

# Resourcing

## Racial Justice Sunday 2017

### *'choosing a Side'*

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany (February 12 2017)



The Resurrection by Jeba Singh Samuel

[Resources for Racial Justice Sunday 2017 have been prepared by Racial Justice and Intercultural Advocates of the United Reformed Church and the Global and Intercultural Ministries Team. We are especially thankful to Richard Becher (prayers, poetry, story), John Campbell (hymns) for their contributions and Jeba Singh Samuel of the Church of South India (art work)]

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20**                      **choose Life**

Deuteronomy is addressed to a post-exilic community. On the verge of crossing into that promise of land, their ancestors were taken into exile. One can imagine the regret, sadness and questions of the exiles. Striking, though, are the repeated words 'life and live', underscoring that how community responds will impact on their present and future life. Interpreters suggest that the imagery 'life' is more than good health, longevity and blessings. It is about resilience in body mind and spirit and goodness in both personal and relational living. It is related to all aspects of life. The invitation to 'choose life' is to receive God's promises, humbly walk the way of justice fully and courageously in all of one's relationship. Choosing the way of fullness of life will make a significant difference not only to individual lives, but for a whole community. There is no beating around the bush here. A decision is required. We must choose. We must act.

- Justice for all marginalised people, groups and communities means there is no space for 'I will think about it' or 'will try'. It is a call to take a side. *What are you going to do to make a difference for justice (racial and otherwise)?*

**Psalm 119:1-8**                                      **way of faithfulness**

The 'poetics of double blessings' are captured in this psalm. 'Happy/Blessed are those who...' are familiar words which form the basis for Matthew's sermon on the mount. There may be a double motive here: encouragement for those who strive to live the way of blessings and those who need to do some radical turning around to living righteously. Or, perhaps the psalmist is also trying to evoke serious reflection from hearers and readers on what it means to walk in the law. Can it be that the metaphor of 'walking' is an invitation for all of us to bring congruence between profession of faith and actions? The way of God in Christ ought to lead to a more just and fair society for it is the way of a righteous and undivided heart. The one whose whole being is wholly dedicated to God's way will bring blessedness. And, God's way is not a set of rules: it is a way of life that draws us closer to one's neighbour and God.

- The psalmist invites us to the way of *hesed* (righteous living): *what does this mean for our current world of created borders, occupation, walls, divisions, and rules of who are in and who are out? Is our song of faith one of faithfulness (living out the nice words)?*

**I Corinthians 3:1-9**                                      **we are not alone**

There is no shortage of imageries here - milk, meat, planting, watering, fields, buildings. Like our economic pundits of today, these imageries all point to growth and growing. Unlike them, though, the writer is driving home the point that: God gives growth. Growth cannot be engineered or forced. So much for all those books and ambitious project on church growth and discipleship. God's project of abundant life for all does not belong to us or to a particular theological/ecclesial brand, confession or project. Our calling is to see that God is the one bringing the full flowering of the seed through, cracked and imperfect vessels like ourselves (as we attempt to live out the gospel). There is, though, an underlying paradox and the challenge here: we can start to experience abundant life when we let go in loving and in joining God's goodness in and for the world. Here is the assurance: whatever the reality around us, we are not alone.

- *How will we live and re-tell the story so that we can all see God's image and goodness in the 'other'? How will God's economy in Christ help us to counter the economies of injustice and scarcity? What will I need to give up? What will I need to take on?*

**Matthew 5:21-37****a different orientation - radical**

It is decision time. Time is running out, and unlike the shelves of our supermarkets, the choices are few. Perhaps Jesus had in mind Deuteronomy 30. At least, in his re-reading of the commands he chooses the side of life. After all his offer is abundant life for all. So, we who walk the way of Jesus must opt for life. Such a choice, though is costly, illogical (to the market logic) and operates with different economy: sell all, give away, and re-arrange the order. Grace is free not cheap and it is radical. So here is an invitation to internalise and inhabit a new way of being and living. It may be easier to behave rightly: it is more difficult is to give one's heart and whole being entirely oriented towards goodness, love and doing justice. Jesus offers a more radical ethic - one already hinted at in the list of beatitudes preceding this discourse. The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the pure in heart--all of these are blessed not because they are paragons of virtue, but because of their inward orientation of heart.

- The righteousness of this newly inaugurated way of abundant life and living is not about following rules. It requires and empowers a life surrendered to God and neighbour. *Reflect what this call to a new and radical way of living ought to mean for all aspects of our life together. What needs to be transformed?*

**Prayers/Responses/Poetry** [Richard Becher]

A dream to be lived...

I have a dream that with our faith we will carve out stones of hope from the mountains of despair

**We have a dream of a kingdom to come**

I have a dream that with our faith we will transform the discords of nations into a beautiful symphony of friendship

**We have a dream of God's will be done**

I have a dream that with our faith we will together achieve the day of freedom.

**We have a dream of heaven coming to earth**

I have a dream of people singing a new song of hope and love, dancing together the way of full life

**We have a dream of abundant life for all**

I have a dream of heaven on earth, enough bread for everyone, reconciliation and God's forever 'amen' chorus

**We have a dream of living in God's love and embrace**

It is a dream we can share when we live the prayer that we say: *Our Father.....*

Together we are guilty....

Lord, we are guilty of neglecting your word and of welcoming each other as if we were welcoming you.

You insulted me and I was angry

*Together we are guilty*

You murdered my family and we took revenge

*Together we are guilty*

You called me a fool and I abused you

*Together we are guilty*

You persecuted me and I hated you

*Together we are guilty*  
You hurt me and I hurt you back  
*Together we are guilty*  
You are black and I am white  
You are male and I am female  
*Together we are guilty*  
So we bring our gifts of hope and peace:  
We meet each other in loving embrace.  
We accept our diversity, created in your image  
*Together we are healed*



image (from a urc church) jagessar

Lord, make me see... (Matthew 5: 29-30)

Lord, through one eye I can see love standing at my side, while the other eye fills my heart with fear.

**Lord, make me aware so I can only see love standing at my side and reach out with the healing hand of friendship that shares a walk of peace.**

Lord, with one hand I can offer the hope of peace and make new friends, while with the other I am making war...

**Lord, give me touch to heal the wounded so that with the hand of peace new friends are made.**

Lord, we have a choice of what to see with our eyes and what to do with our hands so please help us choose to see the good in each other and heal the wounds of history.

God's word is waiting... (from Deuteronomy 30: 14-22)

The word of God is so close: it is hovering on your lips waiting to be spoken and loitering in your heart ready to come to life..... (Deuteronomy 30: 14)

The word of God is waiting  
**Like a story waiting to be told**  
The word of God is waiting  
**Like a voice waiting to be heard**  
The word of God is waiting  
**Like love waiting to be shared**  
The word of God is waiting  
**Like a truth waiting to be lived**  
The word of God is waiting  
**Like a road ready to be walked**



image (from a urc church) jagessar

Thank you, God, that your word offers life and goodness for us all. Thank you that you make it so simple to understand and easy to reach. Forgive us when we make it so complicated and build great walls between us and your way of goodness and love. Today, Lord, we choose the road of life on which we will walk with your love in our hearts and with your story on our lips. Amen

A time to be reconciled... (Matthew 5: 24)

One stone does not make a building  
**Together we can build a new Church**  
One voice does not make a choir  
**Together we can sing a new song**  
One word does not make a sentence

**Together we can write a new story**

One colour does not make a rainbow

**Together we can be a sign of peace**

One nation will not change the world

**Together we build the new Kingdom**

So we say to our brothers and sisters today, forgive us for the anger and hurt we have caused in the past and let us take all our gifts to God so that together we can walk in the way of abundant life for all.

Before

Before anger found me in my pain and grief

My heart was filled with peace

**Lord, help me find that peace again**

Before fear met me on stormy waters of the world

My life was a place of calm

**Lord, help me find that calm again**

Before guilt became a heavy burden to carry

My mind was a space of hope

**Lord, help me find that hope again**

Before I found pride in all that I achieved

I trusted in You to provide all my needs

**Lord, help me to trust in you again**

Before I had greed to get all that I could

I shared what I had with all in need

**Lord, help me share all that I have again**

Before I feared the stranger on the road

I welcomed you in everyone I met

**Lord, help me see you in strangers again**

Thank you, generous God,

for forgiving us for our anger

for forgiving the hurt we continue to cause;

for forgiving our greed and pride

for forgiving our doubts and fears

Help us to see your image in the faces around us

and to serve your way of full life for all. Amen

Working together for God (1 Corinthians 3: 1-9)

The workers are colourful

Each different

but each made by God

to care for each



Korean Comfort Women Protest in Seoul, 2016  
[photo image -jagessar]

and serve the other  
to produce goodness  
for the rule of fullness of life...

The fields of the East  
The fields of the West  
Fields North and South  
all belong to God  
ready to harvest  
but workers are few  
so the fruit is wasted  
the fullness of life way must wait...

The building of many colours  
is where God wants to dwell  
but no-one listens  
to his knock on the door  
so hearts remain closed  
with no home for our Lord....

The worldly build fences  
The powerful build walls  
The excluded are hungry  
having to fight for food  
but the wealthy will claim:  
‘We did the hard work —  
we deserve what we’ve got!’  
Which is tough on the rest!

When the fences have gone  
when we knock down the walls  
when the Church becomes one body  
when we have a shared mission  
when we are all working for a common good  
God’s dream is becoming real  
the rule of fullness of life is taking shape....



image (from a urc church) jagessar

### Storytime

#### A long word to hope [by Richard Becher]

In a small village a little girl is learning to read from the bible by the gentle flicker of a candle flame. It is the only light by which to see at night and the only book her family have in their small tin shack. The little girl strained her eyes and put a finger on a long word in the print of the book. She whispered it slowly. "R..E...C...O...N...C...L...L...A...T...I...O..N." She paused. Then she read it to herself again, louder this time so her mother could also hear. "That's a long word, mummy," she said. "What does it mean?"

The child asked the question without lifting her eyes from the page of the book. Her finger was still fixed to the word which she said faster and faster in her head. When her mother stood by her side and asked her to say it again it just flowed from her lips.

"Reconciliation! What does it mean?" she asked again moving her finger across the words that followed as she read. "First go and seek reconciliation with your brothers and sisters...."

"It means to fix something that is broken," said her mother. "If you drop something you try and join it together because we can't afford a new one. Reconciliation means to join together."

The little girl thought for a while. Her finger moved back over the print and her eyes followed. Then she added. "So if I am angry with my friends I must go and be joined with them again?" "Yes!" said her mum with a smile. "Your friendship has been broken so fix it quickly!" "Someone called me a fool at school today and it made me angry. So must I go and fix our friendship? It doesn't seem fair Why don't they come to me and fix it?"

Mum put her arm round her daughter's shoulder and gave her a comforting hug. "Not everything is fair," she said. "But friendships are important. This is why God is always trying to fix us and join us together."

Mother and daughter sat at an old wooden table and by the flicker of the candle looked at the words of the book. "Reconciliation," the child said again. "How can I fix my friendship with someone who calls me a fool and makes me so angry?"

"Go to them tomorrow and welcome them as a special friend," said mum. "Then tell them how they made you angry. And share your lunch with them. They won't forget." They would see Jesus in you. "That's silly, mummy," laughed the child. "I'm a girl so people can't see Jesus in me. He was a boy!"

Mum slid the bible across the table and started flicking through the pages from Matthew to Luke where she found chapter 9 and pointed to verse 48. "What does it say?" she asked her daughter. So she read it: "Whoever welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." The girl paused for thought. "So if my friends welcome me they can be welcoming Jesus," she added looking into her mum's eyes.

"Yes," said mum. "Jesus wants to have a home in everyone's heart."

"So if we welcome Jesus when we welcome a man Jesus is living in my daddy?" the child questioned. Mum nodded. The girl got more excited. "So when people welcome you mummy they welcome Jesus because he lives in a woman too?" Mum nodded again. "So when my friends at school are welcomed for who they are Jesus is being welcomed?"

The girl was so excited she got up and started dancing round the little tin hut and shouted so loudly that the whole village could hear: "That means Jesus is African and Indian; American and European! He's in everyone if we welcome each other!"

"Yes," said mum knowing that the lesson for the night was over and her daughter understood what reconciliation meant. "It is a long word but it is one of hope," she sighed.

## Hymns for Racial Justice Sunday (February 2017)

We kindly suggest that you consider purchasing a copy of John Campbell's, *Songs to Shake us Up* (Kevin Mayhew 2016). In this volume you will find a collection of hymns to use. John Campbell has written four new hymns specifically for this Sunday. However, I am awaiting permission from Kevin Mayhew before it can be made available.

### Some further online Resources [from GiM Team]

- *Sacred Conversations on Migration: @ home in a strange place:*  
<http://www.urc.org.uk/at-home-mission.html>
- *Imagine a world*, poem by Karen Campbell:  
[http://www.urc.org.uk/images/mission/at\\_home\\_strange/Imagine\\_a\\_world\\_by\\_Karen\\_Campbell.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/mission/at_home_strange/Imagine_a_world_by_Karen_Campbell.pdf)
- *Vigil service for Refugees:*  
[http://www.urc.org.uk/images/mission/at\\_home\\_strange/Vigil for Refugees -  
\\_outline.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/mission/at_home_strange/Vigil_for_Refugees_-_outline.pdf)
- *Prayers and resources by Carla Grosch Miller:*  
[http://www.urc.org.uk/images/mission/at\\_home\\_strange/Worship\\_Resources\\_-  
\\_Carla\\_GM.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/mission/at_home_strange/Worship_Resources_-_Carla_GM.pdf)
- *Refugee Crisis in Europe resource reflections:*  
[http://catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Featured/  
Features-2016/Racial-Justice-Sunday-  
2016/Background](http://catholicnews.org.uk/Home/Featured/Features-2016/Racial-Justice-Sunday-2016/Background)
- *Sanctuary for all*, CTBI resources 2015:  
[https://ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-  
2015/](https://ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2015/)
- *As Christians we are all on a journey*, CTBI resources 2014:  
[https://ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-  
2014/](https://ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2014/)
- GiM Racial Justice Links on URC webpage:  
[http://www.urc.org.uk/intercultural-  
resources.html](http://www.urc.org.uk/intercultural-resources.html)

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