

Sermon for Lincoln Cathedral Racial Justice Sunday 9th Feb 2025

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord.

Sermon written and read by Revd Pauline Cummins

I am going to start with quoting the universal declaration of human rights United Nations 1948.

'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, or other opinion, national or social origin, Property, birth or other status'.

Or simply put Jesus says in John chapter 13 verse 34 I give you a new Commandment that you love one another.

My name is Rev Pauline Cummins some of you know me, I am a rector in the Waltham Group and I look after the six churches that is Waltham, new Waltham, Brigsley, Barnoldby Le Beck, Ashby cum Fenby and East Ravendale. I can say with all honesty that they are great and lovely people and I am proud of what they are doing to bring congregation and communities in closer communion with the faith that brings good news to all people, actively raising the spiritual temperature in these places.

So, who am I? My parents were immigrants from Jamaica. The Windrush generation. I was born in London Battersea so for me I am very proud of my Jamaican and London heritage it's made

me who I am today. I love scripture my faith and my family above all other things. When things get really tough, those are my first go to, unless it is a safeguarding issue and then it's the Lincoln safeguarding team. May God bless them.

Today I'm here to talk about the ratio justice annual event acknowledging the 30th anniversary which was established in 1995 following the murder of 18-year-old Stephen Lawrence in 1993. Much has changed since 1993, we now have female priests and bishops. But some things have not changed. We are still challenged by racial inequality not only here in Britain and Ireland but in many parts of the world today, where war rages and there is civil unrest. In our Bible reading today, we hear about Peter a devout holy man, a Jewish man and Cornelius, a Roman centurion a gentile who believes in God. I find this is a really curious story. First of all, I really love Peter. Peter is this amazing apostle who first of all denies Jesus at a crucial moment just before Christ crucifixion but his own personal ministry is one of inclusion and preaching the word to all people from all nations. He is the evangelist who preached the word of God with such passion that he ignites and increases the spiritual temperature for all those who are listening.

We hear that story at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 where Peter passionately speaks to the crowd and then baptises those who believe in his words. It is the same Peter who then goes to Cornelius's house. It is obvious that Cornelius was a man who had a lot of authority and respect, a man of faith who prayed and believed in God. He had heard about Peter who he really admired and respected. It was the vision while he was praying that he would then invite the apostle Peter into his home where his family and friends were staying. So, what is the significance of these two men meeting together.

I think it is because Peter is known to be a man of inclusion a man who genuinely lives by his faith. And I love that he starts off by saying "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation everyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him"

For me and you may agree that the coat of many colours embodies the many colours of the skins of the people of this world. And there are many. Sometimes you will see images of the different coloured skins of people on posters if they want to show how diverse a people we are. I remember a very famous Michael Jackson 1991 video called Black or white where many people morphed from colour to colour, gender to gender, I thought it was amazing at the time.

Genesis chapter 1 verses 27 says that we are made in the image of God. If that is the case, and I believe that it is then God himself is multicoloured and multiracial because we are all made in the image of God, how amazing is that?

It is amazing how God works. In this story Peter who is a devout Jew suddenly has this vision where he is told that it is okay to eat the food, because of Jewish law, is unclean. The type of food the Gentiles eat. He is totally puzzled by this and then while he's trying to figure this out, he's asked to visit a gentile's home where he will be eating food which God has now said it is okay for him to eat. His mission to share the good news of Jesus Christ was just as important as sharing food, and we will be sharing food together after this service. A time where we too can share stories together

At the same time Cornelius has a vision that he must invite this Jewish man to his home because he has been told that Peter has a special message for him. I wonder how attentive we are?

Do you know that God has prepared you to do something special? Have you ever found yourself already prepared for something that suddenly happened? Well, I have to tell you that that is God at work.

So Why Celebrate Racial Justice Sunday?

We believe that the universe was created by a loving God who chose to become a human being in Jesus Christ, who has redeemed the world and sent the Holy Spirit to enable us to love one another with God's love. All human beings are equally children of God and loved by God. Since none is outside the love of God, none should be outside our love either.

We believe that the diversity of the human race was no mistake on God's part. God deliberately created variety within the human family and wants us to take as much delight in that variety as God does. But racism persists in Britain and Ireland. At its most obvious and brutal, it takes the form of physical attacks, which sometimes end in murder.

But it takes many other forms as well, like discrimination within the police force, popular prejudice against Travellers or people seeking asylum, or reluctance to accept people of a different ethnic or cultural group as neighbours. I am pleased to say that Humberside Police are taking every step to combat violence towards all people.

Even within churches, people can face discrimination and unkindness because they are different from the majority in a particular community.

As long as this continues, we believe that it is important to make time to give thanks for our diversity and to pray for God's help in overcoming our prejudices and the injustices that reflect and reinforce them.

You will notice that inside your service sheet is a prayer pull-out. Seven days of prayer. Do use it especially during the 40 days of Lent. I chose the Psalms as I have found them to be the

most honest human prayers we have in the Bible. Our own TSP, teaspoon prayers T = Thanks or gratitude. S = Sorry in other words being repentant or lament and finally P= Pleadings, when we ask for God's help.

This acronym I learned last week (you are never too old to learn new things) from the New Waltham 1st Scouts Group who came to All Saints Church in Waltham, to learn more about the Christian faith and the Church. It was lovely to have about 25 8–10-year-olds who asked questions.

We did various activities and at the end of the session each child had to write a prayer. I'm going to finish my talk today with a prayer written by Louis Nichols aged 9

So let us pray

Dear God. Thanks for the peace and joy you have brought to the world and the amazing creation of us and we hope you have that too.

Sorry for all the fights and destructive wars because it has become constant and sorry for all the people doubting your morals, parables and yourself. I don't want much but all I want is love and support from my family and you. Amen