



Black Lives Matter: A Statement In Response To Recent Events

The world has been shocked again by the senseless and merciless killing of George Floyd, by the demonstrations (and, from a small minority, riots and wanton violence) which have followed it, and by the insensitive actions of the US president posing for a photo with a Bible outside St John's Church, Lafayette Square, after ordering the use of tear gas to disperse peaceful protesters from the area (as described by the minister of St. John's Church). This statement is prompted by those events, but is intended to give a broader Christian response to the evil of racism itself. There may be those who question why this is highlighted on the front page of our website. It is here because this is a core gospel issue, and it is an urgent issue.

"Black Lives Matter" is a statement that should not need to be said. Every life matters. All human beings, regardless of the colour of our skin, are equally fearfully and wonderfully created in God's image. Our diversity of looks, of personalities and of cultures is a glorious testimony to God's inexhaustible creativity and abundant generosity, which greatly enhances the beauty and wonder of life in God's world. Despite the long history in religious art, God is not white; indeed, Jesus was not white when he walked this earth. *All* people are beautifully made in God's image.

Likewise, every person is of such value to God that he willingly gave his only Son to die in our place so that we could be reconciled to him. But Jesus Christ did not die solely to reconcile us to God; he also died to reconcile us to one another. As Paul says, "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity ... thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Ephesians 2:14-16). So, when Jesus showed John a vision of the Church at the end of time, he wrote: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9) Racism of any sort is an affront to the gospel and to God's plans for the world.

"Black Lives Matter" should not need to be said. But it does need to be said. It is not enough simply to affirm, "All lives matter," for the simple reason that Black people continue to be treated by some as though they do not matter. The killing of George Floyd is merely the tip of the iceberg of the racial discrimination that many Black people experience every day of their lives. Yes, there is also racism the other way, and we certainly cannot condone the violence that a minority have introduced into the protests, but it is far less prevalent. As a White person, it would be easy for me to go about my everyday business oblivious to the cry for justice from Black people that continues to be ignored, not just in the USA, but in the UK and across the world. Therefore, my first priority must be to listen to the experiences of those who have suffered such racial discrimination in an effort to understand how they feel. I encourage you to do the same; take the time to listen to the voices of Black friends and neighbours, as well as the considered, moderate Christian voices below.

Listen to those who experienced how, having become a Christian, George Floyd channelled his criminal past to help others and to promote peace in Houston's Third Ward, in this news article in Christianity Today. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/may/george-floyd-ministry-houston-third-ward-church.html>

Listen to Revd. Yinka Oyekan, current President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, as he writes about his experience of racism in the church and in society.
<https://www.facebook.com/PrinceYinkaOyekan/posts/10163681386260054>

Listen to Revd. Gareth Murray Jr, Pastor of Hillendale Baptist Church, Dale City, Virginia, as he compares his experience of racism to that of the trauma of abuse. Gareth is a close friend of mine with whom I was privileged to participate in a prayer triplet, whilst training for ministry. Warning: this material may shock. (Also sound and visual may also be slightly out of sync).
https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=933564730436222&ref=watch_permalink

Listen to Pastor Tope Koleoso from Jubilee Church, London, as he identifies himself in the killing of George Floyd. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XZx0BeqOAY&feature=youtu.be>

Listen to Revd. Wale Hudson-Roberts as he writes about Martin Luther King's dream of justice, and reflects on followers of Jesus protesting against the injustice of the world. Wale is the Justice Enabler of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.
https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/579374/ I_can.aspx

Listen to Revd. Dr. Kate Coleman as she asks the question, Are you M.A.D. with the world (M.A.D. = Make A Difference)? Kate was the first Black woman to become an accredited Baptist Minister in the UK and then became the first Black female President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (2006-7).
<https://www.nextleadership.org/blog/are-you-m-a-d-with-the-world>

I am challenged by these voices. I am challenged to look at my own life first and ask two questions: 1) "In what ways do I still have unconscious racial biases or behaviours (I came to recognise many years ago that I am not immune)?"; and 2) "Am I doing enough to stand against the evil of racism in society?" I am challenged, particularly by Yinka's comments about racism in the Church, to ask, "Are there ways in which Trinity Baptist Church racially discriminates, or turns a blind eye to racial biases, or does not do enough to challenge them, either corporately or individually?" And, in a Covid-19 affected world, where Ethnic Minorities are disproportionately represented among NHS staff and other (often low-paid) key workers, I am challenged to ask, "Are we doing enough to support and honour and stand up for those who are sacrificing themselves for our safety?"

Black Lives Matter. That statement needs to be heard in order that it may be true in reality that All Lives Matter equally. We were all created in God's image; we are all reconciled to God and to one another through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. But that statement cannot be merely a statement. It must be lived in our lives, in the family of this church and wherever we go in the communities around us. Will we be willing to listen? Then will we be willing, to join Jesus in his stated mission (Luke 4:18-19):

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour”?

What difference will we make to God's world? I welcome feedback on this statement, particularly if you have experienced racism and have insights that would be helpful for us as we consider our response to these issues.

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