

Black Lives Matter Your Life Matters

Perhaps, like me, when you watch the news you sometimes ask yourself what is wrong with the human heart? We seem to be capable of acts of great kindness and sacrifice. People in the NHS and in the Community have been so kind during this Covid pandemic. Carers, porters, nurses, doctors in nursing homes and in hospitals and in the community. People have come to work despite the fear and the lack of personal protection equipment. Some have caught the virus and died. The sacrifices have been made by their families for the sake of strangers.

And yet the same time as remarkable feats of kindness and generosity we seem unable to bring about peace in our world between people of different backgrounds and ethnicities, cultures and creeds. There is dis-ease in the human heart.

On May 25th 2020 in the city of Minneapolis in the USA George Floyd was killed on the street by Police Officers whose job it is to protect their citizens from violence and harm. This incident has been witnessed now by millions of people across the world and it has sparked an upsurge in the Black Lives Matter. Seeking an end to institutionalised racism and a recognition that all lives matter regardless of colour, class or creed.

Slavery was not right 400 years ago when Edward Colston made his fortune in Bristol on the back of other people's misery. It was not right 200 years ago when the Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire was passed by Act of parliament in 1807. And it is not right today.

The 'Stop The Traffic' movement was founded on the 200th anniversary of the Abolition Act in 2007. You can see the wide and varied work they do on their website www.stopthetraffic.org and you can even download an app for Apple or Android to play an active part helping other people through this movement.

Prejudice and division have been part of all nations and cultures. Each people group has its own prejudices. The Nazis were following a long tradition of persecuting the Jews and gypsies and such prejudice is still alive around today as is true of many other people groups and subgroups within societies whether it be the Batwa (pygmy) Forest people in Burundi or the Rohingya in Burma.

I have black, brown and white chickens in our garden and remarkably they lay brown and blue eggs but under the colourful shells all the eggs are the same and together they make beautiful cakes and omelettes.

There is a beauty in diversity in nature, who would want only one type of flower?

There is a strength in diversity. Mother Theresa put it this way: "I can do what you can not do. And you can do what I can not do. But together we can do it all."

There is also challenge in diversity and sometimes conflict. We need to get under the skin, beyond the shell, we need to talk together and not fear or exploit each other. Travel broadens the mind as we meet each other on each other's home ground.

Jesus told his followers that they were to be different. He came to bring about a new society that transcends ethnicity, gender and social status.

Jesus came not only to reconcile us to God by his death and resurrection, dealing with our sin and wrongdoing on the cross (Romans 5:10) but he also came to reconcile us to one another and to make us ambassadors of this gospel of reconciliation in the world. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20) Breaking down the barriers of hostility between people, ‘between Jews and Greek, men and women, slave ad free making us all One in Christ’ (Galatians 3:28).

Together we have one heavenly Father. (Ephesians 3:6)

In heaven there will be people of every tribe, every nation, every language all worshipping God together (Revelation 5:9 – 7:9) Just as there was on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was outpoured. People from Asia, from Africa, from Europe all hearing the Good News, the Gospel, together and thousands choosing to be baptised into this new mixed community of followers of Jesus as Lord and saviour (Acts 2:5-11, 41).

Prejudice is as old as time. Fear of difference, power of one group over another, wars and dominance, conquest and empires, Persian, Greek, Roman or British. But we need to move forward and put the past behind us and discover that Jesus comes to heal the past and to lead us into a into new relationships with one another in a global world. To exchange conquest for common wealth and common health.

Jesus told that great story in response to the question of “who is my neighbour?” It is, he said, the Samaritan, the one despised and prejudiced against because of their mixed race, culture and creed. It is he that Jesus makes to be the hero of the story. It is that man and woman who is your neighbour and God requires that you love your neighbour as a sign and marker that you genuinely love God. (Luke 10:25-37 John 4:9)

Jesus taught us to call God Father when we pray and consequently to see each other as extended family. (Matthew 6:9)

I would like to finish this talk with some words from El-Ruth Harmony, a member of staff at Holy Trinity Brompton in London. It is a church that I respect greatly, and this young Nigerian woman can explain things in a way that I cannot because I come from a white middle class background and she brings valuable insight from her own perspective.

See article below

Response from El-Ruth Harmony, to the death of George Floyd May 25th 2020

El-Ruth is on the staff of Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, London.

"My name is El-Ruth and at this time I think it would be helpful to describe the lens in which I viewed life coming into last week, because then you might be able to picture my point of view and that of many others that I represent.

My parents were missionaries and so since day one I was exposed to different cultures and races and visited many countries outside of Nigeria. I was raised in Devon by white British guardians and went to a school where I was the only black girl. I wouldn't say I experienced racism, but I would say I did experience the same level of ignorance that a white girl growing up in Nigeria might experience.

If someone didn't like me, my first thought wasn't, "Oh it's because I am black!" I thought "Maybe it's because I can at times be a bit pushy and like to take a lot of selfies".

Two things happened to me prior to George Floyd's death.

First, my little sister opened up to me that in the same place in Devon, that I love and speak so highly of, she had experienced racism, not just verbally, she also had been physically hit by some boys at her school.

The same day I heard about George Floyd's murder, I was told that I was not going to receive the outcome of a Court Hearing that should have taken place that day, it had been postponed due to the Corona Virus. On the 1st April around the beginning of Lockdown, I and one of my housemates had been assaulted physically in our own home for no reason at all by someone who lives under the same roof. That person was supposed to be tried for Physical Assault that day but it will not now happen until later this month.

So that day I was already heartbroken to hear what my sister had shared with me about her experience of prejudice and disappointed by delayed justice regarding a racial assault on myself and my friend. Then I saw the news and saw the murder of George Floyd. I was crushed and hit with so many waves of emotion.

First came the anger, the questioning - Why the silence? Why aren't more people outraged? Where is the outcry of the Church in America? Where is the outcry from the Church here in the UK?

Then there was the sadness. We lost our dad suddenly in a car accident when I was six. George Floyd's daughter, Gianna, is six years old and I wept for her and for her family. You see your identity as a black person is massively attacked each time you hear about racism. Each time you witness the world debate whether black lives matter, whether your life matters, you can't help but think: "What if it was me? Would my church stay silent? Would my colleagues stay silent? Would my friends stay silent? Would the people I love demand justice?"

My questions were not just for people around me. I have big questions for God! "God do You even care? This has happened time and time again, does Your heart not break?

When will it be enough for You? When will You be moved to action? God, if Your Church does not act, will You act? Do black lives even matter? Does my life matter less to You?"

Jesus said in Luke 23 verse 34 "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing". My question was "Father how can I ask You to forgive them, when they *do know* what they are doing and still choose to do it anyway!"

I know that I may not get all of my questions answered this side of eternity, but I still think it is important to be honest with God about how I feel. I cannot and will not allow the mysteries of life to pull me away from the Author and Creator of life itself. I am not afraid to unravel in front of God. He is the only one who can put me back together. Silence from both parties causes distance, if it is too much to discuss with a friend it causes distance. If you do not come to God with the burdens of your heart, it causes distance.

This was my experience of last week.

This is the first time I have actively cried out for justice, trying to openly communicate my hurt and disappointment with the racism.

Imagine how exhausting it must be for those who have been fighting for years, for those who have been trying to educate people for years, for those who have experienced the pain and what feels like a betrayal of silence for years. Imagine having a wound that never gets a chance to heal. Just as you are healing from the last death of racism, you are pierced with another one.

And here is the challenging part for us as Christians. For me as a black female Christian, in the midst of pain and in the rightful shouts for change - God's standard for me does not change, it is not dependant on what other people do or say to me. I can be completely in the right and still not respond rightly. I am still called to pray for my Government even when they let me down. I am still called to stand up for the persecuted even if I am not the one being persecuted. I am still called to honour my leaders even if I question their actions. I am still called to speak the truth in love even if I am speaking the truth for the hundredth time. I am still called to forgive even if they don't say sorry. I am still called to love even when they choose hate.

God is still good even when all I see is bad. God is still the God of justice even in the midst of injustice. God is still at work for our good even when we see no change. God is still Father to the fatherless even when I feel abandoned.

And when I am filled with doubt, when circumstances around me draw me to unbelief, I take one look at all that Jesus did for me on the cross and I know that God really is Who He says He is.