

Sermon

Rev Andrew Moughtin-Mumby

Friends, we are living through very strange times, aren't we? Wherever you are, I hope that you will hear deeply Jesus's words from our Gospel reading about God's great care for you and for me and all God's children: Jesus says, 'Even the hairs of your head are all counted.' As God says to us through the prophet Isaiah, 'You are precious in my sight and honoured and I love you.' Perhaps more than ever, right now, let's remember God's great love and care for each one of us, and let's be part of showing that love and care to all our fellow human beings. For I believe that our world is facing three major global pandemics.

Firstly, we have been slowly waking up to the reality of the climate crisis and the need to care so much better for the earth, our common home. Secondly, we have woken up very quickly to the coronavirus pandemic which has forced us to really change urgently the way we live now and into the future. Thirdly, many people have been brutally woken up in recent weeks to the global pandemic of racism in the light of the awful murder of Mr George Floyd, who is, tragically, just one of a still growing list of people of colour who have lost their lives while in police custody in the USA and here in the UK. All three of these pandemics are especially affecting black and minority ethnic people across the world.

Tomorrow is Windrush Day, the 22nd of June marking the 72nd anniversary of the arrival of The Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks in East London. The Windrush was one of a number of former troopships which travelled from the UK to the Caribbean returning serving British Commonwealth troops to their homes, and on the return journey bringing, at the invitation of the British government, Jamaican and other British Commonwealth citizens from the West Indies to the UK, to help rebuild life in Britain after the Second World War.

Many who came to England experienced horrible racism in society, but also in our parish churches; including here at St Peter's, where a very faithful family of Anglicans originally from Barbados – including Muriel who gave our first reading today, were literally barred by the rector at the time from entering St Peter's Church due to the colour of their black skin. They were welcomed in neighbouring parishes, and eventually found a full welcome here at St Peter's. But that racism is a stain on the soul of our Church.

And there is still racism in the Church today, and it is a very serious disease and a sin which I believe each one of us is called to work hard and work urgently to end. As we mark Windrush Day, we cannot but lament the awful Windrush Scandal which many people had a greater insight into recently, watching 'Sitting in Limbo' on TV. The story of Anthony Bryan and how his life was wrongly wrecked due to the racism of the UK Home Office in its treatment of British citizens who happened to have black skin.

Our lament and sadness friends should make us want to make a difference; to build a better, fairer Church and world. And so, I want to ask you some questions this morning, and please feel free to shout out the answers at home!!

Especially the children because children are often better at giving simple answers to questions than grown-ups!

First question, is it right to treat people with less respect or love because of the colour of their skin?

Is it right to hurt people because of the colour of their skin?

And finally, do we, friends, want a world where people are treated the same whether they have black, brown or white skin?

Well I hope you all said what I think you did!

When we think of the Windrush generation, though, and their children we also remember the amazing contribution those generations have made in the life of this country and indeed in the Church, and that makes us thankful.

This beautiful robe that I am honoured to wear for this service is called the Windrush Cope. It was designed by Terry Duffy and includes thanksgiving, lament and protest.

It features Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin who was born in Montego Bay Jamaica, as was I by coincidence. Bishop Rose has done great things in the Church of England, but has also faced discrimination and racism, and has said that we in the Church need to work hard to get our own house in order. She is now the Bishop of Dover.

The cope also features Sam King MBE who was born in Jamaica, served as an RAF aircraft engineer during the Second World War, and returned to Britain on the Empire Windrush in June 1948. Sam experienced both racism and kindness in his life in Britain. As the first black person to be Mayor of Southwark he received death threats from the National Front who said that a black person shouldn't be Mayor. Mr King was awarded an MBE by The Queen in 1998 for services to his community and is remembered with great respect and fondness here in this borough of Southwark today.

The cope also features a large Cross, the cross reminds us that Jesus is especially close to us when we suffer, but also reminds us that when we hurt people through racism or discrimination, we hurt Jesus too. Jesus who was a person of colour, who was brutally murdered himself unjustly.

In a moment, we are going to keep a minute's silence. We will do that in lament for the racism experienced by members of the Windrush generation and other minority ethnic people today and through the generations. In memory of the suffering that countless members of the Windrush generation have gone through, and still go through today. In solidarity with black and brown people who suffer racism and injustice today, praying for the strength to build a better world by God's grace.

Tomorrow, on Windrush Day itself, people across the nation are being asked to observe a 2 minute silence at 11am.

Dear friends, even the hairs of your head are all counted. Your life matters, my life matters, and because we have so graphically seen the horrific impact of those three global pandemics on people of colour, on black and minority ethnic people in particular, I encourage us all to say loudly and strongly, even now: Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter.

Friends, I believe more than ever that the whole human family is on a journey. A mental, spiritual and emotional journey. In our first reading St Paul tells us that our old self has died with Christ, so that we can be dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ. May Jesus Christ give you and me the grace today and every day to live a new life as citizens of the kingdom of heaven here on earth, so that all God's children may be free and flourish with the fullness of life which Jesus promises us all.

Amen.