

A REFLECTION FOR TRINITY SUNDAY (07.06.2020)
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Readings: Genesis 1: 1-2: 4a, 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13 & Matthew 28: 16-20

Well, here we are again. Another week of lockdown completed, another one about to begin. For much of the past whatever-number-of weeks-it-has-been-now, lockdown life has been all consuming. It's pretty much all we've heard in the news for three months. It's no wonder then that, as we've sought to adjust to new ways of being and living, it's pretty much all we've thought about as well.

But this past week or so has seen the news cycle interrupted by another powerful story - one that reminds us that there's a world beyond our own front doors and, that for some people in that world, life feels perilous much of the time, pandemic or no pandemic. We've been confronted by a story of inequality, brutality and inhumanity and, in its wake, we're witnessing an enormous struggle for justice being played out in front of all of us.

As a statement issued by the Greenbelt Festival this week read, 'George Floyd is the latest life, the latest name, lost in a centuries-old callous disregard for the intrinsic value and equality of all humans. But the global response of protests (and riots) that has followed George's brutal murder seem...to be marking some sort of turning point.

The streets are filled with young people – of all races, religions and sexualities. Perhaps because the Covid-19 pandemic has made us all feel more vulnerable and precarious, the response we're witnessing feels more visceral, tangible – and even hopeful. Black Lives Matter is not someone else's concern, another community's issue. It is a call to action for all of us.

And let's not kid ourselves that this is just an issue for those on the other side of the Atlantic. As Brits, it was we who exported this idea of colonialisation and commodification (and let's name it: slavery) in the first place. If the racism that stalks our society is perhaps different in form, it is no less destructive and, yes, sinful. It may well be more subtle in the UK. But in many ways it is all the more insidious for its subtlety.'

This is indeed a call to action for all of us. As President of the Methodist Conference, Barbara Glasson, wrote on Tuesday, 'It is with outrage and deep sorrow that we have witnessed the recent brutal killing of George Floyd in the United States. But outrage and sorrow are not a sufficient response to racism and inequality in society. How to begin a process of change? It starts with self-examination and listening to the people whose lives are affected by discrimination and hate.'

Issues of race aren't easy to delve into. The fear of saying or doing the wrong thing - and unintentionally causing further hurt or offence - or having our prejudices exposed - can be overwhelming. At times it might feel better to say nothing than to risk opening our mouths and saying the wrong thing but, as the placards say, 'silence is compliance'. The journey of self-examination for those of us who are white, is going to be a challenging one to say the least. But our discomfort is probably necessary. It awakens us to truths that are difficult to hear but truths that are vital for us to grasp if human society is to flourish, if the world is to be transformed.

Having read various articles and listened to a number of podcasts this past week, I can now see that, however well-intentioned and inclusive I might think I am, my whiteness affords me a place of privilege in the world from which it is very difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend what life is like for black, Asian and minority ethnic people in this country, let alone for people of colour anywhere else in the world.

I also have to accept that, to date, I have done little or nothing to question that privilege or challenge the status quo that continues to benefit me but adversely affects others. That does have to change.

Let me read you something that I read this week:

"The problem is that white people see racism as conscious hate, when racism is bigger than that. Racism is a complex system of social and political levers and pulleys set up generations ago to continue working on the behalf of whites at other people's expense, whether whites know/like it or not. Racism is an insidious cultural disease. It is so insidious that it doesn't care if you are a white person who likes black people; it's still going to find a way to infect how you deal with people who don't look like you. Yes, racism looks

like hate, but hate is just one manifestation. Privilege is another. Access is another. Ignorance is another. Apathy is another. And so on. So while I agree with people who say no one is born racist, it remains a powerful system that we're immediately born into. It's like being born into air: you take it in as soon as you breathe. It's not a cold that you can get over. There is no anti-racist certification class. It's a set of socioeconomic traps and cultural values that are fired up every time we interact with the world. It is a thing you have to keep scooping out of the boat of your life to keep from drowning in it. I know it's hard work, but it's the price you pay for owning everything." (Scott Woods) (<https://scottwoodsmakeslists.wordpress.com/2014/01/03/5-things-no-one-is-actually-saying-about-ani-difranco-or-plantations/>)

Ouch. Though it's a natural instinct, going on the defensive isn't going to help. It prevents us from listening and learning. And we have to do both of those things. So, hear this we must.

Time and again this week the message that I received through the words of others was, 'Do the work. Immerse yourself in the thoughts and work of black people and take things from there. And do it not to relieve any feelings of guilt that you might have but because you're honestly searching for truth.'

So that's what I'm going to commit myself to doing and invite you to do as well. Not so that I or we look good. Not so that my or our consciences are eased. Not just because it's the right thing to do - though it surely is, of course - but because if we are indeed created in the image and likeness of God then that's all of us and not just some of us. And if we're to take our God-given place and role in the world (which, incidentally, is meant to see us act towards other creatures and indeed all of creation as God is with us), then we have to take seriously the equality at the heart of God and reflect that. If we don't do this, isn't our worship hollow, our teaching flawed, our communion diminished, our baptism undermined?

As someone once said, 'At the heart of the Trinity is an invitation. It is not a mathematical formula meant to confuse us but a community of love that invites us to join in.' (Roots, 2005 - Open the Word: A faith worth sharing)

Trinity is an invitation. A community of love that invites us to join in. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all as we decide how best to respond to that invitation.