

WESLEYAN REFORM UNION

CESA - Values Day 2021, February 7th

Let's look at RACISM

The Christian Ethics and Social Action Committee is very aware that we are all having challenges in holding services at this time, but we thank God for innovation and "Zoom". We present these thoughts to your fellowship and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you as you consider how best to use them.

Although the word 'Racism' does not appear in the Bible, the subject of racial tension, prejudice and hatred is self-evident throughout. From the Tower of Babel, to the journeying of Abraham, Jacob's family, Joseph, the slavery in Egypt, to Deborah, Gideon, Samson, David and the Philistines, to the Exile and the horrors of Psalm 137, we see that the racial and nationalistic tensions of our day are echoed throughout the Bible. The following outlines by Andy Wilcock, have been produced to help you and your congregation to explore this subject. You could use the material as a Bible Study or a sermon.

Here are some questions to get you thinking

How would you describe what racism is?

Have you ever witnessed people being racist? How did you feel?

How have recent racist events made you feel?

Do you think there was racism in the Bible?

Here are a few examples. Could you think of more?

Jonah

The story of Jonah is more about Jonah's encounter with 'foreigners' (as Jonah saw them), and God's Grace towards them, than about his encounter with a whale. (The whale bit is only two verses and acts as a turning point in the story, but not much of a turning point for Jonah). Twice God calls Jonah, to warn the great city of Nineveh of a coming disaster, and in his reluctance to obey God's call, twice he comes face to face with humble, praying, honest pagans. In the boat, it's the pagans that call on Jonah to pray and he refuses. They seek the will of their gods or any god, just whoever is causing the storm that they know is not natural. Even when they find out it is all Jonah's fault, they try to save him, rather than throw him to his death and they fear judgment from God for his murder. All the time what is driving Jonah away from Nineveh, is his hatred and self-righteous condemnation for this city.

- One of the key things that fuels Racism is to group all people of a skin colour, nation, culture or religion into one group and judge them by stereo-types.
- To say, they're lazy, poor, uneducated, un-achievers, dangerous, after our money or carrying a knife. Individuals or whole organisations can be plagued by this wrong attitude.
- It fails to recognize and devalues the individual.

- It can lead to anything from people getting the cold shoulder, to not getting jobs, to being arrested, being shot on the streets, to the gas chambers.

Imagine being a talented, hardworking, educated young person, knowing that the colour of your skin or nationality sets you apart as lazy or a danger and unemployable. How would you feel?

Jonah had grouped all the Ninevites into one evil people, who he had decided did not deserve mercy, forgiveness or compassion. I am sure he loved the message he was given to preach to them, but he hated the prospect of God showing them compassion. Read Jonah 4:1-7. Twice Jonah is faced with people 'Other' than him and his people, who act more honourably than he did. They pray when he refuses to, they respond to God's call, when he goes the other way. They accepted God's mercy, when he refused it. Why did he refuse it? Because of his Nationalistic, Religious, Self-Righteous anger, and in chapter 4 he directs his question to God.

The book of Jonah ends without resolution..... Yes, Nineveh is not destroyed. The people were sorry, but never came to the point of salvation. Jonah is humbled, but God had the last word.

Leaving us, the reader to examine our own conscience:

- Are we like Jonah?
- Do we judge others by grouping them by, lazy stereotypes?
- Do we embrace the mercy that God offers all people in this world?
 - a. 1st by the way we see and great others?
 - b. 2nd by who we offer the message of grace to and believe they can be saved.

(Thoughts taken from 'The Prodigal Prophet' by Tim Keller)

Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses Number 12

Numbers 12:¹ Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. ² "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked.

"Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the Lord heard this.

Another interesting example.

Why does Miriam and Aaron provoke God's anger to burn against them and cause Him to leave their presence v9?

There are two answers: **1st** What they did & **2nd** Why they did it.

1st What they did? They challenged God's authority and His appointed prophet. They wanted to replace Moses and be God's representative to the people. Notice that v3 says that "Moses was a very humble man". If you remember back to the Burning Bush, Moses objected to being God's messenger. Moses did not seek this roll, God chose Him.

2nd Why did they do it? Because Moses had married a Cushite woman. In other words an African woman of dark skin. I am sure jealousy and a desire for power also came into it, but not to serve God and the people like Moses. I don't remember Aaron or Miriam pleading for Israel like Moses did, asking to be blotted out of the Book God had written. Ex 32:31-32, or similarly as Paul does in Romans 9:1-5 "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people." This is the mark of a priestly prophet taking up their cross and following Christ.

Back to the subject of race. In Jeremiah 13:23 it says "Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots?" Moses had married a Woman of Colour, and it was this that gave

Miriam and Aaron the belief they had a case against Moses. They despised their brother and his position, and wanted it for themselves.

How could this type of thinking happen within the very Holy Courts and leadership of God's people? To value or devalue someone based on the colour of their skin or ethnicity!

Notice that God does not see the human race this way, but He looks to the heart of the individual, and then sends Jesus to redeem us.

As a punishment, Miriam is covered in leprosy. God wanted to show his anger. Then, of course, the whole camp had to wait seven days for Miriam to be healed, before they could move on. Notice how Aaron pleads for his sister Miriam in v10-12. It was not the colour of her skin, but the disease that made her unclean, and illustrated at that point her contamination of sin that needed dealing with, before they could move on.

The Good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37

As with Jonah, Jesus tells this story to challenge and provoke religious, self-righteous Jews who saw the Samaritans as good for nothing. They had stigmatized a whole group of people and culture by lazy stereo-typing. This is exactly what Jesus is challenging with his story. In fact Jesus identifies himself with the Good Samaritan, by illustrating his own journey to save mankind through the actions of this 'foreigner'. Actions towards a helpless person. "Love your Neighbour" is the resounding call, and "who is our neighbour?" Well, not someone like you, but "the other" group of people, not like you. That is what Jesus did, in coming to earth. In becoming like us. Theologians speak of the "otherness" of God. Yet Jesus sees us as individuals, as is illustrated in the individual sparrow that falls to the ground, or every numbered hair on our heads.

He values our national identity so much that there will be representatives from each one in heaven. We will carry our nationality with us to heaven and it will not hold us back. But at the same time we receive a new citizenship in His name that in no way devalues who we are and the culture, country or team we support.

We are called to love the 'other' person, and as the Good Samaritan sets the standard, we are called to go out of our way, to right any injustice that has befallen them. Feed, treat, and provide shelter and hope, without judgment. **BEWARE:** the story points out the religious Priest and Levite are the ones that judge and walk by on the other side.

Jesus taken by a mob Luke 4:14-30

Luke Chapter 4 starts with the temptations in the Wilderness, where Jesus is shown all the Kingdoms of the World, possibly through all history. He is offered their authority, submission and splendour, to rule and own. Yet He refuses, because Jesus came to worship only God and serve only Him. But He also came that the nations may also Worship only God and serve only Him. They could not do this with Satan anywhere in the equation. Jesus leaves the wilderness experience, having not sinned and strengthened by the Power of the Spirit. There is a parallel here with Israel, leaving the same wilderness to conquer Canaan. Yet they failed at every temptation in the wilderness, and they came to Canaan to crush and invade. See what happens next in Luke 4, when Jesus goes to Nazareth.....

The Synagogue in Nazareth

Jesus takes the scroll and declares His mission statement. The congregation loved it! v22 'All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked'. Why? Because charity begins at home!

Jesus read "he has anointed me

- to proclaim good news to the poor.
- 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.

This is great news!! They thought, after all our people are oppressed by the Romans and we need someone to set us free!! They even demand Jesus did the miracles, there in their own town.

v23, like you've done in other places! Your own people, need miracles Jesus! Charity begins at home! Doesn't it?

Well here is how this sermon ends, with Jesus being taken to the edge of a cliff by the mob. How quickly people change their tune. Religious people, in a Synagogue, after hearing the Bible read by Jesus. It makes you think!

Jesus reminds them of two stories of their Biblical heroes, who came to the aid of the poor and sick. Elijah and Elisha; two great miracle workers of old, but Jesus points out that they came to the aid of 'foreigners', the 'other' people.

- **Elijah went** to the house of a Widow in Zarephath –a pagan country! One of the places the original Israelites failed to crush when they invaded Canaan. Yet in the story of Elijah, there were widows throughout Israel. His own country! They had suffered a three year famine, but he went to the widow of a foreigner and blessed her household!
- **Elisha healed** Naaman, a terrorist from Syria, who, during one of his raids on Israel, captured a young girl to act as a servant to his wife. When she realized that Naaman had leprosy, it was she who told Naaman about Elisha. Leprosy was an incurable problem and every nation suffered from it. Yet Elisha was willing to heal him.
- **Jesus' mission** is for all people, of all nations. Because their lives matter to Him. He values theirs and our lives so much He went to the cross for all peoples of the world!

In conclusion we need to affirm that racism has no part in the Christian Gospel. It contradicts our Lord's command to love our neighbours as ourselves. It offends the fundamental Christian belief that every person is made in the image of God and is equally precious. It solves no problems and creates nothing but fear and hatred.

Racism is a problem for the heart and Jesus can transform hearts to forgive, open people's eyes to love more deeply and help us to be a positive part of change.