

PASTOR'S THOUGHTS

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Love Thy Neighbour

The UEFA European Championship 2024, commonly known as Euros 2024, started on Friday 14 June 2024. It is set to be a thrilling showcase of Europe's premier football talent and hosted by Germany. The tournament promises to captivate millions of fans worldwide, celebrating the unity and excitement that football brings.

Sport, including football, plays a crucial role in society. It promotes physical health, fosters teamwork, and provides a platform for cultural exchange. The Euros, in particular, serve as an example of Europe's diversity, where players and fans from varied backgrounds come together to share in the joy of the game. This unity and collective celebration can help bridge cultural divides, encouraging mutual respect, diversity and understanding.

However, despite its unifying potential, football is not immune to the pervasive issue of racism. Recent incidents in football stadiums across Europe have highlighted the ugly side of the sport, where players and fans of colour face racial abuse. Such behaviour tarnishes the spirit of the game and undermines the values of equality and respect that sport is meant to uphold.

Addressing racism in football requires a concerted effort from governing bodies, clubs, and fans. Strict penalties for racist behaviour, comprehensive education programmes, and robust support systems for victims are essential steps. By tackling racism head-on, the football community can ensure that the Euros 2024, and all sporting events, are inclusive spaces where everyone can enjoy the beautiful game without fear of discrimination.

The fight against racism in sport is not just a battle for fair play on the field but a crucial step towards a more just and equitable society.

In Leviticus 19:33-34 we read, 'When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'

Former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela in his book Long Walk to Freedom wrote "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

We must do what we can to create harmonious relations with each other - exercising patience, being kind and showing love.

The use of games such as football and fellowship in general are great ways in which to build unity, equality, respect, and love for our neighbours. Let us live and walk in love.