

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

10:06:2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am writing to you at the end of a tumultuous week when the world was shocked by the despicable and brutal death of George Floyd, a 46 year old black American who became yet another victim of police brutality and systemic racism. His dying words *'I can't breathe!'* echo those of another unarmed black victim, Eric Garner, who died in 2014 after being placed in a chokehold by a New York Police Officer. The struggle to breathe is also a poignant reminder of the drowning sensation experienced by the victims of COVID-19 in the final moments of life when respiratory difficulties have become fatally advanced. Whether it is the worst effects of the viral pandemic or the brutal reality of institutional racism, the past few weeks have indicated that the BAME community are disproportionately and therefore unjustly affected by both. These stories and many others reveal the deep fissures of *inequality* that run through the social, political and economic structures of our society.

I was reminded the other day that the last recorded letter that was written by John Wesley was a message of exhortation and encouragement to William Wilberforce just days before the Abolition of Slavery debate in the Houses of Parliament. Wesley was deeply committed to the abolition of slavery and refers to it as that *'execrable villany'* and the *'scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature'*. I was particularly struck by how moved Wesley was when he read the testimony of an African slave, Gustavus Vassa;

'Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance, that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a law in all the colonies that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villany is this!'

There is little doubt that the graphic portrayal of George Floyd's murder, caught on video footage and broadcast world-wide, has had a profound effect upon the moral consciousness of a generation. The civil unrest and the peaceful demonstrations show no sign of abating – there is a rising and collective sense of righteous anger that is fuelling a deep desire for change and justice. I commend that struggle and pray for those who long for change – it has been too long coming!

As people of faith we need to be reminded that the God of Israel is passionate about justice and calls his people to reflect that same kindness, mercy and justice in the life of the world. The prophet Micah declares that above and beyond religious observance and ritual God requires his people to walk humbly with God, to practise kindness and to enable justice to be established in the world. (Micah 6:8) In the Gospel of Luke Jesus announces his manifesto and indicates that his ministry will be good news to the poor, freedom for the oppressed, liberty for the captives and jubilant release for those enslaved by crippling debt. (Luke 4:18-19). Seemingly whichever way we turn we cannot escape the clarion call for justice, liberty and universal kindness and so we must work and pray to make this a reality in our own time and day. I hope and pray that you will join with me in working for a fairer and more just world; where everyone regardless of difference will feel valued, loved and cherished as a human being made in the Image of God,

With Peace and Blessings,

Julian