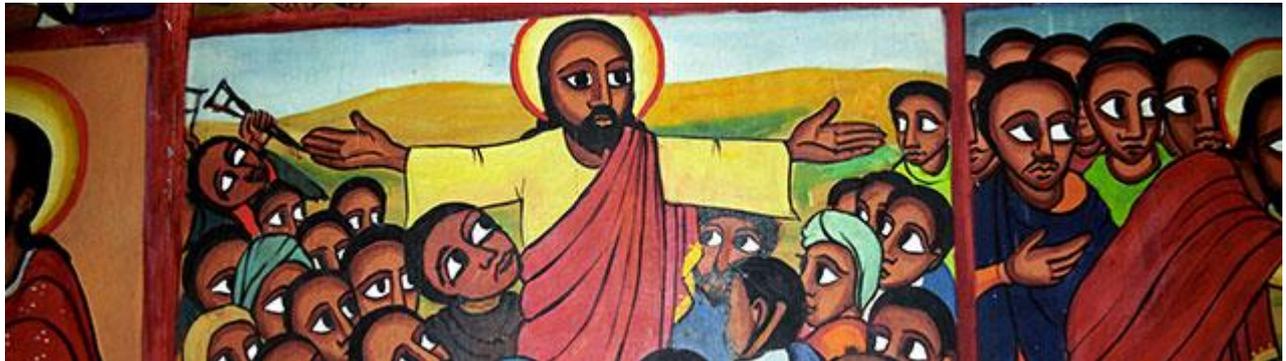
Parish of Central Exeter

3rd Sunday before Lent

13 February 2022

Racial Justice Sunday

Welcome everyone.



'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.'

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN, 1948

Our service this morning has been taken mainly from material provided by Churches Together In Britain and Ireland. Other sources are credited. The second Sunday in February was designated Racial Justice Sunday in 2017.

Why celebrate Racial Justice Sunday?

We believe that the universe was created by a loving God who chose to become a human being in Jesus Christ, who has redeemed the world and sent the Holy Spirit to enable us to love one another with God's love. All human beings are equally children of God and loved by God. Since none is outside the love of God, none should be outside our love either.

We believe that the diversity of the human race was no mistake on God's part. God deliberately created variety within the human family and wants us to take as much delight in that variety as God does.

But racism persists in Britain and Ireland. At its most obvious and brutal, it takes the form of physical attacks, which sometimes end in murder. But it takes many other forms as well, like discrimination within the police force, popular prejudice against Travellers or people seeking asylum, or reluctance to accept people of a different ethnic or cultural group as neighbours.

Even within churches, people can face discrimination and unkindness because they are different from the majority in a particular community.

As long as this continues, we believe that it is important to make time to give thanks for our diversity and to pray for God's help in overcoming our prejudices and the injustices that reflect and reinforce them.

(From the Methodist Church website)

Call to Worship

God our Maker
You call us here
to worship You together.
To bear witness to Your creativity
seen, heard and found in all who gather.
We are all Your children,
bearing Your divine image,
shaped by Your imagination and breath.
You have gifted us
with the beauty of difference
the blessing of diversity
the pleasure of individuality
and the bond of love and peace.

Gathering Hymn

'Lord of all hopefulness'. Sung by the choir of St Albans Cathedral. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8mti7VL3gg>

Hosea 12: 6

But you must return to your God;
maintain love and justice,
and wait for your God always.

Confession

Merciful God,
You made us in Your image,
With minds to know You,
With hearts to love You,
With wills to serve You.
But our knowledge is imperfect,
Our love inconstant and immature,
And our obedience incomplete and self-serving.

Help us day by day to grow in Your likeness,
Which is so widely displayed in the diversity of creation.
Help us to understand our own prejudices and narrow mindedness.
Help us to love our neighbour as we ourselves long to be loved.
Help us to serve others with humility and gratitude.
Do not hold our sin against us,
but help us to repent of outdated
and inappropriate world views.
Help us to mature in our thinking, loving and serving.

A collect for racial justice

Lord God,
You are the source of human dignity, and it is in your image that we are created.

Pour out on us the spirit of love and compassion.

Enable us to reverence each person, to reach out to anyone in need,
to value and appreciate those who differ from us,
to share the resources of our nation,
to receive the gifts offered to us
by people from other cultures.

Grant that we may always promote
the justice and acceptance
that ensures lasting peace and racial harmony.

Help us to remember that we are one world and one family.

Amen.

(Australian Catholic Social Justice Council)

Racial Justice and the Bible

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. *Genesis 1:27*

In a very strict sense, the Bible has nothing to say about 'Racial Justice'. This is because the concept of 'race' – the notion of fixed, hierarchical, biological differences between people from which the sin of racism emerges, did not exist in biblical times. Racism, i.e., racialised forms of discrimination that is expressed in policies, systems, structures and practices, arises from forms of scientific 'racial' thinking of Europeans.

If the Bible has nothing strictly to say about racial justice, it nevertheless, has a huge amount to say about the radical equality between people, communities, and nations, irrespective of whether human beings are ethnically or culturally the same or are different.

The 'Doctrine of Creation' in which the Godhead declares that all humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, speaks to a radical form of equality in which all human beings are more alike than unlike. (Gen.1:27). Given the ways in which notions of 'race' and racism has sought to divide humanity into arbitrary categories, in which 'some' are more important than 'others', this doctrine remains one of the major biblical teachings that refutes any sense of superiority for some and inferiority for others.

Reading 1 Acts 13: 1-3 **A multi-cultural church**

13 ¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.



Reflection on this reading

(extract) by Prof. Anthony Reddie, Director: The Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture, Regent's Park College, University of Oxford

One of the Bible's fascinating qualities is the way certain events and activities are 'hidden in plain sight' and Acts 13: 1-3 is a great example of that. In the previous chapter, the writer of Acts explains how Antioch, a city in Syria, was an early stronghold of Christianity, and it was here that the followers of Jesus were first called 'Christians'. We also read how these Syrian-based Christians had such love for their brothers and sisters in Christ that they provided help to those who were struggling elsewhere as a result of a famine.

In the first verse of the reading, we are presented with the names of the prophets and teachers who led that thriving Antioch church. Five individuals are named: Barnabas was a Cypriot, and Saul was from Tarsus, which is modern-day Turkey. Then there is Manaen (who we know little about except that it says he 'had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch'). That Manaen became a Christian having lived with a tyrant like Herod reveals a lot about God's mercy and grace. However, the two individuals that are really interesting are 'Simeon called Niger' and 'Lucius of Cyrene'. In Latin, the term 'Niger' means 'Black', and Bible scholars suggest that Simeon was a Black man, probably an African Gentile who had moved to Antioch, and met with Jesus. While Lucius was from Cyrene, which is modern day Libya.

In the same way that Christian tradition suggests 'Simon of Cyrene', the man who carried Jesus' cross, was Black (Mark 15:21), Bible scholars also assert the same for Lucius. So, what we see in today's reading is that Christianity, which has its origins or roots in Jerusalem, soon has its most dynamic presence in a Syrian-based church that is being led by believers from Asia Minor, Africa and the Mediterranean.

If we were to describe the Antioch Church in modern-day language, we would say that it was a diverse church with a diverse leadership. What is interesting is that we often think of terms such as diversity, equality and inclusion as new-fangled ideas. While the writer of Acts does not mention that actual word 'diversity', we do see it in action. The Antioch Church has worshippers from parts of Africa, Turkey, Cyprus, Jerusalem, Greece and Syria – what was then all of the known world. What is more, it had equality: the believers were all considered to be sisters and brothers in Christ and of equal status. Moreover, it had the best form of inclusion imaginable; it had Black people not only in the congregation, but also in leadership positions within the church – Simeon and Lucius for example. These men were not there to make up numbers, or to add colour to proceedings, but were using their God-given abilities to lead and build up the church in Antioch.



Manifestations of Your Light

Good and gracious God,
Who loves and delights in all people,
we stand in awe before You,
knowing that the spark of life within each person on earth is the spark of your divine life.

Differences among cultures and races are multicoloured manifestations of Your Light.

May our hearts and minds be open to celebrate similarities and differences among our sisters and brothers.

We place our hopes for racial harmony in our committed action and in Your Presence in our Neighbour.

May all peoples live in Peace. *(Sisters of Mercy of the Americas)*

Reading John 17: 21-23

²¹ “May they all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Reflection on this reading

by Father Philip Sumner, Catholic association for Racial Justice and Roman Catholic rural dean of Oldham and Tameside .

These, of course, are the words of Jesus praying for His disciples as He’s about to go to His death. But His prayer is surely for all of us too. It’s a prayer for a true communion of people, that’s to be seen in the relationship of the Trinity itself, where we can speak of oneness, even when there’s clearly difference.

The ethnic mix of many of our communities has changed so much in recent years because of the movement of peoples. And hateful racism is not simply targeted at Black footballers on social media. Immediately after Brexit, the number of racist incidents rose significantly across the country and all too many people saw newcomers as unwelcome. It’s not without reason that footballers and others in this country have been ‘taking the knee’ since the murder of George Floyd in the United States.

Back in the year 2000, Pope John Paul II suggested an aim for the beginning of the millennium that he thought the rest of us might share. Like Jesus in the Gospel, his prayer was that we achieve a ‘spirituality of communion’. He described this as being able to see

God shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us, to know how to “make room” for people who are different, and to bear “each other’s burdens”.

In a recent book called “The ungrateful refugee”, Dina Nayeri, speaking from personal experience, argues that the most urgent need for a migrant or a refugee is to belong to a place. She says that this is achieved by existing communities allowing newcomers to change them on their native soil. But this is true not just for migrants or newcomers but also for people who are seen to be different from the majority.

We would do well to remember the different aspects of institutional racism described by Lord MacPherson in the 1990s. One of these is when established groups in society exercise their power in such a way that people, from different backgrounds, feel that they don’t really belong. The phrase, “We’ve always done it this way,” is one I sometimes hear, and it betrays an unwillingness to be changed on our own soil. Sadly, the requirement of the majority can all too often be, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do!”

But, to enable people to belong usually requires us to think differently and to listen more to the ways that others might do things if they were given the opportunity. Pope Francis, in a letter he wrote this year to mark ‘Migrants’ Day’ called us to “build communion in diversity, to unify differences without imposing a depersonalized uniformity.”

Meditative song

‘Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the streets.’ Words are on the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSzEviUc_o

Affirmation of Faith

Jesus taught us to speak of hope as the coming of God’s kingdom.

We believe that God is at work in our world
turning hopeless and evil situations into good.
We believe that goodness and justice
will triumph in the end
and that tyranny and oppression cannot last forever.
One day all tears will be wiped away;
the lamb will lie down with the lion,
and justice will roll down like a mighty stream.

True peace and true reconciliation are not only desired,
they are assured and guaranteed in Christ.

This is our faith.

This is our hope. *(20th century South African creed.)*

Intercessions

God our Maker,
in whose image and likeness each of us has been created,
with a human dignity worthy of respect.
Listen to the cry that rises from every corner of this fragile earth,
from our human family.

To world leaders and decision makers,
grant the wisdom to reach beyond boundary and border.
May our common humanity drive policy
and foster peaceful dialogue and constructive collaboration.

To those who misuse their power or take power from others,
through violent action or hateful speech.
Grant mercy and grow in them a humble heart of compassion,
peaceful dialogue and constructive collaboration.

To the innocent ones robbed of dignity, possession, or shelter,
to the victims of these forces who have had life taken from them,
we entrust them in your everlasting arms, O God,
that are wide enough to embrace all of Your creation

**Merciful God, accept these prayers
for the sake of your son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen**

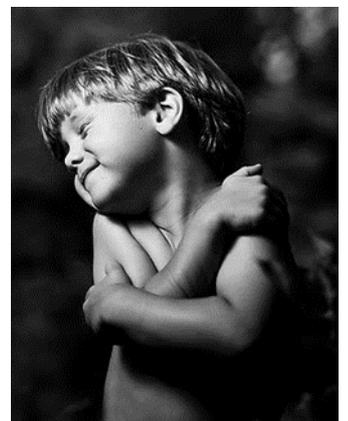
The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the
Peace as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in
penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ
crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour
Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in
ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.



O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

*As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to Bread is Broken: words by Richard,
music by Nigel, sung by the Langford Singers. Words are on the screen. Thank you Nigel.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-WUE5nrlw4>



*Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can
have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm
sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of
silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it
a sacramental moment.*

*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection
you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Post Communion Collect

Merciful Father,
who gave Jesus Christ to be for us the bread of life,
that those who come to him should never hunger:
draw us to the Lord in faith and love,
that we may eat and drink with him
at his table in the kingdom,
where he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Closing Prayer

Creator of all people,
in our amazing diversity of size, shape, colour, and giftedness:
guide us, by your grace,
to recognize the beauty and fitness
of all whom you have made in your own image.

Give us gifts of humility and generosity of spirit
to recognize in all people, the face of our Saviour, Jesus,
and to practice his commandment to "love one another,"
to bring harmony and peace
among persons of all colours, origins, and abilities,
for the sake of your Kingdom.
(Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia)

Blessing

May the path
that Christ walks
to bring justice
upon the earth,
to bring light
to those who sit
in darkness,
to bring out those
who live in bondage,
to bring new things
to all creation:

may this path
run through our life.
May we be
the road Christ takes.

(written by Jan L. Richardson, and posted on The Painted Prayerbook.)

Closing Music

We close with 'We are one in the Spirit'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r982gxKVVN4>

