

TIME4CHANGE

Morning service

17th October 2021

On the morning of Sunday 17th October 2021, churches across the wider Birmingham community are invited to focus on racial justice and reconciliation.

Each local church is different, with its own worship styles, traditions, theology, context, and demographics. Only *you* will know what your congregation needs, and the right way to craft it.

Racism affects us all. Our experiences of, and contributions to, racism are all different.

It is for all of us, as people all beautifully and wonderfully made in God's image, to see and celebrate God's beauty in one another. Together, as children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, we celebrate our unity and belonging. We are family!

It is all the more painful, therefore, when those whom God has declared priceless works of art (Eph.2:10) are treated so poorly. Racism, in both its overt and subtle forms, is a denial of God's truth. It is sin and, as such, is to be repented of. As God's prophetic community, we as Church are to practice reconciliation, being restored back into right relationship with God, with one another, and even with ourselves.

Thank you for joining with churches across our City to lead your congregation on the morning of Sunday 17th October in a service of racial justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. It is a journey we travel together.

We hope you will also enable your congregation to attend the Time4Change gathering later that same day, 4:00 pm at St Andrews Stadium, the home of Birmingham City Football Club. See <https://www.time4change.uk/events>

Ending racism and achieving reconciliation is not an event, it's an ongoing commitment to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). If you haven't already, please read and sign the Time4Change Charter – both as an individual and as a congregation. See <https://www.time4change.uk/the-charter>

For service content ideas/ examples, see these two webpages:

<https://www.time4change.uk/copy-of-resources>

<https://www.time4change.uk/resources>

Bible readings

Because each church and context is different, you could pick from the following themes and passages from Jesus' radical Sermon on the Mount:

- Resistance – Matthew 5:38-42
- Reconciliation – Matthew 5:43-48[^]
- Repentance – Matthew 4:17
- Reparations - Matthew 5:21-26

Interview

Hearing people's stories can be very powerful. It can enable people to gain a better appreciation of other people's experiences – what it is to walk in their shoes.

If you do interview/ profile one or more people about their experiences of racism, please be aware just how painful it can be for them. Be sensitive and compassionate, before, during, and after the interview. Remember to 'check in' with them a few days and weeks afterwards, in case of any delayed effect.

Video

Show the Time4Change invitation video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8NeVJd0fm0>

Small Groups

Four small group outlines based on Jesus's Sermon on the Mount are available from <https://www.time4change.uk/resources> - Kingdom, not Empire.

Sermon – time for change

Have you noticed, when they mess up, politicians and businesses speak of their.. *'regret'*. They rarely say.. *'sorry'*.

Or they deflect on to others by saying, "If YOU have taken offence to my choice words, of course, I.. *regret* this.

They're 'bang to rights'. *They* know they've messed up. *We* know they've messed up. And yet they'll do all they can to wriggle out of actually saying *sorry* – apologising.

They're just so full of.. *regret*.

- Regret that they got caught, that they've been called out.
- Regret that *they* – not those ve hurt – might now suffer or be inconvenienced in some way.

By issuing a 'statement of *regret*' they want to give the appearance of being contrite but without actually accepting responsibility, the consequences of, the liability for, their actions.

Regret is *no* apology.

Jesus began with a very simple and direct message: "**Repent.** *For the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*"

That word '*repent*' can seem old-fashioned, even judgmental. Like you're being accused of something. Judged. Labelled. That's not what Jesus meant or what those around Him understood by it. The Greek word '*metanoia*' meant 'change direction', 'change your thinking or attitude'. Don't just express regret. Repent. You've been heading in *that* direction. Wise up. Come to your senses. *Repent*, head instead in *this* direction. You'll find life works better *this* way.

Repent even goes beyond apology. It's about a *change* of direction.

That's why we as a church are participating in Time4Change. Today, we join with churches across the wider Birmingham community to say, it's not enough to *regret* the sin of racism. Enough is enough. It's Time4Change.

And change starts with us; with me and you.

Somehow, despite how tough life could be, being with Jesus made everything seem just that little bit brighter, more hopeful.

When you – or someone you love – is faced with sickness:

- the cancer that isn't going away;

- the treatment that seems so invasive- and for what?

Or when life seems so stacked against you:

- your postcode and inherited genes always seem to hold you back
- you're treated less favourably just because of your skin colour..

Everything within you wants to believe – dares to hope – that someday, somewhere – call it Heaven – there will be no more tears, no more death or mourning, no more crying or pain.

And yet, for some, they (maybe, you too?) feel so let down by life, so failed by the System that is meant to protect us. To believe, just seems too painful. Like picking a scab.

Jesus says to you, dare to change your thinking. Take the risk - and embrace the life that Jesus has for you. Live the way you were always wired for. Kingdom, not Empire. A taste of Heaven on earth. Repent.

Sometimes, we have to repent – change our thinking/ attitude – not just about what we have experienced/ what Empire has done to us, but also what we have done to others - for the part we have played in tolerating / perpetuating the system of Empire, not Kingdom.

Jesus was speaking to ALL when he said 'repent.' It doesn't matter what your age, faith, gender, sexuality, ethnicity...

Today, light is being shone on the darkness of racism. Tragically, it's still often in response to a sickening incident. Yes, the direct and unsubtle racist comments / attitudes that are, perhaps, easier to 'call out'. But also the far more subtle attitudes and behaviours that allow some people to be treated better or worse than others simply because of their skin colour, their place of birth, their first language. Unconscious bias, institutional racism, racism within the structures of life.

We like to think, we're all in *this* together, that Covid-19 affects us all, equally... We know now, it doesn't. People of colour, for example, those who are Black British and Asian British, were twice as likely as White British people to die from Covid-19. Why?

Earlier in the pandemic, some wondered if this was due to higher rates of underlying health conditions or even physical weaknesses within some communities? But the Office for National Statistics concluded the higher death rates among black and minority ethnic communities had *nothing* to do with their physicality or underlying health conditions. It's socio-economic factors, such as

where you live, how many people you live with, the job you do... that determines your life chances.

The question we should ALL be asking then is, WHY? Why is it that more people of colour experience these socio-economic disadvantages more than white people?

What are the social and economic policies, structures, way-things-just-are that mean people of colour in this country too often still start the race of life behind those who are white British or who are longer-settled?

This is a question for us ALL, whatever our ethnicity. If we accept this as just how things are, we are perpetuating *Empire, not Kingdom*.

But now, it's time for a bit of cooking. *[To illustrate, have to hand an onion, chopping board & knife.]*

During lockdown, we all cooked more. If I cook spaghetti bolognaise, my bolognaise is going to need onion. If I miss it out, my bolognaise will lack flavour, it'll be bland - tasteless. Onion is not the *only* ingredient. Here, I've got tomatoes, garlic... It would be an odd bolognaise that *just* had onion, nothing else. But it definitely needs onion in the mix.

So, here's my onion. If I simply dump the onion whole into the pan, but do not really engage with it, you'd rightly call me out. What are you doing? That's not how you use onion. For the onion to properly do it's thing, releasing it's flavour throughout the whole dish, I need to peel back it's layers.

Starting first with the very obvious outer layer. But to get the full effect, the full benefit, I need to peel back more layers.

Some stop short simply because it makes *them* feel uncomfortable. It might make them cry. To avoid the possibility of tears, they avoid onion as much as possible. If they'd only press through, even through their tears, they'd get what onion is all about.

Of course, I'm not here as your Chef. This isn't the Cooking Channel. I'm speaking as your Church Minister/ preacher. And this isn't just about how to make a good bolognaise.

The onion is an illustration. Think of racial justice as like an onion. It's multi-layered. The more you engage with racial justice, the more layers you realise it has. Just when I think I've come to some understanding about racial justice, I realise there are more layers I have yet to engage with. And yes, if I truly engage with racial justice, if I really understand the enormity of injustice that others have

experienced, then it should break me. It should break all of us, in the way it breaks God's heart.

Peeling back the layers on racial justice is for all of us. Allow it sink in just how vile – evil – the slave trade was, how Colonial powers like Britain used oppression to plunder the wealth from African and Asian nations to boost our own wealth and privilege – and that this is one of the reasons why many of those nations remain so far behind in economic wealth when compared to Britain today. And it's also about how we treat those arriving today from other parts of the world. Both how we are treated by others, and how we treat others who are different to us.

Jesus said,

“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew 5:23-24

If you know you've hurt some, don't try to carry on as if nothing happened. Don't think it's OK to keep rocking up for worship, singing your songs of praise, when all the time you know you've cause people real pain. *You know. They know. God knows.* As important as sung worship is (and it is!), if that's you, drop everything, and go and seek reconciliation. Repent. Say sorry. And get that broken relationship fixed. Remember, they are your *brothers and sisters* – family. Treat them that way.

We must apply this on a global, historical basis too.

If we, as a nation or as a city, know we've caused real pain to others – now or in the past - we too should seek reconciliation. Owning our own guilt and responsibility – our sin. Seeking forgiveness, reconciliation. Trying to carry on, like Colonial slave trading isn't an issue today, is not an option. So, it's quite right that we Repent. Say sorry.

In May 2020, George Floyd was murdered. Police Officers knelt on his neck for 8 minutes 46 seconds. Even when he appeared to stop breathing, they carried on for 2 more minutes. When paramedics arrived, they still continued for a further 20 seconds. If only that was just a one-off, isolated, horrific incident by the one, rogue Police Officer. The true tragedy is that racism is alive today – and in our community.

We need to hear each other's stories. To be honest, whatever our ethnicity or skin colour, this can leave us feeling uncomfortable. But that's no reason to duck it or try and pretend it doesn't happen.

Jesus says, change your thinking. Repent.

Two/ three hundred years of Transatlantic Slave Trade that ripped 12 million people from their homes, families, communities; shipped them as cargo, claiming insurance on the 15-25% of 'human goods' that perished *en route*; then forced them to work to create the wealth that propelled the British Empire, that our wealth, pension funds, privilege are built on today.

Repent. Change the way we see and do life.

We all sin. We all get it wrong sometimes. Apostle Paul, hero of the faith, says "and I am the worst of sinners." It's the Holy Spirit who searches hearts and convicts us of sin, whatever that might be. And it's different for each of us. None of us can claim to be practically perfect in every way. (Unless, of course, you are either Mary Poppins or Jesus.) What God needs to 'call out' in you might be different to what God needs to call out 'in me'.

Don't let pride stop you from experiencing the life Christ has for you.

When Jesus says, "Repent, for Heaven is near" what does that mean for you today? What is the Holy Spirit 'calling out' in you?

The good news is that repentance comes with forgiveness, restoration, restored relationship.

When we say 'sorry' we are restored to right relationship with others, God, and even ourselves. What do you need to change your thinking/ attitude about? What is God nudging you/ us to repent of today?

Lament

[To lament is to grieve aloud, to express deep sorrow, and to acknowledge the deep pain caused to others. It points us to Christ. Allow time and space to lament on the sin of racism.]

A prayer of preparation

Lord, as we become increasingly aware of the intensity of the racial divide, our hearts are broken.

Help us not to rush from this place of hurting to triumphalism or repair but rather to lament. May our lament be a form of worship, a joining of our hearts with yours, as we grieve the lack of your kingdom justice here on earth.

Strengthen us for this path, as without you, the overwhelming depth of the problems that must be addressed and acknowledged would be devastating. We know that you mourn with us and comfort us as we mourn with one another.

In Christ's holy name, amen.

[This prayer was written by Elizabeth Behrens, and published in Be The Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation by Latasha Morrison, p.51 Waterbrook Press, 2019.]

A liturgy of lament

Leader: We acknowledge that we stood by when the dwellings of our neighbours were cast down, and we ignored the cries of the innocent. Lord, have mercy.

Group: **We lament.**

Leader: Lord, we acknowledge we have not learned to do right; we do not seek restorative justice that benefits all. We have not defended the oppressed. We have not taken up the cause of the fatherless or pleaded the case of the widow. Instead, we have mocked and punished the poor with our partisanship and apathy. Lord, have mercy.

Group: **We lament.**

Leader: We lament that we stood by as systemic and institutionalized racism became founding pillars and structures in Our City/ Country and within the church. Lord, have mercy.

Group: **We lament.**

Leader: We have allowed agendas of an empire to become prominent within your church. We understand that empire aims to take and oppress. We

have replaced your kingdom with an empire mentality. Lord, have mercy.

Group: **We lament.**

Leader: We have formed and developed church structures and denominations while excluding the voice of your global church, due to racism and racial segregation. Lord, have mercy.

Group: **We lament.**

Leader: We acknowledge the racial hierarchies and structures of privilege many have benefited from and many have been oppressed by. Lord, have mercy.

Group: **We lament.**

Leader: We have ignored the cries of children because they were not our own. We have discounted the pain of mothers because they were not our own. We have turned a blind eye to the affliction of Brown and Black people because they were not our own. Lord, have mercy.

Group: **We lament.**

Leader: We have replaced your supremacy with idolization of our nation and racial identity. Lord, have mercy.

Group: **We lament.**

Leader: We have not required justice, we have not loved others well, and we have not walked in humility in our brokenness.

Group: **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader: We cry out to you, our God and Redeemer, as the only one who can save us from ourselves. Show us our blind spots. Don't let us hide from you in our shame and guilt. Restore us to your perfect union that can be found in Jesus Christ. Lord, show us how to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

Group: **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader: Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Group: **Lord, with deep sorrow we lament.**

[This prayer is from 'Be The Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation' by Latasha Morrison, p.51 Waterbrook Press, 2019.]