

St Augustine's & St Mary's Reflection Newsletter for 21st June – The 2nd Sunday after Trinity.

Lectionary Readings: Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86: 1-10; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matt 10: 32-34)

Brief Reflections: Conflict and Peace (by Revd. Dr Ela Hall)

I have often been struck by the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:34, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

How can that be?!? Jesus advocates against the sword (“No more of this!” he commands in the Garden when disciples wanted him to resist arrest and fight off the authorities); and instead Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, and turn the other cheek (Matt 5 // Luke 6). Whereas we humans are very good at creating, and engaging in, conflict and war, Christ’s life and death inspire self-sacrifice, not armed conflict. He encourages his disciples, “Peace I leave with you” (John 14:27).

What could Jesus have meant in Matthew 10:34?

I believe that the sword Jesus describes here is meant to evoke **inner conflict**; self-reflection; discernment. Jesus is saying something like, “As you follow me, your heart will change; you may find yourself thinking and feeling differently from society, even your family. You will not have peace if you make a compromise too many and lose sight of me.”

Paul uses the sword metaphor to describe the word of God as “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6: 7b). The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews too describes the word of God as “living and active, sharper than any two-edged word, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Like many others, I have found my heart troubled by recent developments, particularly events and issues linked to the Black Lives Matter movement. There is so much pain; so much anger; so much violence; so much injustice.

Yet, I find it is all too easy to fall into the trap of thinking in binary terms and adopt for ourselves a rhetoric of victims and villains. Surely the truth is more complex than that ... The sad truth is that many black lives have been lost to slavery, and contemporary BAME communities still face prejudice and injustice. But many white people also fought and died to put an end to slavery, and many stand up for justice now. On the other hand, postcolonial black liberation movements can also become tyrannical and abusive – one only needs to consider Mugabe’s regime in Zimbabwe.

Talking only of victims and villains is not helpful. We need to think beyond genetic, ethnic, and national identities ... and start considering the individual stories. We need to consider joined histories, as complex as they may be.

Some have argued that Church and politics should not mix. The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby disagrees. In March 2018 he said, “You would have thought that we might have learned. Stay quiet, don’t collect taxes and keep your head down (and so on). The trouble is that’s not what Jesus Christ did. He was never party political. No wing of politics – left or right – can claim God as being on its side. But Jesus was highly political. He told the rich that, unlike the poor who were blessed, they would face woes. He criticised the King as a fox. He spoke harsh words to leaders of the nations when they were uncaring of the needy. He did this because God cares for those in need and expects those who claim to act in his name to do the same. That means action – and words.” (Lindsay, Ben. *We Need To Talk About Race* . SPCK, 2019. p. 130)

Thankfully, we no longer think slavery is OK, even if it is mentioned in the Bible.

How many other acts of oppression do we still enact, however, in the name of ‘pure’ Christianity?

Is it not the time to put an end to all violence, oppression, and end of the fear and loathing of the OTHER?

Whatever our nationality ... our passport ... our social status ... our gender ... our sexuality ... our identity ... our skin colour, we are all equal in God's eyes. We all have the same value. Having said that, we need to celebrate not only what we have in common; we need to acknowledge and indeed celebrate our differences. The Bible is full of differences: clean and unclean food; circumcised and uncircumcised; Jew and Gentile; Peter and Paul. And yet, we are one Church; one body, made of many parts. (And thank God for that! Can you imagine a body made up only by say, toes? Or elbows? Or Mouths? Or eyes?)

I heard someone say recently that God is a verb. You know what, I think they were right. Because God is Love, and love is not just a feeling. Love is action; love is God enacted through acts of courage ... 'Courage' comes from the Latin word 'cor' which means 'heart'. So love is God enacted through acts of the heart.

Let us pray that the sword of the Spirit will not give us peace until we act as the genuine body of Christ and therefore enact his love in the world.

Collect for this week

**Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are nothing worth:
send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the true bond of peace and of all virtues,
without which whoever lives is counted as dead before you.
Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake,
who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen**

Please continue to use these weekly reflections with the Home Act of Worship for Sunday morning – gathering separately but together at 10.30am. We have not produced a midweek Evening Act of Worship for Ordinary Time but you can access Evening Prayer (as well as Compline and Morning Prayer) for each day via the St Mary's mobsite (mini-website) You can easily try it out from the link below. Because its basically a website, you can save this to your favourites, *and* because its a bit like an 'app', there is a way to create a homepage or desktop icon on your device, so it will behave more like an 'app'. <https://www.stmarys-church.co.uk/mobsite/>

We continue to offer a zoom gathering as a supplement to this worship each Sunday at 11am – the details have been emailed to everyone over the last two weeks and remain the same. Please contact Catherine or Karen if you need a reminder. Please ask if you would like help to access these, and do join and feel free to remain “off camera.”

Roots resources this week include two sets of material - prayers and activities for the lectionary readings and for Fathers Day. <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/i-am-looking-for/public-copies/worshipathome21jun>

<https://www.facebook.com/stmarysmessychurchsheffield> also has some prayer activities for Fathers Day.

Please take a few minutes to read this excellent article by Revd Anesia Cook

<https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/blog/diocese-of-sheffield/reflection-on-the-death-of-our-brother-george-floyd>

Just over 1,000 people received food from St Mary's this week – please pray for this, find out more and spread the good news <https://www.avivacommunityfund.co.uk/good-food-for-sheffield-families>

And remember St Augustine's is also now a flour collection point <https://www.breadforsheffield.org/>

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