

# WEEKLY SERMON

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## God made them all

Recently, the ugly results of racism have been brought to the attention of the world, precipitated by the cruel death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Historically, racism is nothing new. However, this current state of affairs in racism began in the 18th century when it was at the heart of the slave trade and activities of colonisation in both America and Europe. By the 19th century it had spread around the world when people perceived to be of low status were exploited for cheap labour. In the 20th century, racism was incorporated under the general term of discrimination. In 1948 the 'Universal declaration of human rights' was formulated and agreed upon by the United Nations.

One would have hoped that by now, the situation would be resolved and settled. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and sadly it is characterised in the present generation by physical violence, daily insults, protests, damage to property, and verbal expressions of dissatisfaction and contempt. All these are having a profound effect on social relationships.

For almost 20 years of my life in Blackburn, I represented the Diocese of Blackburn, tackling the subject of racism on a committee at Westminster. It was as a member of this committee that I got to know the former Archbishop of York, Most Rev John Sentamu. It was heart breaking at times to hear sad stories of racism in churches from different dioceses. I am reminded of Martin Luther King's famous 'I have a Dream' speech when he said of his children that he dreamed they, 'will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character'.

A few years ago I was highly honoured to have been invited to Hull in Yorkshire to meet the great, great granddaughter of William Wilberforce. Wilberforce was a politician and a leader in the movement to abolish the slave trade in England. He said, 'A private faith that does not act in the face of oppression is no faith at all'.

His great, great granddaughter shared that she once put chains on herself and walked down the street in order to experience the pain, suffering and humiliation inflicted on the slaves at that time. She expressed how terrible it made her feel. I was blessed to be given a copy of a Wilberforce family prayer.

Again, and again we read from the Bible how the prophets condemned injustice. Surely the churches representing the Body of Christ need to unite together as one to condemn racism and injustice. The Bible says that where there is unity God commands the blessings. It is true to say that racism breeds hatred and distrust. It is, therefore, a sin, ungodly and evil. Why is it evil? Because all are made in the image of God (Gen 1.27), whatever colour, and all colours are loved by God (John 3.16). People need to be educated into the love, fear and judgement of God, as well as the wrongness and evil of injustice, hatred and racism.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

I recently heard a Christian speaker put forward five excellent reasons why the church should oppose racism.

- 1) All are made in the image of God (Gen 1.26-27)
- 2) All are loved by God (John 3.16)
- 3) The message of the early church was to love each other (1 John 4.11)
- 4) All are equal in Christ (Gal 3.28)
- 5) Men and women of all colours have equal dignity (John 13.35)

It is a fact that all are made of flesh and the same red blood, therefore the sooner people realise we are made to care for each other the better, because some day people will stand before God to be judged.

It is appropriate that Rev 7.9 states, 'After these things I looked and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb'.

In response to the saying, 'Black lives matter', some people responded by saying 'All lives matter'. All would agree by definition that all lives matter. However, this present movement. With protests in over 2000 cities and towns is not about generalisation of life. It is about racism of a particular race who have been oppressed for centuries because of the colour of their skin, which I am happy to say God gave to them, praise His holy name.

In conclusion I was reminded of the hymn 'Thy Kingdom Come Oh God', by L Hensley, which asks the profound question, 'When shall all hatred cease.' Let us all, therefore, stand on the word of God together, and His living power to wipe out racism and injustice in our generation.

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