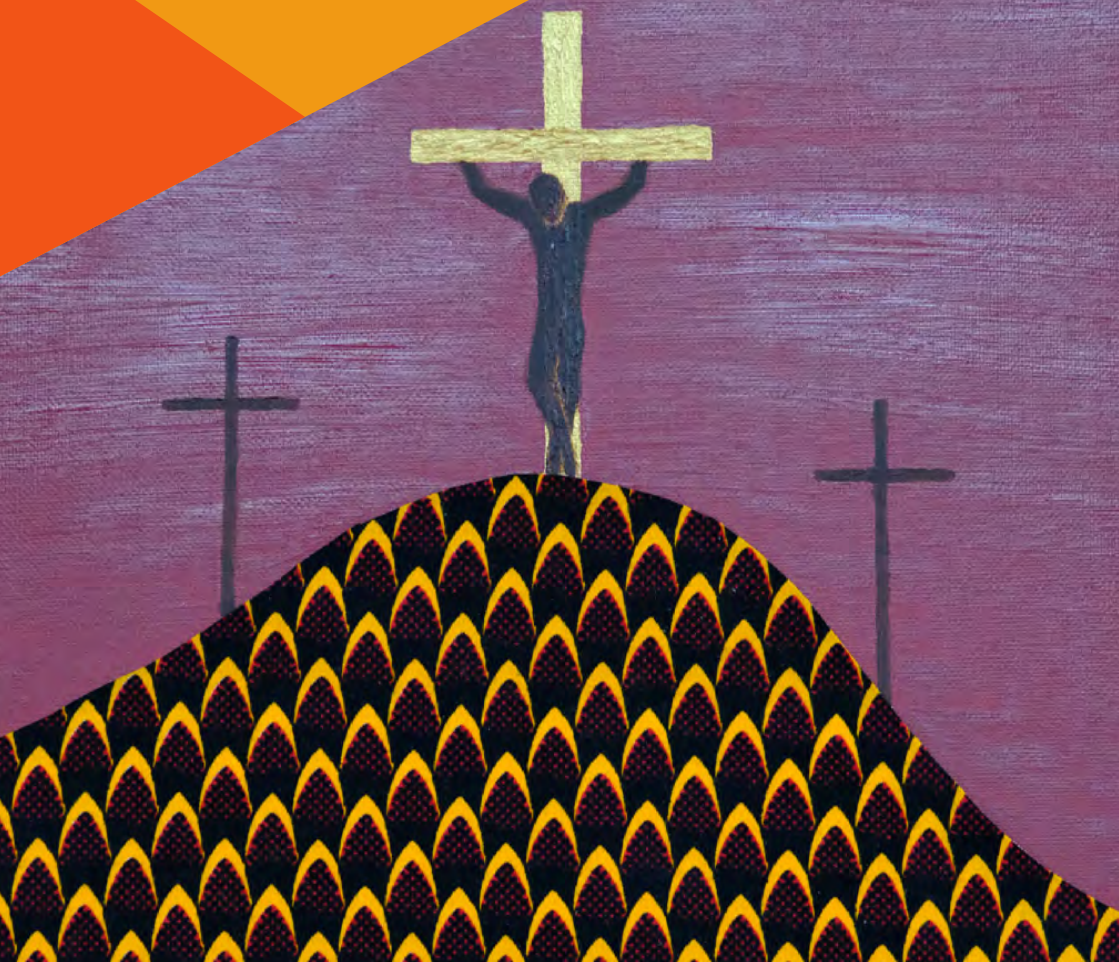




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LONDON

Becoming a Reconciled People

A bible study resource for racial justice



A note of welcome and care

Listening, learning and growing together

The Rt Revd Dr Anderson Jeremiah

Bishop of Edmonton and for Racial Justice

As Christians, we are called to see the world through the eyes of God. Yet that is not always easy. We live in a world marked by division, inequality and misunderstanding, and we can sometimes struggle to know how faith speaks into these realities. This resource has been created to help us listen more deeply to God's word, to one another, and to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

My hope is that these nine Bible studies will not only increase our knowledge but also deepen our discipleship. My prayer is that they will encourage honest reflection and courageous conversation. Whether you are using this resource alone or with others, I encourage you to engage with it prayerfully. Take time to listen. Take time to reflect. Above all, allow God's word to shape your heart and imagination.

May these studies help us become communities where every person is valued, where every voice is heard and where, together, we bear witness to the reconciling love of Jesus Christ.

Caring for yourself and one another

Conversations about justice, exclusion, race and belonging can sometimes stir painful memories or strong emotions, especially for those who have experienced prejudice, marginalisation or a sense of not being fully seen or heard within the Church or wider society.

If anything in the Bible passages, reflections or discussion questions feels difficult, please know that you do not have to carry it alone. You may find it helpful to pause, take some time in prayer or speak with someone you trust after the session. Caring for our wellbeing is not a lack of faith; our experiences are real and worthy of being acknowledged in God's presence. We do not need to hide pain, emotions or struggles from God.

As we reflect on God's heart for justice and the dignity of every person, may we also make room for gentleness, honesty and compassion, both towards one another and towards ourselves.



Bible translation: All Bible quotations and references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

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A great multitude that no one could count

Contributor

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Bible passage: Revelation 7:9–12

“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

”

Reflection

This passage from Revelation offers a compelling glimpse of the fulfilment of God’s purpose in, which John sees a vision of a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before God’s throne in worship. It is a vivid and hopeful vision of unity in diversity,

where difference is not erased but gathered together into a shared act of praise.

At its heart, the passage reveals God’s desire for us to be together, united in worship in all our diversity. The multitude retains its rich variety – different nations, cultures and languages – yet is united in adoration. This is not a vision of sameness or uniformity, but of harmony: distinct voices forming one song. It reminds us that the kingdom of God does not flatten difference but redeems it and rejoices in it. Diversity is not a problem to overcome but a gift to be celebrated, and worship is the great leveller, drawing all into a shared belonging before the throne.

This vision in Revelation challenges any narrow or exclusive understanding of God’s people. It challenges any notion that God’s covenant is limited to one kind of person alone. Instead, it anticipates a redeemed humanity in which divisions between people of different ethnicities, languages and cultures are transcended in Christ.

It confronts the persistence of racism and exclusion, calling the Church to reflect, even now, the future reality it proclaims – one of equality, dignity and shared identity in Christ Jesus. Every voice is heard; no one is marginalised. Diversity is honoured as a gift, not a threat.

I glimpsed this glorious future a few years ago at the Lambeth Conference, when bishops from across the Anglican Communion gathered in Canterbury for 10 days to talk, study the Bible and worship together. Around 1,000 people gathered from 165 different countries. At one point during the opening act of worship, we were invited to pray the Lord's Prayer together, each in our own language. The resulting cacophony was beautiful and glorious – no one voice or tongue dominated; all were united in the same prayer. It felt like a foretaste of heaven.

The images of Revelation encourage us to ask how we will live now, in the light of the coming kingdom, when God will reign fully and there will be no more crying, death or suffering (Revelation 21). This vision of the multitude from the very end of time encourages us to become that kind of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual church now: truly and wonderfully made up of people from every nation, tribe, language and tongue. It gives us

something to work towards. It reminds us that God's kingdom is not defined by one culture but gloriously diverse, and it calls us to live now in ways that honour that future.

What will we do now to see God's will done on earth as it is in heaven?

Discussion questions

- What does John's vision of "a great multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language" teach us about God's kingdom and the place of diversity within it?
- How does this challenge ideas of unity that depend on everyone becoming the same?
- Where do we still see barriers in the Church or in society that do not reflect this heavenly vision?
- What practical steps can we take, as a church and as individuals, to make our life together more closely reflect this vision of worship, equality, dignity and shared belonging in Christ?



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The Cushite Woman

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Bible passage: Numbers 12:1–2

“While they were at Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had indeed married a Cushite woman); and they said, “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” And the Lord heard it.”

Reflection

Commentaries differ on whether the Cushite woman was Ziporah or another wife of Moses. However, Cush in scripture points to Ethiopia, and most scholars understand this as a reference to a Black African woman.

Whatever her precise identity, these verses offer a helpful starting point for reflecting on how we view and respond to those who differ from us – especially people of different races. At a time when society’s commitment to racial justice is increasingly contested, this is an

opportunity to examine our own attitudes with honesty and grace.

It is striking in Numbers 12 that the criticism arises within a family, reminding us to look inwards and appraise how we, as Christ’s people, hold attitudes of grace towards one another. We are all familiar with the words of Colossians 3:11: “In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” Yet we must ask whether we truly live as though there are no distinctions in Christ.

We should probe even further in order to discern what lies beneath our attitudes and responses to those unlike us. To what extent are they driven by ingrained prejudices? Even when we do respond with kindness, what shapes that response: a desire not to appear prejudiced, caution and a fear of causing offence, or a self-preserving effort to fit in with prevailing attitudes? Or do our actions flow from a genuine conviction that every person, whatever their appearance or voice, deserves dignity and honour because they bear the image of God?

Uncomfortable as it can be, we need to keep examining how we treat others in everyday moments. I was reminded of this recently on a long train journey, sitting opposite a dishevelled woman speaking loudly and anxiously on her phone. As I left, she approached me with a warm smile and handed back something that had fallen from my bag. In that instant, I felt deep shame for the assumptions I had made based on her appearance and behaviour and was humbled by her simple kindness and integrity.

Let us look at Miriam and Aaron's actions in the light of our own actions and ask ourselves how we react and respond to those who are different. Are we quick to criticise? Do we rush to make assumptions simply because people are different?

It is only when we scrutinise our attitudes towards those we live alongside in our church communities that we can, with integrity, advocate for those who are vulnerable and challenge those who actively perpetuate injustice in wider society.

Discussion questions

- How does the reference to the Cushite woman invite us to reflect on how we view people of different races and backgrounds?
- How does Colossians 3:11 shape the way we respond to those who are different from us?
- What other biblical principles help us treat those who differ from us with Christ-like grace?
- Do we sometimes collude with harmful attitudes by failing to challenge stereotypes or prejudices within our church communities? How might Christ challenge us to respond differently?
- How can our churches ensure that our welcome is shaped by Christ's love rather than by race, appearance, or cultural difference?



Remember you were strangers

Contributor

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Bible passage: Leviticus 19:33–37

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them: I am the Lord.”

Reflection

Leviticus is not the first place many of us would immediately turn to when reflecting on racial justice, even in a Bible study. Yet within God’s instruction for the covenant life of ancient Israel, we encounter a profound vision of how God’s people are called to live with those who live among them but are still regarded as outsiders because of their ethnicity, culture, origin or background.

Ultimately, in the midst of laws and rituals, this passage reveals the purpose to which the law points: a community in which justice, love and belonging reflect the very character of God. The command concerning “the alien” appears alongside laws about justice, honesty and care for the vulnerable, reminding us that holiness is not confined to worship or ritual observance. Rather, it is revealed in the way God’s people order their common life, especially in their relationships with those who are most vulnerable.

The New Revised Standard Version translates the Hebrew term *gēr* as “alien”, while other translations use “stranger”, “foreigner” or “sojourner”. No single English word carries the full weight of the term. In this reflection, I use “stranger” to draw attention not simply to legal status, but to the experience of living within a community whilst still being regarded as someone who does not fully belong.

The Hebrew *gēr* describes a person living within the community yet without the security that came through

land, ancestry or kinship. The text asks us to notice those whose place in the community is uncertain. The stranger is not simply to be protected or treated fairly but to be “as one born among you”. This command does not erase difference, nor does it require the stranger to become someone else. Instead, it redefines and expands the community itself—something that reflects the beloved community of God.

The measure of faithfulness was not simply how people worshipped God but how they lived with those who might otherwise remain on the margins: “for you were aliens in the land of Egypt”. Memory becomes more than a recollection of the past; it becomes a way of seeing the present. Israel’s own story was to shape its imagination, ensuring that its experience of vulnerability was never forgotten in the exercise of power.

This same pattern is echoed in the Eucharist. Christ’s command, “Do this in remembrance of me”, reminds us that, in Scripture, memory is never passive. We remember so that God’s saving work continues to form us as his people. As Israel remembered Egypt, so the Church remembers Christ, receiving anew the truth that our life together is grounded not in status or achievement but in the gracious initiative of God.

As followers of Christ, we do not simply transpose Israel’s law into our own context. We read it prayerfully, asking how God’s Spirit continues to form the Church. The passage invites us to ask whether there are people who worship alongside us and yet remain strangers in our midst. Racial justice asks whether race, ethnicity or culture still shape who feels at home, whose voices are heard and whose gifts are recognised.

Every act of Christian remembrance asks the same question: what kind of people are we becoming? Remember, you were strangers. Since our remembering is shaped by God’s grace, it must also reshape the way we belong to one another. God’s vision is greater than tolerance and deeper than inclusion. The Church is called to become a community where justice gives visible expression to love, where dignity is recognised rather than earned, and where no one is left wondering whether they truly belong. Perhaps that is the enduring challenge of Leviticus: not simply to welcome the stranger, but to become the kind of people among whom no one remains a stranger.

Discussion questions

- In what ways might people still experience being treated as “strangers” because of their race, ethnicity or cultural background, even within our churches?
- The command to treat the stranger “as one born among you” challenges assumptions about who belongs. How can the Church become a community where people do not have to leave their culture or identity at the door to be fully included?
- What kind of people are we becoming? If someone encountered our church for the first time, what would they learn about God’s welcome from the way we live together?

Justice and the God who hears

Contributor

The Rt Revd Dr Anderson Jeremiah

Bishop of Edmonton and Lead Bishop for Racial Justice

Bible passage: Exodus 3:7–12;

Luke 13:31–35

Exodus passage

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

Luke passage

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'" Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

Reflection

Both God's call to Moses and Jesus' lament over Jerusalem invite us to see the world through God's eyes, to recognise injustice, and to respond with compassion, courage and practical solidarity.

Exodus is not simply a story of escape from oppression; it is a call to imagine freedom, justice and peace from God's perspective. God's people are not liberated in order to reproduce the bondage from which they have been delivered but to live differently: in covenant, responsibility and justice.

That call begins with Moses at the burning bush. As the bush burns without being consumed, Moses discovers that he is standing on holy ground before the God who sees, hears and knows the suffering of the oppressed.

God's response is not distant sympathy but compassionate action: Moses is sent to confront Pharaoh and lead the people into freedom. Moses responds to God's call with hesitation and inadequacy.

God does not reassure him by praising his ability but by promising his presence: "I will be with you" (v. 12). Moses' confidence rests not in himself but in the God who sends him. God reveals his character through his relationship with the oppressed: the one who sees their suffering, hears their cry and acts to bring liberation."

Racial justice is not an optional concern for Christians. Racism is a sin because it denies human dignity and disfigures

our recognition of the image of God reflected in others and in ourselves. Racist attitudes may appear in obvious acts of hatred but also in habits, jokes, assumptions and silences that shape prejudice. To pursue racial justice is to recognise the image of God in every person and to resist the ways in which power dehumanises.

In Luke, Jesus looks towards Jerusalem, the place of his impending crucifixion, and laments. Like the prophets before him, Jesus grieves over sin, the abuse of power, the exploitation of the vulnerable, violence and blind ambition. Yet his lament is not detached or cold. He presents himself as a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings: opening his arms to gather, nurture and protect. This image holds together prophetic truth and tender compassion.

Discussion questions

- Why does God's compassion move us to action?
- How does the promise "I will be with you" shape the way we respond to God's call?
- How can lament be a faithful response to injustice and suffering?
- Where are we called to hold together prophetic courage and tender compassion today?
- How can our churches or communities recognise the image of God more fully in every person?

Closing prayer

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you hear the cries of your people and call us to walk in the ways of justice and love. Open our eyes to the burning bushes around us. Give us the courage of Moses, the compassion of Christ and the wisdom to see your image in every person. Disturb our silence, deepen our solidarity and make us partners in your work of healing, freedom and peace. Amen



Service at All Souls Langham Place



God who lifts up the oppressed

Contributor

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Opening prayer

Faithful and loving God, we praise you, for you worthy of all praise. You are the maker of heaven and earth, and you have fashioned us in your own image and likeness. You remain faithful for ever and are the God who upholds the oppressed, feeds the hungry and lifts up those who are bowed down. You watch over the stranger and those who are orphaned.

As we gather to reflect on Psalm 146, open our hearts to your word and our minds to your truth. Teach us to see the world as you see it, to notice where people are burdened, excluded or treated unjustly, and to hear your call to be people of justice, mercy and compassion. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Bible passage: Psalm 146

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Reflection

Psalm 146 is a song of praise but is also a deeply political and spiritual declaration about where God stands in the midst of our world. The psalm begins by turning our attention away from human power and towards the Lord, the one whose reign is everlasting and whose faithfulness never fails. This is not simply a call to private devotion; it is a challenge to every person, system and structure that often forgets the character of God and the dignity of those made in God's image.

The psalm tells us much about the character of God – what God is like. God is both creator and creative. God upholds the cause of the oppressed, feeds the hungry, sets prisoners free, lifts up those who are bowed down, and watches over the foreigner, the widow and the orphan. Again and again, God's heart is turned towards those who are pushed to the edges of our society or world – those who are silenced, overlooked or denied belonging and dignity. In the kingdom of God, those whom the world marginalises are not an afterthought; they are seen, held and defended by God.

These themes matter deeply for racial justice. Racism is not only about individual prejudice; it is also about systems, habits and cultures that rank human

worth, protect some while disadvantaging others, and make it harder for some people to belong, flourish or be heard.

The Church of England has itself acknowledged the reality of systemic racism and the ways in which many Anglicans of minority ethnic and global majority heritage have not found the Church to be the welcoming spiritual home it is called to be. It has recognised that good intentions alone are not enough and that racial justice requires truth-telling, repentance and structural change.

Psalm 146 does not allow the Church to be neutral about this. It exposes the false security of power that protects itself while others carry the burden. It reminds us that worship of the living God must lead to lives shaped by God's justice. The psalm shows that true worship should lead to a change of hearts, minds and systems.

To praise the Lord is to be drawn into God's concern for the oppressed, the stranger and those whose dignity is denied. It is to ask where people are still bowed down by racism, exclusion or silence, and what it means for the Church not only to welcome them but to change itself.

This is kingdom work. The God we praise is the God whose reign lifts

up those who are bowed down and turns the way of the “wicked” upside down. As the body of Christ, we are called to reflect that reign: to be a church where truth is spoken, burdens are shared, dignity is honoured, and all God’s children are able to belong and flourish.

Discussion questions

- What does praising God mean to us, and how has praise shaped our life, our circumstances or our community?
- What do we find most challenging or most encouraging about this psalm in today’s context?
- Psalm 146 says that God upholds the oppressed and watches over the foreigner. What does this reveal about God’s heart, and what might it be calling the Church to do today?
- Where do we see people being “bowed down” by racism, exclusion or lack of belonging in society or in the life of the Church?
- What might it mean for our parish not only to welcome people warmly but also to examine the habits, assumptions and structures that may prevent some from truly flourishing?

Closing prayer

God of justice and mercy, we thank you for the gift of your word and for all that you have revealed to us in our time together.

As we leave this study, help us not only to praise you with our lips but to follow you with our hearts.

Where we have seen injustice, give us courage to respond. Where people are bowed down, make us agents of your compassion and hope. Where voices are silenced or people are excluded, teach your church to be a place of welcome, truth and belonging.

May the God of hope fill us with joy and peace in believing, and send us out to love and serve in the name of Christ. Amen



Worship at IMPRINT Church, St Clement Eastcheap

A wider cloud of witnesses

Contributor

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Bible passage: Hebrews 12:1–3

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.”

Reflection

The author of Hebrews invites us to imagine the journey of faith as a race. It is tempting to hear this passage as a call to individual perseverance: keep going, stay strong, do not give up. Yet Hebrews offers something more communal.

We are part of a story that began long before us and continues through the lives, struggles and witness of others.

The “great cloud of witnesses” consists of those whose lives still speak, still shape us and still draw us into deeper knowledge of God.

The word ‘witness’ carries a richness within it. Its roots are connected to ‘knowing’ and to having seen something firsthand. A witness is not simply a distant observer, but someone who has come to know through lived experience, and who therefore bears that truth into the world.

The people who surround us are not all the same. Hebrews 11 names a diverse group whose faith was shaped in very different circumstances. Together, their stories reveal the many ways God is at work in the world. This invites us to ask: Whose witness are we shaped by? Whose stories have formed our understanding of God?

All of us are formed by the cultures and communities we inherit. What is familiar can quietly become what feels normal or complete. Yet the wider church, across cultures and communities, reminds us that God is always bigger than any one expression of faith.

Part of discipleship is being continually (un)formed by God. It is noticing our assumptions, becoming aware of the voices we have not heard, and learning to receive from others. This is not simply about making space for different people; it is about recognising our need for one another in order to encounter the fullness of God's love.

This is why racial justice is deeply connected to spiritual formation. It asks not only who belongs, but whether we are willing to be changed through encounter. The faith, wisdom and witness of communities whose voices have often been overlooked are not additions to the Church's story; they are part of the body of Christ.

The writer of Hebrews calls us to fix our eyes on Jesus, while remembering that we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses. Jesus shows a love that crosses boundaries, draws people together and forms a new community.

Discipleship is a journey of staying with God, sharing the journey with others and being transformed for the sake of the world. When we listen to a wider cloud of witnesses, we come to see more of God's grace already at work among us.

Discussion questions

- Who makes up the “cloud of witnesses” that has shaped our faith, and what have their stories taught us about God?
- What assumptions or ways of seeing might we be invited to lay aside in order to grow more fully into the life to which God is calling us?
- How might listening to a wider range of voices and experiences change how we understand God's presence in our churches and in our world?

One new humanity: a vision for racial reconciliation

Contributor

The Rt Revd Rod Green

Bishop of Stepney

Bible passage: Ephesians 2:11–22

“ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far

off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

Reflection

Ephesians 2:11–22 has something important to say about racial justice. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians was written to a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile believers. At first glance, Jew and Gentile appear to be a purely religious distinction. But in the first century, it was an ethnic and social distinction too, carrying centuries of mutual suspicion and legal separation.

Paul names this history directly, which is important. The reconciliation he describes is not abstract; it is reconciliation between people with real

reasons to distrust one another, shaped by histories of ancestry and identity.

The text moves in three steps, and each is important. First, Paul tells Gentile believers to remember what they were: “aliens” and “strangers”, excluded from Israel’s covenants of promise, and “without” God (v. 11–12). Second, he declares that Christ is their peace: Christ has made the two groups “one”, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility, ending the system that separated them, and creating “one new humanity” out of the two (v. 14–18). Third, he describes what they are now: no longer outsiders but fellow “citizens” and “members of the household of God”, being built together into a dwelling place for God’s Spirit (v. 19–22).

The dividing wall is a powerful image (v. 14). We see walls like this in our world today, such as those between Mexico and the United States and Israel and the West Bank. Paul is almost certainly writing about the actual barrier in the Jerusalem temple that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts –another physical, state-sanctioned form of segregation.

It is this kind of barrier that Christ has torn down, says Paul. His language is institutional, not just emotional:

the hostility had structure. Notice too how he names that hostility for what it is. Paul uses the word twice (vv. 14, 16). Rather than softening the Jew-Gentile relationship into a simple misunderstanding, he calls it enmity. I think he is right to do so; naming the wall clearly before describing its demolition matters. Reconciliation that skips this step too often produces a thin, premature peace.

Verse 16 describes a double reconciliation. Christ reconciled both groups to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. This reconciliation runs vertically: there is reconciliation between God and humanity. It also runs horizontally: there is reconciliation between the two ethnic groups. It is striking that Paul does not treat this horizontal reconciliation between hostile peoples as a separate social project bolted onto the vertical reconciliation. He treats it as an integral part of what the cross itself achieves.

But what does this “one new humanity” (v. 15) actually mean? It is not Gentiles becoming Jews, nor Jews becoming Gentiles. It is not about the erasure of either identity. It is a genuinely new social body emerging from the two groups. This is so profound that Paul stacks three images, with deliberate

escalation, to describe this new body. He starts with legal belonging (citizens), then intimate belonging (household), and ends with sacred belonging (a temple where God's Spirit dwells). The boldest claim, in my view, is the last one. The multi-ethnic community itself, joined together, is where God's Spirit dwells.

Four convictions follow from this for me. First, the gospel addresses groups, not only individuals. God is reconciling peoples, not just souls. Second, sin can be structural and systemic, so racism needs to be recognised as more than just personal prejudice. Third, reconciliation is costly, happening "through the cross", not through goodwill or positive thinking alone. This tells me that human reconciliation will also require sacrifice and real change, not just better feelings. Finally, the church is meant to be evidence of this reconciliation. This is why the local church should reflect its local community in all its diversity. This, in and of itself, is a sign of the power of the cross.

Paul does not end this passage with a call to be nicer to people who are different. He ends with an unfinished building, a dwelling place still being built together. The wall, he says, was already torn down at the cross, but

the building of one new humanity out of the rubble is presented as ongoing. There is work to be done. How might you play your part?

Discussion questions

- Paul names the Jew-Gentile relationship as 'hostility', not merely 'difference'. Are there dividing walls in our church, city or family that are better described as hostility?
- Verse 15 describes something new – not assimilation or mere coexistence, but "one new humanity". What is the difference in practice, and which are we more tempted to settle for?
- Verses 19–22 picture the multi-ethnic church as a dwelling place for God. Does our community function more like a household truly joined together or like separate groups sharing a building? What might need to change?



The gifts of diversity and conflict in the Church

Contributor

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**Bible passage: John 17:20–23;
Acts 6:1–15**



John passage

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.



Acts passage

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together

the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated some

men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. They set up false witnesses who said, “This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us.” And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.



Reflection

One of the most curious patterns within modern Christian communities is our tendency to regard conflict as a solely negative circumstance and, on some level, a sign of the failure of Christian discipleship. This can be rooted partly in our own experience of how well conflict was, and is, handled among our families but also within our communities, networks, places of learning, work and ministry. For some, our lived experience may be that all conflict has been violence.

This perspective on conflict is often shaped by a distorted understanding

of John 17:20–23. Often described as ‘Jesus’ unanswered prayer’ within our formational faith communities, these verses can foster an unexamined desire to ‘manufacture unity’ so that the public face of our family, church and public lives aligns with Christ’s prayer, while somehow side-stepping his priestly lordship.

There are several ways that we might seek to manufacture unity. As individuals, we might avoid difficult conversations altogether in order to preserve the appearance of harmony. Alternatively, we may distract or ‘busy’ ourselves, which can stem from disinterest or disregard for the needs and wellbeing of others, or equally from an understandable desire to protect our own time, energy, peace and calling. Whatever the cause, our individual avoidance and distraction can disconnect us from the realities of conflict and prevent us from recognising the injustices, harm and violence that can mar the reality of Christ among us.

We do this in the benign hope that, by focusing on the more important work of teaching and preaching of God’s word, as the apostles do, these difficulties will somehow eventually resolve themselves. However, this begs the question: What is the point and purpose of preaching and teaching

the gospel of Christ if we do not seek to live, practise and embody his teachings?

Collectively, and particularly in less reflective formational contexts, terms like ‘conformity’ and ‘assimilation’ are sometimes used to silently point to a preferred set of cultural or religious norms that members must adhere to or comply with, in the hope that this will create the kind of community where discord and enmity are minimised. Yet experience tells us that cultural conformity and assimilation do not beget unity or accountability, and they rarely protect ‘the least’ among us.

While homogeneity of ethnicity, class, lifestyle, language and thought can certainly make for less friction and greater cohesiveness, and may even make numerical growth easier to achieve, is it really a true picture of Pentecost? Is it what we hope the new heaven and new earth will be like?

Manufactured unity cannot be regarded as the same as ‘allegiance with’, being ‘conformed to the likeness’ (Romans 8:29); “transformed into his image” (2 Corinthians 3:18), or are in any way ensuring that believers are becoming ‘one’ as the Father and Son are one. (John 17:22). All these approaches simultaneously underestimate the

power of the Holy Spirit and the schemes of the ‘evil one’.

Yet, if we can readjust our fear-driven avoidance of conflict, we might discover that conflict can be an opportunity for learning and a disguised blessing that provides us with precious insights into:

- what God is doing among us
- what God wants us to see and pay attention to
- what is not working well within our fellowship gatherings

how human sinfulness – the desire to be like gods (Genesis 3:5) – can combine with the diabolical to create generational ‘Gehenna’ (Hebrew for the burning rubbish heap, placed outside of Jerusalem that was used as a metaphor to describe ‘hell’).

These matters are not abstract theological concerns; they are present from the earliest days of the Church. If we put our Acts 6 text in its wider narrative context, it follows on from the Ascension and the birth of the Church at Pentecost. The text documents the first acts of the Apostles, before providing us with an insight into the early Church’s first ‘in-tray and crisis management’ exercises. This fledgling

Jewish sect is almost immediately dealing with integrity issues from within the Church, which is promptly followed by Act 6's first public justice issue and congregational disagreement.

Discussion questions

- Can we think of any situations where 'manufactured unity' has replaced honest engagement with conflict?
- Why is racial justice sometimes viewed as a modern add-on rather than part of biblical teaching and the ministry of Jesus Christ in Christian spaces?
- How might the Church's witness and trajectory through history have been different if racial justice had been more fully embraced?
- What distractions or preferences continue to prevent the Church today from pursuing racial justice?
- How has our church, home group or prayer group engaged with biblical discussions and theology around racial justice? What practical difference has this made to our understanding, relationships and service?



Living tomorrow's kingdom today

Contributor

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Bible passage: Revelation 7:9–10

“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!””

Reflection

Imagine standing on a packed London Underground platform during the morning rush hour. Around you are people speaking different languages, wearing different clothes, carrying different stories and representing almost every nation on earth.

London is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, yet diversity alone does not guarantee unity. Alongside its richness, our city still experiences racial prejudice, exclusion

and inequality. What if the Church could offer something different – not merely diversity, but genuine reconciliation?

John's vision in Revelation 7:9–10 gives us precisely that hope. He sees “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb”. This is not a vague ideal or simply a picture of heaven; it is God's promised future breaking into the present. Diversity is not erased; rather, it is redeemed. Every culture, language and people retain its God-given identity, yet all are united in joyful worship, proclaiming together, “Salvation belongs to our God”.

Written to churches facing persecution and division, Revelation reminds believers that Christ's victory will gather people from every corner of the earth into one redeemed family. Ethnic and cultural differences are no longer sources of suspicion or superiority but become part of a magnificent chorus of praise. This is not uniformity but reconciled communion.

This vision speaks powerfully into today's London. Racial justice is not simply a social or political concern; it is a gospel imperative rooted in the character of God. Humanity is created in God's image, and through the cross, Christ has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14), reconciling us both to God and to one another. As the Diocese of London reminds us, we are called to be actively anti-racist because racism is incompatible with Jesus' command to love our neighbour and with God's desire for life in all its fullness.

Theologian John Stott wisely observed that we should be as broad as God's love and as narrow as God's truth. Likewise, Archbishop Desmond Tutu reminded us, "My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together." Their words echo Revelation's vision of a kingdom where dignity, justice and belonging are gifts of God's grace, not privileges reserved by ethnicity or status. Hence, we are called to be a reconciled people: not uniform, but united; not flattened, but gathered; not colour-blind, but Christ-centred.

Friends, this passage both comforts and challenges us. It encourages us because God's future is far richer and more beautiful than our present divisions. It challenges us to ask whether our

worship, leadership, friendships and decision-making reflect heaven's reality or merely mirror society's prejudices. As Professor Jarvis J. Williams writes, in Christ, God creates a new and transformed multi-ethnic community while preserving each people's distinctiveness.

A church shaped by Revelation 7 will repent where it has excluded, listen where it has ignored, celebrate every culture as God's gift, and intentionally build communities where everyone belongs. Every act of welcome, every stand against injustice and every step towards reconciliation becomes a foretaste of heaven. Until then, the Church is called to live tomorrow's reality today.

Discussion questions

- What strikes us most about John's vision of the great multitude in Revelation 7:9–10?
- How does this passage challenge or encourage our church as it seeks to reflect God's diverse kingdom in London's multicultural context?
- What practical steps can we take, individually and as a congregation, to pursue racial justice, genuine inclusion and reconciliation?

Becoming a reconciled people- together

Thank you for taking the time to read, reflect, pray and listen.

We hope these Bible studies have created space for honest conversation, deeper understanding and a renewed commitment to racial justice.

Becoming a reconciled people is not something we achieve through one conversation or one Bible study. It is an ongoing journey of listening, learning, repentance, prayer and action. As we continue this journey together, may we remain open to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit and committed to building a Church in which every person is valued, every voice is heard and everyone can fully belong and flourish.

May what we have encountered through Scripture shape not only what we believe, but how we worship, lead, serve and live alongside one another.

Continue the journey

Visit our website to discover further racial justice resources, events and opportunities to become involved.

Explore our racial justice resources

<https://bit.ly/46XyfQD>



SCAN ME

With prayer and gratitude,
The Racial Justice Priority Team

Further discipleship resources are available through www.wayoflife.london

The Stations of the Cross Ruhkia, 2025.
[Oil paint, textile, Dutch gold leaf on canvas].
St. Andrew's Church, Southgate

Ruhkia is a figurative realist oil painter whose work explores the space between humans and nature. Through detailed portraits, using gold leaf and African textiles, her paintings also seek to evoke questions about identity and expression.

Website: ruhkia.com



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Listening to Scripture • Learning from One Another • Growing Together

Prepared by the Racial Justice Priority Team