



Archbishop Stephen preached at the 11am service at St Peter's Church Burnley. This follows in full.

“In days to come

the mountain of the LORD’s house

shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

and shall be raised above the hills...

Many peoples shall come and say,

‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the house of the God of Jacob;

that he may teach us his ways

and that we may walk in his paths.”

*Isaiah 2. 2-3*

And in another passage in Isaiah, again using the image of God’s mountain, God’s home, the place to which we are all invited, Isaiah says that -

“The wolf shall live with the lamb,

the leopard shall lie down with the kid...

The cow and the bear shall graze...

...the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,

and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.

They will not hurt or destroy

on all my holy mountain;

for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD

as the waters cover the sea.”

*Isaiah 11. 6-9*

In other words, the world itself will reflect the beauty and inclusive hospitality that we see in God’s home, that we will learn the ways of the Lord and walk in God’s paths.

In this blessed place, this new earth, everyone has a place, and fear and death - and therefore also racism, prejudice, and xenophobia - are no more.

Indeed, right at the very end of the Bible, the Book of Revelation picks up the same ideas where, in a climactic passage, we are told that people from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (see Revelation 5.9) have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, by the blood he shed on the cross for the breaking down of barriers, and they, in all their rich diversity, with glorious difference and liberating equality, worship before God.

A few years ago, the groundbreaking report, **From Lament to Action** was published. It forensically examined the failings of the Church of England over many decades. Not only our failure to welcome people in, but our failings to nurture and support people of colour who were already part of the Church, and the ways in which many of our reports (with many fine words promising so much change) had never even been implemented.

In our response, the Archbishop of Canterbury and I wrote, with apology and sorrow, about the scourge of racism. That “anything which diminishes the value and beauty of each individual person, made in the image of God, is sinful.” That racism is a sin. That there should be no place for it in the world, and therefore no place for it in the Church. That the work of racial justice must be the work of the whole church, not a side issue or minority concern.

Hence the importance of this Racial Justice Sunday and its challenging vision of what it means for us to be human; to be made in the image of God, revealing in ourselves the new humanity we have in Christ, for that humanity is diverse and beautiful, and it is only when all are welcomed in and all are brought to the table of the Lord that we can be the Church we are meant to be and effectively minister to our needy and divided world.

It's good to be in Burnley this morning, this beautiful multiracial, diverse and hospitable town to speak what I hope are words of challenge and hope. Because, we are just not going to take it anymore. Racism must not win.

Or as Martin Luther King once said, “I've been to the mountain top... I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know, that we as a people, will get there. And I'm happy about that... I just want to do God's will.”

And that is our vocation. To go to the mountain. To see the things of God. To build a different world.

And those two powerful words – lament and action – feature in our gospel reading.

In the Beatitudes Jesus challenges us to live a new life. He describes what it means to live as a child of God's Kingdom and how we can be blessed.

One of the beatitudes calls us to lamentation: ‘Blessed are those who mourn’. Which doesn't mean ‘Blessed are the bereaved’, or ‘Blessed are the sad’, but ‘Blessed are those who cry out against the injustices of the world, its cruelties and its prejudice’, and ‘Blessed are those who say that this

is not how the world is meant to be'. And therefore, 'Blessed are those people, like Martin Luther King and Lord Boateng and Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Ghandi, and Stormzy Geroge Floyd and Jemima Prasadam, and Philip, Bishop of Blackburn and John, the Bishop of Liverpool and so many others who have cried out against the injustices of racism in our church and in our world'.

And the promise of this beatitude is that we will be comforted; which is not comfort in the rather British sense of a cup of tea and a bit of sympathy, but strength to persevere. Strength to go on crying out even when it seems that nothing will change, because if we persist in our lamentation and refuse to let go of our vision, change will come. We will see ourselves differently and dream a different church which will build a different world, one that is God's Kingdom here on earth.

And because you cannot do a Myers Briggs on the Beatitudes and choose which ones you like or say that with your personality one seems preferable to the other, because they are a totality, then lament does indeed lead to action. 'Blessed are those', says Jesus, 'who hunger and thirst for what is right'. 'Blessed are the peacemakers'.

And the rightness for which we hunger, is the rightness which does not judge people by the colour of their skin or their ethnic and national background but values each person because they are a child of God and made in the image of God, all of us with our rich diversity.

And the peace that we long for is not the empty truce of the world, simply the silence after the guns have finished firing, but reconciliation, the lion eating straw like the ox, the nursing child playing over the hole of the asp, the wolf lying down with the lamb, and, yes, every tribe and every tongue and every nation and every language standing before God in the equality in diversity that God has made us.

I thank God for those who have been sometimes lone, prophetic voices in our church, often rejected, often ignored, because to the eyes of the establishment, be it religious or political, a peacemaker often looks like a troublemaker. But people have held onto this vision.

The work of the Racial Justice Commission hold us an uncomfortable mirror to a Church where, tragically, racism and prejudice still exists and bids us do better.

And I thank God for the opportunity of this Racial Justice Sunday, for the Racial Justice Group being commissioned in this diocese this afternoon, and for the opportunity it gives us to come close to the heart of the gospel itself. Because what God has done in Jesus Christ, through his dying and rising, has made us a new humanity. All the old barriers are broken down and we now find ourselves in Christ and find new perspective and new relationship with each other, and then have such hope and joy to offer to the world.

On this mountain, round this table, all are welcome, all are counted in.

Then, on that happy day, many people will say, come let us go up to the mountain of God, let us find our way into the Church of Jesus Christ, that

we may learn God's ways and walk God's paths of peace.

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