

## **SERMON 18<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2020 ST JOHN'S CHURCH, HIGH PATH**

How do we talk about Christian faith today? In the middle of a raging pandemic, in the cry of a grown man for his mother as the life is sucked out of him by a heavyweight boot, challenging our view on what it means to be human. How do we talk about Christian faith today?

If ever there was a time for the true meaning of the Gospel to be told, it is now when the 'evidence' the unbelievers demand is there before them: the greatness of a higher power that has stunned those who are enslaved by the greatness of human power.

The events of the past months have brought into sharp focus these words from

First Corinthians "God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong."

That heavy boot to the neck, crushing out the life of a one time criminal, perceived as unworthy, foolish, of no consequence, yet reformed, changed by the grace of God, we see by his slaying, a sprouting of new theologies on race, on colour, a sudden worldwide thirst for all things black, suppressed history brought back to life, old, formerly accepted viewpoints questioned, a reawakening of all that is true highlighted in even the darkest of places. Indeed, God has in our time, chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.

The prophet Isaiah's vision speaks of the eyes of the blind being opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. He calls for those who are weak at the knees, and those whose hands are weak to be strengthened by those who are stronger. They are to make each other strong, looking forward in faith and encouraging the weak in faith to be strong and unafraid, on the basis of the promises of God's word.

St Luke, whose feast day it is today, has Jesus telling the seventy disciples he sends out ahead of him that "the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few".

It is no different now.

We, Christians, called by Christ, are to be the labourers of our time; to be catalysts for change in our world; for how can we live in a world we are not prepared to change into the world that God wants.

That world is one in which there is fairness, equality of opportunity for all, freedom for the oppressed and respect for all people, all the things that Jesus came into the world to validate.

Fast forward two thousand years and we are still looking to validate those human values. In their place, we have the anomaly of situations which produce movements that give rise to events such as Black History Month.

Many ask why does there have to be a black history month, What is so special about blackness that it has to have a month of its own. Simply this. Without it, there would be no wider knowledge, no celebration of the achievements of black people throughout the ages, and in this country, no obvious public records of the sacrifices and hard work, commitment and loyalty of black people to the development of what is Great Britain.

There is an African saying: "Until the lions tell their stories of the hunt, reports will always glorify the hunter." Black history in its varying forms is only now being taken notice of, brought into the mainstream and recognition given to its many black writers.

These are times when we need to confront the truth of our existence. I would love to talk about past Black History Months and those going on this month in spite of the limitations placed on all of us. I'd love to talk about the throbbing drums of Africa, the steel bands of the Caribbean, the aroma of sweet smelling spices flavouring from the cuisine of a thousand islands. But among this cocophony of wonderful sounds and sweet smells, are the discordant voices, the passionate retelling of a journey from enslavement to freedom and the re-enslavement of a different kind, the rhetoric of the dispossessed, disempowered, those dispatched to unknown lands to wither and die. There is always another story and that story needs to be heard.

There is no doubt that we are living in times of unresolved issues, deep resentments, hurt, fear for future generations on all sides. We can't shy away from it. Why should we?.

Throughout our history, God has provided us with countless opportunities to cleanse, to heal, to restore. Perverse as it may seem, perhaps the evil run of a pandemic, a boot to the throat are what we are provided with for the era of peace to be brought in. But we will miss the opportunity we have been provided with to remove the evil of hatred, malice, self interest, of not recognising the 'other' as our brother or sister; if we do not open our eyes to see and open our ears to hear what the Spirit of God is saying to us.

St Luke's Gospel is a Gospel to the poor and is one of social justice. It is his Gospel which tells the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man, and their reversal of fortunes. Only in Luke's gospel do we hear Mary's Magnificat where she proclaims that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. And in sending the seventy out, he instructs them to greet each dwelling with the words: "Peace to this house!"

For as long as there is injustice in the world, there can never be peace.

In this 2020 Black history month, with all that we have seen and experienced over the past months, the mysteries we cannot understand or fix can we really remain the same. We have seen that God is no respecter of persons; he makes the sun to shine on the good and the evil and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

Is it now time to affirm and reaffirm that Black History isn't just a black thing but something that is part of our human understanding, rooted in who we are as human beings. Yes, we are our brothers keeper; that its a time of understanding, of understanding each other whatever our race, ethnicity, faith so that our spiritual ears and eyes will be even more fully opened to receive Christ's peace in our hearts.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father through the might and power of your Holy name, I pray that your peace transforms each and every life, here and everywhere. May the precious hands of Jesus cure every part of body, mind and spirit, heal every hurt, and bring justice to your world. Be with each and every one of us, keeping us safe from all harm and danger through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen