

**RECORDED SERVICE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE  
SUNDAY (Written version)  
12TH FEBRUARY 2023**

**Intro**

Hello and a warm welcome to all, whether local or from afar and whether you join us for a little or all of this service. My name is John Bailey and I'm a local preacher in the Ripon and Lower Dales circuit. Today is Racial Justice Sunday which began in 1995, two years after Stephen Lawrence, a black boy was murdered by a group of racist men at a bus stop in London. The 30th anniversary is on the 22nd of April this year.

Baroness Doreen Lawrence (his mum) wrote the following:

"The most profound social justice issues of our time demand a collective response. We must come together in coalition with brothers and sisters from across the Christian community and beyond, to ensure that the church itself is reflective of the society we hope to build for future generations, working together to end racism and discrimination in all its forms."

I have used a great deal of material from the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) website for this particular service which was initially designed with black majority churches in mind. However with a few small changes I felt it would appropriately fit in today.

**Call to worship**

God of love,  
You call us into Your presence,  
Gathered one and all  
In the richness and beauty of diversity that You willed into being.  
We bring our voices together in harmony with Yours  
As we gather to worship You.  
One God, Creator, Saviour and Spirit.  
Amen.

**Hymn            STF 18            Be still and know  
that I am God**

Be still and know that I am God.  
Be still and know that I am God.  
Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.  
I am the Lord who saves and heals.  
I am the Lord who saves and heals.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.  
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.  
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

*Anonymous Based on Psalm 46:10-11*

**Prayers**

Gracious and loving God,  
We gather together today to mark this Racial Justice Sunday.  
We recall the tragedy of a young life cut short – with the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence. Even 30 years on, we lament the sin of racism, so prevalent in our society and in our world. We bring to mind the senseless killing of George Floyd.  
And we feel the need for change.

**THANKSGIVING**

God of life and love,  
In Your infinite wisdom  
You created all things to live in harmony.  
You choose to make us in the image of the Creator of the cosmos –  
Born of the same imagination  
And lovingly crafted from the same dust,  
You breathed all peoples into being,  
Blessing us with different gifts and talents,  
A tapestry of cultures and stories  
Interwoven into Your story of all creation.

We thank You for our world,  
Tired and groaning though it may be,  
But it is still beautiful and filled with so much potential  
To reflect and display Your Glory.  
Help us to work together for the care of our shared home.  
We thank You that You have blessed us with each other,  
Every nation and community, filled with beautiful and gifted people,  
Each called to be fully who You made them to be,  
And all called to be co-workers with You.

We thank You for the gift of immigrants and refugees  
And the many blessings they bring to our communities.

We thank You for the gift of our young people,  
Filled with hopes and fears, dreams and ambitions –  
May they inspire and challenge us to be better.

We thank You for those who have been in our communities for many years,  
The storykeepers, the history makers and caretakers –  
May their experience and wisdom enrich our lives.

We thank You for the diverse nature of Your people,  
Each imbued with dignity and each worthy of value and respect.  
Thank You for inspiring so many to lift up their voices against the sin of racism. But we still lament that there are so many voices silenced or ignored,  
Shouted over or made to feel irrelevant.  
Move in power, God of justice,  
So that we would no longer have to witness violence and loss of life,  
As with the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence;  
So that we would no longer have to witness miscarriages of justice and misuses of power,  
As with the unlawful killing of George Floyd;  
So that we would no longer have to fight against systems of control and oppression  
To make people understand that every human being has dignity  
That needs to be seen, recognised and respected.

Lord, we thank You that we can meet together  
And give thanks and praise for the progress made,  
That we can sing in protest of injustice,  
That we can cry out in anguish, giving voice to our lament,  
That we can pray in hope together for a better future.  
We seek the power of Your Holy Spirit  
To guide, empower and sustain us.  
Amen.

**Readings Deuteronomy 30: 15-20**  
**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

<sup>15</sup> See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God<sup>[a]</sup> that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that

the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

**1 Corinthians 3: 1-9**  
**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**  
On Divisions in the Corinthian Church

**3** And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, 'I belong to Paul', and another, 'I belong to Apollos', are you not merely human? <sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup> The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

**Hymn STF 409 Let us build a house where love can dwell**

Let us build a house where love can dwell  
and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell  
how hearts learn to forgive.  
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
rock of faith and vault of grace;  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:  
All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
and words are strong and true,  
where all God's children dare to seek  
to dream of God's reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
and as symbol of God's grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:  
All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found  
in water, wine and wheat:  
a banquet hall on holy ground  
where peace and justice meet.  
Here the love of God, through Jesus,  
is revealed in time and space;

as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:  
All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach  
beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
and live the Word they've known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
bear the image of God's face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger:  
All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayer of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:  
All are welcome,  
all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

*Marty Haugen (b. 1950)*

### **Sermon**

I am informed that the 1804 Bible offered to "Black West Indian slaves" omitted many chapters of the Bible that we have in our possession today. For example, the book of Exodus contained only chapters 19 and 20, most chapters from Deuteronomy were omitted, including one of our readings today. The entire Psalms and much more were also excluded. Thus we need to remind ourselves that God's faithfulness had been deliberately hidden from some generations for many years. And that people of every nation, tribe and tongue need to hear the good news of Christ and have access to all of scripture to experience the power of God's word.

Each of us has identity markers. Our gender, DNA, ethnicity, fingerprints, religion, marital status, sexuality, socio economic status, education, family, profession, illnesses, disabilities, etc. - All these contribute to defining us. These identities exist, first and foremost, because we are human beings created in the likeness of God. As we get older, we may challenge or affirm our tribe or particular community. Or we may choose to opt out of some identities and adopt new ones. However, some parts of our identities like our ethnicity cannot be changed, even when they

are attacked, abused, disrespected, or devalued.

Today I want to focus on Paul's writings to the Corinthians. The text brings into sharp focus our identity with Christ. One Corinthians 3 begins with the words "**and so**". These words invite us to look in at least two directions. Looking forward we might say "So what". However if we look backwards we might take a quick look at chapter 2 for a moment. One of the identity markers of Corinth was having wisdom. What Paul did was to distinguish between what is valued by society or culture and what is valuable to God. He states what some people don't want to hear. There is a difference between civic leaders who do not have God's wisdom and the people of God who have the gift of God's Spirit. He makes a distinction between knowledge and knowing. Knowledge coming from learning tradition and experience: wisdom comes from God and is enabled by the Holy Spirit.

So in chapter 2, Paul comes up with the following four points.

He is not full of human wisdom, not eloquent, but simply someone who can testify to having encountered the resurrected Christ.

He is not strong, not courageous and not steady, but he is weak, has great fear and trembling.

He is not wise or persuasive but he has demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit. He has the mind of Christ.

"And so", one can feel the heavy sadness of deep frustration in the apostle Paul. He is heartbroken that the Church of Corinth could not, or did not, demonstrate the identity, qualities and behaviours that reflected Christ or showed that they had the spirit of God. They were not spiritual people instead they were of the flesh motivated by the spirit of their age. They were caught up in the dominant culture of Corinth which produced childlike spirituality. (3: 1). They were emotionally overtaken with jealousy and blaming others for their insecurities.(3:3)

Jealousy is an Oasis for quarrels. A quarrel, or an over exuberant exchange of thoughts, is a sign that we are no longer communicating well. Quarrels manifest themselves in heated arguments, disagreements, bouts of shouting and verbal battles between two or more people. Occasionally that can produce a positive outcome but more often results in a breakdown in relationships with people often saying things that they forever regret. Jealousy gives us an

identity few would be proud of; it harms and destroys relationships. One antidote to jealousy is having confidence in God and in the Spirit of God to take care of the things we find difficult. We can trust God enough to leave our insecurities in his hands. We can release ourselves from the burden and desperation of trying to make relationships work- and doing it rather badly-by giving them over to God.

**“and so”** there is an opportunity for the Corinthians to adopt new and different identities. For in verse 9 we read: “for we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

So this gives us three identities for Corinthians /us to take on:  
God’s servants.  
God’s field.  
God’s building.

We can explore all three of these, but let’s look at something Christians don’t often see ourselves as – God’s field.

The context here is not a conservation expanse of land left to its own devices, so other creatures can flourish and the biodiversity increase - although this is not a bad idea in the 21st century. Rewilding is good for the planet; It allows nature to find its habitat - insects, birds and animals all find a home in the natural world. The soil can recover when it is left to itself. This is no less than what God had in mind when Israel was required to rest the land. When fields were left to rest in antiquity, it was so that they could recover to better serve their owner. I seem to remember something from school where we were taught crop rotation as a farming method which always had one year where the field was left to lie fallow.

The apostle Paul is pointing to a fertile, prosperous and productive field. This is cultivated and taken care of, and which provides unique crops based on what is sown. Its identity, therefore, is determined by what grows in it.

We might also observe that Paul is not speaking about a walled garden. He’s talking about field openly displayed, easily visible and accessible to everyone who passes by. That means that everyone can make their own assessment of the state and nature of that field. People can judge for themselves whether the land is being prepared for sowing of seeds, they can see whether the crops are bursting through the

ground, they can see whether the field is in full bloom or whether it is harvest time.

These fields might also take on the character of their season. They are there to support the lives and livelihood of all those who labour in them. Those who depend on them for food, raw materials or commodities can look forward to harvest time. And yes, God’s fields flourish; They generate wealth or whatever resources God intended.

**“and so”.**

What if we were to borrow the words of the apostle Paul and suggest that we are God’s field? Do you believe that God has left us, his fields, to grow untamed, untended, like a rewilding field. So that others might exploit our resources for their own flourishing? Are we fields that flourish in ways our culture, community, employers and even this church expect of us, but produce little to show that we are God’s fields. Are we producing growth beyond our imaginations, resulting in great admiration, yet very little that demonstrates we belong to Christ?

For all of you who are God’s fields, God makes the decisions on what is planted. In other words God makes the decisions about you and me. And, of course, God’s judgments are likely to be very different from those of our culture, national leaders, employers and even those closest and dearest to us. God’s decisions go beyond the limitations imposed by our demographic our ethnicity our gender our accents or even where we live and how others choose to look up to or down on us.

Paul is provoking us to conceive that any crop that God plants will flourish in his fields. The spiritually mature will flourish, and those who have the spirit of Christ will also flourish. He is however unequivocal that’s those who are stirred by jealousy, those who provoke quarrels, those who embrace the spirit of all around them - inequality, injustice, exploitation and the like - are in a different field and will ultimately perish there. For me this is the crux of Racial Justice Sunday , whatever our DNA, gender, ethnicity etc doesn’t matter, it is the fact that we understand and look for the spirit of Christ in ourselves with the Holy Spirit governing our lives.

In the Old Testament reading, Moses offers two contrasting options to the people of Israel. And we’ve also already heard that enslaved Africans were discriminated against even in accessing the Bible.

## “and so”

I would like to give you the opportunity to listen to the Old Testament passage again. This time, as I read these verses think of them through the lens of making the choice between God’s boundless identity and the identity of the other nations, cultures and gods.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

<sup>15</sup> See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God<sup>[a]</sup> that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

May God’s name be praised as we, his people, his church, choose life.

**Amen.**

## Prayers for others

God of all people,  
hear our prayers for mercy  
we cry to you for help in such a time of trouble.  
We have fallen short of your hopes and dreams for us  
We can see so many in our communities  
treading water  
we can see so many starting to struggle in the  
depths of despair and debt.  
We can see so many affected by issues in  
society that we could play our part in mending,  
Yet we don't do enough.  
We come to you, merciful God, seeking  
forgiveness

God of mercy  
**Hear our prayer**

God of all people,  
Hear our prayers for justice.  
We come to you, Lord,  
You who are sovereign over all,  
And we ask that you would draw the whole  
world together,  
Casting out the evils of prejudice and arrogance  
that cause hatred and oppression  
We long for your justice and peace in our nation  
and world. We come to you, merciful God,  
seeking justice.

God of justice  
**Hear our prayer**

God of all people,  
Hear our prayers of hope.  
We come to you, Lord,  
You whose love is without limit and without  
end,  
And we ask that you help U.S. Open our hearts,  
minds, and wills to you.  
As we hope for the day  
When we can live as members of one family at  
home in the world.  
We come to you, merciful God, in hope.

God of mercy  
**Hear our prayer**  
God of justice  
**Answer our prayers**  
God of hope  
**Inspire us anew.**  
**Amen.**

**And now let us say together the prayer  
that Jesus taught us: Our Father.....**

**Hymn            STF 706            Longing for light  
we wait in darkness**

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.  
Longing for truth, we turn to you.  
Make us your own, your holy people,  
light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has power to save us.  
Make us your living voice.

Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.

Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.

Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others,  
walls made of living stone.

Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.

Many the gifts, many the people,  
many the hearts that yearn to belong.  
Let us be servants to one another,  
making your kingdom come.

Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gathered today.

*Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)*

### **Blessing**

BASED ON A PRAYER BY MARTIN LUTHER KING

O God,  
We thank You that You have inspired people in  
all nations and in all cultures.  
We know that You are God eternal, living and  
moving – yesterday, today and forever.  
May we follow You, committed to Your way of  
love and justice,  
united in the desire to recognise and respect  
the dignity and worth of every human being.  
In the name and the Spirit of Jesus.

**Amen.**