

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

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Last week our Chaplain Jamie preached powerfully on unconscious bias, which can lead to racism, and more generally the exclusion of anyone who isn't white and male, or who is from any sort of minority group. Following the report of the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Task Force, this week our own Diocese issued a strong report on racism within the church itself. This report was circulated with the newsletter and some paragraphs stood out for me:

“In our church context it is seen in the glaring under-representation and exclusion in decision making at both local church committee and higher synodical levels. It is also seen in the demeanour, disregard, and disrespect as well as the lack of sensitivity based on skin colour that often devalue meetings and honest conversations. One can point to a lack of greater intentionality in addressing issues concerning discrimination on the basis of race on the one hand; and on the other hand to the ‘inclusion’ of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people as token and exotic (a kind of well-meaning racism). What is lacking is whole-hearted welcome to leadership and decision making. What is needed is space and value for the contributions and perspectives of People of Colour. Are we ready to see the potential in the other and prepared to share responsibility? Are we able to recognise the potential in the other and delegate responsibility? Are we equally ready to sacrifice our own place at the table in order to welcome another?”

The Archbishop of Canterbury has issued an apology for deep rooted racism within the Church of England, and for not doing enough about it, urgently enough. There's now a Working Group looking at the whole issue and we in our chaplaincies are urged to get to grips with what is acknowledged as an unacceptable position.

When we look at the Church of England, the figures alone are startling:

“There is no Diocesan Bishop from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community. In the 42 dioceses there is only 1 Cathedral Dean and only 3.9 per cent of the 7700

clergy are from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people (see ministry statistics published in 2019). There is a worrying and visible lack of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic representation in all synodical bodies. A feature of chaplaincy councils and diocesan decision-making boards and committees is the underrepresentation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people. Underrepresentation is further painfully evident in senior leadership. The Working Group is aware that the Diocese in Europe is blessed with a Bishop and an Archdeacon from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community. However, there is a lack of representation of People of Colour as Cathedral Deans, Area Deans, Canons, Chaplains and Licensed Readers.”

If we look at our chaplaincy, we don't have any Black, Asian and Minority people on our Ministry Team, or many as officers of the Council. We need to work towards changing this, not least in reaching out to the different communities across our area, showing how we can be a place of welcome to all.

Thinking of this reminded me of when Garry and I visited Australia two years ago and on the Sunday afternoon we were taken to a suburb of Melbourne. We had no idea what to expect when we drove up to an enormous leisure centre. The place was packed to overflowing with people, very tall, slender, and beautifully dressed, the men in smart suits and ties despite the heat, the ladies in gorgeous evening gowns, and children in their best clothes zipping about. We felt very scruffy indeed, as we'd just been spending a happy day exploring the Botanical Gardens so were a long way from being smartly dressed. But we were welcomed like long lost lambs, pulled in, given a drink and plonked at a table to eat home made food. Our hosts were refugees from Africa, from the Dinka tribe, who have made their way in numbers to this part of Australia. Fervent Christians, Anglicans, they were overcome with joy after a lot of hard work and fundraising, to have the Bishop there that day to license their very own priest and to inaugurate this place as their church. They are still working hard to raise funds to build their own church. Their joy, energy and excitement were palpable – and infectious.

Now that morning we'd been to a communion service at a big church not far away which was nowhere near full. We learnt that the Dinka had not been made welcome at their local Anglican church – far too enthusiastic about worship, so they'd been forced to look elsewhere. Empty churches for small white congregations, a huge sports hall full of fervent black worshippers, three choirs,

prayer was everywhere. What a waste of an opportunity – and an indictment of the church.

In the midst of this flurry of activity and words, come this Sunday's readings – from Acts at the end of the chapter about Peter being shown by the Holy Spirit that all people, whether Gentile or Jew, are to be given the good news about Christ and where the Holy Spirit is seen to fall upon Cornelius, a Roman (and therefore Gentile) and his household, and from the Gospel of John, where Jesus tells his disciples "Love each other".

Now Peter is being given firm instructions that all are welcome thanks to Christ. He goes to the house of Cornelius, an officer in the occupying Roman Army no less, and welcomes him, his family and household into the new Christian church and baptises them to the astonishment of some of his colleagues. An extraordinary thing for Peter to do. But he is following in Jesus' footsteps, and listening to the Holy Spirit. He welcomes into fellowship with him all who wish to receive the good news of Christ.

Jesus said we should love each other. What does that really mean? Perhaps it's easier to look at what it doesn't mean and its nicely summed up by these words from a song writer called Godfrey Birtill:

When I look at the blood  
All I see is love, love, love.  
When I stop at the cross  
I can see the love of God  
But I can't see competition  
I can't see hierarchy  
I can't see pride or prejudice  
or the abuse of authority  
I can't see lust for power  
I can't see manipulation  
I can't see rage or anger  
or selfish ambition

I can't see unforgiveness  
I can't see hate or envy

I can't see stupid fighting  
or bitterness, or jealousy.  
I can't see empire building  
I can't see self-importance  
I can't see backstabbing  
Or vanity or arrogance.  
I see surrender, sacrifice, salvation,  
humility, righteousness, faithfulness, grace, forgiveness  
Love Love Love.....  
When I Stop!...at the cross  
I can see the love of God.

Perhaps to this we should add the words "I can't see racism, bigotry, xenophobia or homophobia".

God made us all in his own image, Christ died for us all, the Good News is for all, regardless of where we were born or the colour of our skin. We need to all play our part in welcoming everyone to our church, perhaps having a good hard look at ourselves and our attitudes and even sometimes think about giving up our own place at the table to others. We are Christ's church; we all need to pay our part in making it a rainbow church.

Amen.

