

Racial Justice Sunday

A sermon given by The Reverend Canon Sonia Barron, former Co-chair of the Church of England's Anti-Racism Taskforce and member of the Archbishops Commission for Racial Justice

*Cathedral Eucharist
Sunday 8 February 2026, 10.30am*

Genesis 1:1-2:3, and Matthew 6: 25-34

I was visiting a primary school recently and came across a poster that said “how cool is it that the same God who created oceans and mountains and galaxies looked at you and thought the world needed one of you too.”

Our reading from Genesis 1 is one of two accounts of the story of creation. In the story God speaks and things happened, and God created “each according to its kind” indicating that difference has been with us since creation.

There was variety from the beginning and God created human being to take care of it all – male and female. Human beings were God’s final act of creation on day 6 “God created humankind in God’s image” (v27) and having done that “God saw everything that he had made and it was very good” (v31). Notice “it was VERY good.”

And yet today much of what was VERY GOOD has been “messed up” to coin a current phrase. We have not lived up to the mandate given to us in Genesis 2:15 to tend and guard creation and be caretakers rather than owners of it. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

But instead of being good stewards we have destroyed the natural habitats of many species, polluted the air, land and sea, we discriminate against groups of people because of the colour of their skin rather than the content of their character to paraphrase the late Dr Martin Luther King. That has not been VERY good and we need to take action to help us restore God’s creation.

As “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” at the beginning of creation, I believe in these difficult and dark times that the Spirit of God hovers and is present and wants every baptised Christian to live up to the truth of the gospel and the virtues of hospitality, generosity, kindness and compassion that Jesus commanded.

In our second reading from Matthew Jesus tells his disciples: “seek first the kingdom of God.” Could our understanding of what that really means be part of our helping restore creation? What is the kingdom of God? It is the sovereign rule of God come to earth – it is when the beauty of heaven becomes a reality on earth. Tom Wright’s translation of this verse “make your top priority God’s kingdom and his way of life.”

In God’s kingdom love for our neighbour, the stranger, the outsider, the outcast, those on the margins is paramount.

On this Racial Justice Sunday Christians all across the country are marking this occasion and I invite you to reflect on how you might help to make our world VERY good again particularly when it comes to racial justice. Making it a place where everyone belongs; where everyone is loved, valued and affirmed for who they are, and not what they look like or have to offer, remembering we are brothers and sisters of one ‘race’: the human race.

Committed Christian believers are called to follow Christ and live his way, setting an example and giving a lead for others to follow which our gospel reading puts as *seeking the kingdom of God first*. What does the kingdom of God look like? What does that actually look like in reality, in the diocese of Bath and Wells?

I believe it looks like the restoration of things as it was at creation when God saw it was VERY GOOD. It is seeking God's sovereign rule, perfect will, and righteousness, to be obeyed and be established on earth. God’s kingdom will bring an end of injustice, unjust governments, violent and corrupt regimes, it is seen in heavenly values like love, justice, and mercy in our daily actions.

God’s kingdom will bring light into our darkest situations as we celebrated at Candlemas recently. God’s rule and reign will replace brokenness with beauty, despair with hope.

How might you help bring light into the darkness of polarisation and the “mutating ‘virus’ of racism? – become bridgebuilders with compassion and love. Stand up for the neighbour or colleague experiencing racial abuse, showing love and welcome, but you need to be prepared for the risks of standing in solidarity with the racially abused. It might mean professional isolation in the workplace or your chances of promotion become limited. For others the risk might be **social** isolation or backlash from perpetrators. Standing up against racism can mean putting yourself at personal risk and lead to direct verbal abuse or physical danger. To restore the VERY good creation we might need to take risks.

Elsewhere in the NT Jesus did say “whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me.”

When we look at our broken world it could leave us feeling hopeless and helpless but Jesus brings light so we can have hope.

We need to trust that through OUR words and actions we can make a difference – we can stand up for those who are not recognised as being part of God’s VERY GOOD creation.