

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 2014...14th September

BACKGROUND:

For many years Racial Justice Sunday material was compiled by an ecumenical group or a denomination with the support of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). With the restructuring at CTBI and a greater emphasis on networking (and networks), the process by which Racial Justice material can be compiled through the ecumenical instrument of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland seems to take



longer and less consultative.

In the United Reformed Church we believe Racial Justice Sunday is of importance to our churches, even if churches use a different Sunday or remember Black History Month and One World Week at a similar time. As we have not seen any 2014 material, we have compiled some, based on Lectionary readings for 14th September

which are almost the same as in September 2005. We have therefore used some of the same material from 2005 and added other pieces. We hope this is helpful. Please feel free to photocopy. Copyright issues, where applicable, have been dealt with through the RJMM office at Church House. Should materials be made available through the ecumenical instruments in England, Scotland, Wales or CTBI then we will also encourage their use

This material is not meant to be a full service, but hopefully will inspire us with further ideas so that we can prepare worship and discussion for our own church or group of churches.

Thematic Focus:

'WHY DO YOU LOOK DOWN ON YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS ? WE ARE ALL EQUAL BEFORE GOD' (Based on Romans 14v10)

CONTENTS:

- **PSALM** Psalm 103 (selected verses) with responses
- **REFLECTION** on forgiveness, based on Matthew 18 vv 21-35
- **LITANY**
- **MEDITATION** ' Opening Doors'
- **BIBLICAL REFLECTION** based on Romans 14 vv 1-12
- **MEDITATION** based on Romans 14v10
- **PRAYERS of INTERCESSION** (with congregational participation)
- **BLESSING**
- **HYMNS**
- **QUESTIONS for GROUP DISCUSSION**

PSALM with RESPONSES

[Psalm 103 vv1-4, 9-12; response verse 8]

Response:

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great mercy

Praise the Lord O my soul

And all that is within me bless his holy name

Praise the Lord O My soul

And forget not all his benefits

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great mercy

Who forgives all our sin

And heals all your infirmities,

Who redeems your life from the pit

And crowns you with mercy and compassion

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great mercy

God will not be always chiding

Nor will God keep anger for ever

God has not dealt with us according to our sins

Nor rewarded us according to our wickedness

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great mercy

For as the heavens are high above the earth

So great is God's mercy over those that fear God

As far as the east is from the west

So far has God set our sins from us

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great mercy

(Verses from Psalm 103 from The alternative Service Book 1980 are copyright. The Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, 1980, The Archbishops' Council, 1999, and are reproduced by permission)

The Gospel reading is **MATTHEW 18, vv 21-35**

“ I do not tell you to forgive seven times but seventy seven times...”

- We are to forgive others the wrongs they do us because we are all sinners and yet God is ready to forgive us our sins. To be true to God who loves us and forgives us, we must love and forgive each other.
- It is very easy to treat those whom we consider ‘outsiders’ as if they had done us some kind of wrong. This is what we are doing if we adopt an attitude of prejudice towards them. It is this that leads to discrimination and



racist attacks. It underlies the outcry against people who have fled persecution or desperate poverty and sought asylum in Britain or Ireland. Often people whose way of life is different from the majority are viewed with suspicion and anger.

- This reading makes it clear that we are not to allow ourselves

to hold anyone in contempt. We are all loved by God and we respond to that love by loving everyone else, including those neighbours whose presence we find inconvenient or even threatening. Love casts out contempt.

A LITANY

From all pettiness and smallness of mind,

Good Lord, deliver us.

From every callous remark and thoughtless word

Good Lord redeem us.

From our shuttered eyes and padlocked hearts

Good Lord, liberate us

Through the glorious diversity of your creation

Lead us to joy.

Through the rich variety that is humanity

Lead us to understanding.

Through our continuing travels,

Lead us to peace and love.

May Jesus' influence so permeate all our relationships and direct all our actions, that what separates us

may lose all significance and power being replaced
by the knowledge of our oneness in him,
Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we offer these our prayers.

[REVD Gordon Gatward, Arthur Rank Centre]

A MEDITATION written by David Jenkins, Prayer Handbook 2014, 'Opening Doors', page 89

Reading Romans 14 vv 1-12

Biblical Reflection by Rt Revd Kieran Conry, Bishop of Arundel and Brighton.

Paul's letter to the Christian community in Rome was written probably in the year 55 AD, nearly twenty years before the first written version of the gospel. Paul's letters are a very useful glimpse (almost the only one we have) of how the early Christian communities came together.

The growth of the early Church was not without its difficulties and controversies. One of the first great debates – or indeed arguments – was between Paul himself and the community in Jerusalem led by James. Paul had begun to preach the Gospel to the gentiles, whereas previously it had been preached only to the Jews. The debate was apparently quite heated, but Paul got his way and set out on his great missionary journeys that would take him into what is now Europe. The importance of this cannot really be exaggerated.

But the debate between Christians of Jewish origin and those of pagan or gentile origin did not go away. In fact it forms the basis of the letters to the Galatians and the Romans, since both communities were experiencing the same sort of prejudice and discrimination. The Jews were looking down on the gentiles, even though both had embraced Christianity.



The beginning of the letter to the Galatians is a real cry from the heart - 'I am astonished that you are so promptly turning away from the one who called you'; and in Romans 14.10 Paul returns to this betrayal of the Christian message, though now in a less passionate but nevertheless serious vein. Paul cannot understand how people can look down on others when we are all saved in Christ and equal in God's eyes. A little later in the same passage Paul speaks about the sort of judgement of one another that actually becomes a 'an obstacle that can bring a person down'. The Greek word that Paul uses for 'obstacle' is 'skandalon'. It is no less than this.

Discrimination and prejudice are more than distasteful. Their existence in the Christian community is a scandal.

The Christian community must become a clearer sign of the call to universal equality based on justice for all and respect for each individual. If we cannot demonstrate a community free of discrimination, then our pleas for justice and equality are in vain.

A MEDITATION on Romans 14 v 10, written by Jenny Carpenter, 'Why do you criticise other followers of the Lord ? why do you look down on them? '

Stop in the name of Christ! What's that you're doing
Pulling yourself right up to your full height
So to look down on fellow human beings?

For heaven's sake, look on the level or look up instead:
Nothing that God has made can be beneath contempt
To God each person's worth a crucifixion

He was despised, rejected, laughed to scorn
Yet he engaged with outcast and with child
Content to eat with scoundrels and with thieves
Counting the widow's mite as precious gold

Didn't you know ? Diversity is good –
Each of us needs to complement the others
Compliments too may even be in order
Not hasty judgement based on prejudice

We must all stand before God's judgement throne
Or , falling prostrate , " Lord have mercy" cry

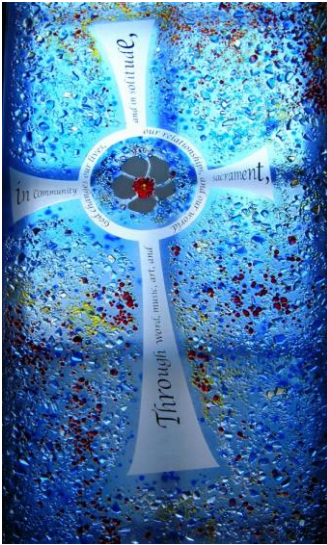


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PRAYERS of INTERCESSION

All: In a world marred by unkindness

Hardness of heart and lack of respect for
Others, let us pray that God will enable
Us to reflect more on the infinite
Kindness, compassion and respect that
God shows us.

Worship leader: Lord, help us to be slow to pass

Judgement and quick to show
Compassion and understanding
Lord hear us

LORD GRACIOUSLY HEAR US

All: Help us to see the injustices in the world

Around us, give us courage to make a
Stand against them and the wisdom to
Work together to bring about positive change

LORD GRACIOUSLY HEAR US

Worship leader: As we observe Racial Justice Sunday

Help us to open our eyes to the rich gifts
Of all God's people. Let us never look
Down on others, but always up towards a

Future where we can enjoy the diversity
Of our world in peace and with understanding
Lord hear us
LORD GRACIOUSLY HEAR US

All: Father, we give you thanks for filling your creation with such abundant diversity and we offer you our petitions in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who calls us to treat all people with respect. AMEN

BLESSING:

May the Lord give us courage to reach out where there is intolerance, fear, conflict. Give us compassion to reach out to one another in our diversity and our unity. Forgive us when we fail to do this. May the Lord bless us and guide us. Amen

Sandra Ackroyd for
Racial Justice and Intercultural Ministry (RjiM)
June 2014

HYMNS, SONGS, MUSIC

We are sure that churches will decide what they think appropriate to sing, for this service, but below are a few suggestions:

- 'This we can do for justice and peace..' Rejoice and Sing- 639
- 'Jesu, Jesu..' Rejoice and Sing- 648
- 'Brother, Sister let me serve you..' Rejoice and sing- 474
- 'Lord for the years..' Rejoice and Sing- 603 and Mission Praise- 428
- 'Let there be Love..' Rejoice and Sing- 477 and Mission praise -411
- 'God forgave my Sins..' Mission Praise- 181
- 'Heaven Shall Not Wait' (John Bell and Graham Maule, WGRG, Iona Community)

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS for GROUP DISCUSSION

These questions could be helpful for discussion in elders and church meetings, study groups and for use with adults and/or young people. They are taken from the United Reformed Church Multicultural, Intercultural Habit Charter.

1. How can we find ways of re-reading the BIBLE in greater depth and also see and hear the word through the eyes and ears of others ?
2. How can we recognise and welcome different expressions and experiences of FAITH within and between our congregations ?
3. How can we own up to our COMFORT ZONES and boundaries which may exclude others ?
4. In what ways can we GROW, in discipleship, seeking justice, understanding the community in which our church is set and numerically?
5. As we embrace change which requires giving and receiving , how far are we prepared to be MUTUALLY INCONVENIENCED ?
6. Are we able to reflect and discern how we are using POWER in the church and to try to redress any power in-balances and journey towards more diverse leadership and participation ?

+ In praying and working towards greater openness, trust, forgiveness , justice and inclusion, we hope you may find some , if not all these questions, helpful for your ongoing journey as a church