

Evening Service for St James' Church, West End – 19th July 2020
'Challenging Racism' led by Reverend Linda Galvin

Hello and welcome to our service this evening which has been put together using a liturgy called *Challenging Racism* that was put together by Yousoouf Gooljary, who until recently was the Rector of St Martin of Tours in Edinburgh.

So, let's just take a moment to bring ourselves closer into God's presence

Introduction: Racism is a sin against God and against our fellow human beings. It is contrary to the justice and the love of God. It destroys the human dignity of both the racist and the victim. Let us condemn racism in all its forms.

'Whoever say I am in the light while hating a brother or sister is still in the darkness' (1 John 2:9)

We listen to: *Mayenziwe (Your Will Be Done)* from the African American Heritage Hymnal, conducted by James Abbington

Scripture Reading Mark 7:24-30

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' ²⁸ But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' ²⁹ Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Sung Response Kindle a flame to lighten the dark and take all fear away

Voice 1 Rereads Mark 7:24

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

Voice 2 Jesus, moves from his country to a foreign land, his comfort zone to a place outside his ethnic security

Sung Response Kindle a flame to lighten the dark and take all fear away

Voice 1 Rereads Mark 7:25-26

²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Voice 2 Jesus does not want to get involved. He tries to keep a low profile but is confronted by a stranger pleading for his help: someone of a different nationality, a different ethnic origin, a different religion. A woman.

Sung Response Kindle a flame to lighten the dark and take all fear away

Voice 1 Rereads Mark 7:27

²⁷ He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'

Voice 2 Jesus answers her harshly

Voice 3 I am from a different ethnicity, a different cultural background. I have to look after my own

Voice 2 Why does Jesus respond like this? Is he leading the woman? What does he expect her to say?

Sung Response Kindle a flame to lighten the dark and take all fear away

Voice 1 Rereads Mark 7:28

²⁸ But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'

Voice 2 The woman responds courageously

Voice 4 I may be a different religion, a different ethnicity, a different colour, a different gender, a different culture, but I have rights too. I am entitled to something. At least give me the crumbs.

Sung Response Kindle a flame to lighten the dark and take all fear away

Voice 1 Rereads Mark 7:29-30

²⁹ Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Voice 2 She has risen to Jesus' challenge. Now he treats her as an equal and gives her more than she had dared to hope.

Voice 3 Your daughter is healed: fully, completely, now. I do not give you the crumbs. I give you the whole banquet. For you too are a child of God.

Sung Response Kindle a flame to lighten the dark and take all fear away

Reflection:

...I wonder if I was to ask you to look at me and describe what you see you would probably start with a middle-aged woman, desperately in need of a haircut, and if I was wearing my collar perhaps a vicar or a priest. It's highly unlikely that you would use the adjective 'white'.

Yet if I were to show you this picture, the vast majority of people's initial description would be 'a black man', before looking for other features. When we use a colour adjective as our principal descriptor we are unconsciously beginning to discriminate. Our skin tone should not be the thing that distinguishes us, and certainly not the words black or white, because neither of these skin colours actually exist; human beings' flesh colours ranging from the palest to the darkest of browns of infinite variety and hues.

Of course we could refer to people with a lighter skin tone as 'Caucasian' referring to a race of humankind native to Europe, North Africa and Southwest Asia, but that's just a polite way of further discrimination as the antonym of this word is 'a person with black skin, a non-white, a dark skinned person' and most illogically, 'a person of colour' for aren't we all people of colour?

However, for people who are identified purely by the colour of their skin, life immediately becomes a struggle to be treated with equal value and respect and we all either knowingly or unconsciously perpetrate this discrimination;

For example, some 'black' people recently shared some ways in which they are racially discriminated against that 'non-black' people might not even notice:

When being black is being afraid to leave the shop without buying anything.

When being black is having to think twice about what hairstyle you will wear to a job interview.

When being black is having people cross the street because they're scared of you.

When being black is working as a cashier and having people wait for someone else even though you're available

When being black is having your parents tell you from a young age to work twice as hard as the opposite race in order to be noticed properly.

When being black is being in a dangerous situation and not knowing if calling the police will help or make things worse.

Have you ever had to take any of these things into consideration or has it even crossed your mind to do so?

Now you might ask how, as a 'white' person, you might speak about these things for how do you know what it really feels like and you'd be perfectly correct that none of my life experiences, my family background, the neighbourhoods in which I've lived or the cultural identity I have been a part of could possibly allow me to do so. You might also say that it's not just a matter of black lives, but that all lives matter when it comes to discrimination, but you'd be missing the point.

As Christians we should be able to empathise with any situation, but there are times when we have to prioritise when we should be doing something positive and active about things that are hurtful, that are unjust, that are just plain wrong and at this time racial discrimination is high on that list and cannot be pushed to one side any longer.

Discrimination happens when we consider not just that things are different but somehow inferior, someone or something to be feared and despised. The bible tells us that we should not conform to the ways of the world, and some Christians will take this quite literally by quietly withdrawing from daily life, refusing to engage with the political process or even to have contact with anyone whom they consider to be 'impure' because they are not part of their own select group.

I don't believe this is what God intends because we hear Paul very clearly in his letter to the Romans names those 'ways of the world' as those attitudes and behaviours which are judgemental, exclusive, discriminatory, which refuse to recognise God in each person and which limit the availability of God's grace.

Each and every one of us has a part to play in the commitment to action for change and to celebrate our glorious diversity because even Jesus was challenged and was prepared to change his mind to be more inclusive

It is God who challenges us to include all – even ourselves, to see beyond the label, to look through other people's eyes and into our own hearts, to celebrate our wonderful diversity and to see each other as reflections of the all-embracing rainbow God in whose image we are each made. Something we can now affirm together:

To all the colours of the rainbow

WE STAND WITH YOU WHEN WE ARE PERSECUTED

To all the colours of the rainbow

WE CELEBRATE OUR DIVERSITY

To all the colours of the rainbow

WE ARE WELCOME AT CHRIST'S TABLE

Blessing from *The Soul Loves The Body*

Senzenina (A cry of the oppressed): 'What have we done?' by Cape Town Youth Choir (formerly Pro Cantu Youth Choir) / soloist: Monde Mdingi

Prayer for God's help and healing

Leader: Redeeming God,
in a world of violence
we acknowledge our own selfishness and prejudice,
which are contrary to your all-embracing love.
Help us to act justly, to love mercy
and to walk humbly with Christ, in respect for all your children.

**ALL WE PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS AND REDEMPTION;
WE PRAY FOR HELP AND HEALING**

Leader: Gracious God,
mindful of our own need for your forgiveness and grace,
enable us to be challenging yet compassionate
towards those who show bigotry and commit racist violence.
May their hatred and prejudice be overcome
through the strength and liberation of your redeeming love.

**ALL WE PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS AND REDEMPTION;
WE PRAY FOR HELP AND HEALING**

Leader: Caring God,
your Son Jesus showed solidarity with the weak and vulnerable.
Touch with your love
all those who have been the victims of racist violence.
Heal their wounds of body, mind and spirit
and lead them on the journey to justice and reparation

**ALL WE PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS AND REDEMPTION;
WE PRAY FOR HELP AND HEALING**

Leader: Liberating God,
you offer freedom to all people.
Send your Holy Spirit to strengthen the victims
of racist bullying, threats, persecution and abuse.
Break the bonds of fear and isolation,
and empower us in our struggle.

**ALL WE PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS AND REDEMPTION;
WE PRAY FOR HELP AND HEALING**

Leader: Reconciling God,
help us to overcome all our ethnic divisions.
Increase our understanding
of how to develop a truly inclusive culture
Most of all, this day and every day,
challenge us to challenge racism.

ALL AMEN

Closing Responses

Leader: God of justice,
give us voice,
take away our fear;
shake up our prejudices and move us to a different place,
so that we may stand on common ground
with those who struggle for justice.

**ALL TEACH US LOVE. TEACH US COMPASSION.
ABOVE ALL, OUT OF LOVE AND COMPASSION,
TEACH US TO ACT
AMEN**

Thuma Mina (Send Me Lord) by Hugh Masekela from Notes of Life