

## Wells Cathedral: 2 February 2026

### **Title: *Racial injustice, Resistance and finding ways to Repair/Heal***

#### **Richard Reddie**

I would like to start by saying it's a pleasure to join you this evening. As you know, this Sunday is Racial Justice Sunday, which is an occasion for Christians in Britain and Ireland to collectively focus on equality and justice. It is also an opportunity to *Remember, Reflect and Respond* to inequality. This means:

- Remember the importance of racial justice
- Reflect on human diversity and thank God for it
- Respond by working to end injustice, racism and ignorance through prayer and action.

So, we are talking about the 3 R's, which reveal that education or learning in both a formal and informal way, are at the heart of this activity.

This evening, I have been asked to explore the topic of 'Racial injustice, Resistance and finding ways to Repair/Heal', which, if you break down the title, is also about 3 R's – 'Racism', 'Resistance', and 'Repair'.

So, let me start with the first of those 'R's, which is 'racism'. I don't know how many of you have experienced a hurricane. However, back in August 2012, I went to Jamaica to attend my parent's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. They lived in the Parish of Portland in the eastern section of the island, and they planned to have their anniversary party in the grounds of their local church. However, about a week before the big day, we heard that a hurricane was heading toward the island. It was not supposed to be a powerful one, but serious enough, and my dad decided that it would be better to move the outdoor plans in doors, just in case. So, for the days leading up to the arrival of the hurricane, that was all the talk on television, radio, and among people in the streets. People took down their outdoor shutters on their houses, lopped the branches off tall trees, bought groceries, torches, candles and anything else that would help with their preparedness.

I had never experienced a hurricane before, so there was a combination of trepidation and anticipation, at what was impending. But the day it was due to arrive, everything became a little too real and scary. First, there were no birds in the sky – they knew what was coming and had fled the scene. Second, everything became eerily quiet – everyone was hunkered down at home, and there were no vehicles on the road. Third, the sky became dark and then went very black – it was ominous stuff. Then, there was the wind; what started as a stiff breeze, soon picked up speed until it became a storm, and later a hurricane. When you looked out of the window you could see items from people's homes or gardens being tossed around. In the middle of the hurricane the electricity went, which meant no lights, TV, internet or fridge. The situation only got back to normal once the tempest had passed.

I all of this, because I believe a racial storm is coming our way: I believe that this ill wind of bigotry, ignorance and hatred will intensify over the coming months and make landfall soon after that. I'm tempted to say that the storm is heading our way from the USA, but that

would be untrue. It's a storm that has been brewing in this country for decades, but one which really ignited after Brexit in 2016. Right after Brexit, the police reported that there had been a massive spike in reported race and religious-related hate crime in this country. At the time, I was working for the Mayor of London in the Community Engagement Team, and folks from Poland, Spain and Portugal were telling me that for the first time, they were being confronted by people who were telling them to go home, because that's what Brexit meant. Brexit was meant to be about taking back control (of borders), but it also resulted in a toxic and divisive conversation around immigration and race that we have not experienced in decades.

I carry out racial justice work for CTBI, and immigration appears to be the number one public policy issue. Yet a YouGov opinion poll last year suggested that less than 30% believed immigration to be a major public policy issue. They put the cost-of-living crisis and the National Health Service way ahead of immigration matters. But despite this, there is an intractable narrative that there is too much immigration, and that it is bad for the country.

What is interesting is that around 20 years ago, there was still the widespread belief that the diversity that resulted from immigration was an asset to this country. Not only did it enrich our society, but it also gave us knowledge and cultural capital. In today's climate, we are told that diversity is divisive and leads to the fragmentation of communities and society in general. In the 2024 general election, we saw the return of five MPs for Reform UK, who ran on a largely anti-immigration platform. Reform UK's website states that it 'Will stand up for British culture, identity and values, and will freeze immigration and stop the boats.... [and] restore law and order'. In May 2025, the British Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, decided to take a leaf out of Reform's book, and suggested that Britain 'risked becoming an island of strangers' due to immigration.

We are now told that there are too many immigrants in this country – but those same people who say this, invariably struggle to characterise or define who is an immigrant. Linked to this, is the debate around who is British, and what it means to be British. There was a recent survey which suggested that 35% of Britons believed that you had to be born in this country to be British, which means that the likes of Cliff Richard, Joanna Lumley, Richard E. Grant and Boris Johnson are not British according to those folks. However, I would argue that the people who they are really considering are the likes of Sir Idris Elba, Sir Mo Farah or Yasmin Alibhai-Brown. So, you could be born here, and even be able to trace your British lineage back several generations, but for a growing number of people you are not one of us because of your skin colour.

A Reform UK MP, who shall remain nameless, but who stated on a TV station last year that: "It drives me mad when I see adverts full of black people, full of Asian people on television". What is more, according to a recent Daily Telegraph story, the BBC has been warned that there are too many Black people in their period dramas. Essentially, no Black faces in any dramas that take place in stately homes.

I believe that we struggle with history in this country. We spend a great deal of time focusing on the Victorians and the Second World War to the detriment of whole swathes of our history. For instance, Black people have been living in this country for centuries.

Miranda Kaufmann's book, *Black Tudors* reveals that Black people were living in this country during Elizabethan times. Equally, works by historians such as David Olosoga and Pete Fryer speak about the numbers of Black people in this country during the Georgian and Victorian eras, so it would be wrong to suggest that there was no Black presence during the times those period dramas are set.

When I was growing up in the 1970s, the only Black people I saw on TV were Sir Trevor MacDonald and Sir Lenny Henry, and of course, the Black and White minstrels, but they don't count for obvious reasons. Some people would like this country to return to that era, or better still, the 1950s, as those were simpler times. The term 'simpler times' is a euphemism for less Black and Asian people. The whole idea that less Black and Asian people means less race-related problems is nonsensical. On 24 June 1976, Lord Pitt of Hampstead, a UK civil rights activist famously said:

"...it is a myth, that the fewer the numbers [of black immigrants] the better the quality of race relations. That is a myth, and it is a myth that has inspired the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the Immigration White Paper of August 1965 and the Immigration Acts of 1968 and 1971. It is designed to placate the racialsists, but it is a fallacy; for to the racist or the antisemite the only acceptable number is nought."

Finally, the most sinister of all these developments is linked to the propagation of 'Replacement Theory', which is the idea that there is some deliberate plot for Black and Brown people to replace White people as the dominant ethnic grouping in this country. This idea also has a religious dimension to it since those same Black and Brown people would be Muslims. These ideas have their roots in a Nazi ideology that led to the Holocaust, and are extremely dangerous, yet, according to research from the University of Cambridge, 31% of Brexit voters believe in this conspiracy theory, compared to 6% of British people who oppose Brexit.

So, this storm of a racial nature is heading our way. It's picking up speed, and if we do not do something about it, it threatens to wreak devastation on our society.

I want to move onto discuss the second 'R' – Resistance. The so-called 'simpler times' or 'happier times' that some anti-immigration people long for, were not better times for a lot of people. Britain rightly takes pride in its progressive legislation on equalities; by this I mean how laws protect or safeguard the rights of minority ethnic people, women, those with disabilities *et al*, as if Britain always had these laws. Again, there is a deficit in our historical memory because these progressive laws were as a result of hard-fought campaigns waged by Black, White and Asian men and women over decades. When my parents arrived in this country in the 1950s, it was one in which racism was rife in the employment, housing, transport, health, education and legal sectors. It was common to see signs saying no 'Blacks, Irish or Dogs', in windows, and others saying '&%£@! Go home' scrawled on walls. The fifties were the era of right-wing agitators and their organisations, such as Oswald Mosley and his *Union Movement* and Colin Jordan and his *White Defence League* (does any of this sound familiar). It was also the era of the Teddy Boys who would attack Black people in areas of London such as Notting Hill. This spate of racist violence led to the racist murder of the Caribbean-born carpenter, Kelso Cochrane in 1958.

As a result, the Black community came together and established the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination or CARD in 1965. Figures such as the aforementioned Lord Pitt, Dame Jocelyn Barrow, Claudia Jones and others were instrumental in this work, alongside White Britons, to push for legislation to outlaw racist practices and behaviours. CARD was responsible for the Race Relations Act 1965 being passed, which was the first piece of legislation in the UK to address the prohibition of racial discrimination. The Act banned racial discrimination in public places and made the promotion of hatred on the grounds of 'colour, race, or ethnic or national origins' an offence.

In the 1970s, there was the National Front (NF), and after that the British National Party or BNP, who would be linked to acts of racist violence against minority ethnic communities in Britain. These organisations had a penchant for marching through towns and cities brandishing flags, usually Union Jacks, to show their patriotism and pride in all things British. (Does any of this sound familiar!) Again, Black, White and Asian people came together to combat these far-right extremists. They formed organisations such as the 'Anti-Nazi League', and later the 'Anti-Racist Alliance'. There was also the music related initiative, 'Rock Against Racism' in which some of Britain's leading music groups organised concerts to highlight the importance of unity, and to undermine the work of far-right extremists.

When I juxtapose the events of yesteryear to what is happening today, it is interesting to note that neither the NF nor the BNP would describe themselves as 'racist' parties at that time, although most people now would state that they were. I wonder how folks will describe those far-right parties and organisations today, in future years?

The real difference between what was happening then, and what is happening now is that there is a real religious or Christian dimension to race and immigration issues today. There are far-right protesters claiming to stand up for Britain's Judea-Christian heritage, who are happy to walk with banners proclaiming 'Jesus is Lord' alongside a St George or Union Jack flag. The same Reform MP who railed against Black people on TV, was instrumental in the establishment of Reform UK's Christian Fellowship, which was launched in November 2025, at St Michael's CofE in London.

I am a Christian, and as I am speaking in this Cathedral, which is a house of God, I must talk about the role of the Christian faith in resisting this racial maelstrom. Unlike a hurricane, which is an act of God, or a force of nature, and cannot be stopped or diverted by human means, I do believe we can do something, as the people of God, to disrupt this impending storm.

The first thing we need to acknowledge is that our God, is a God of love. In 1 John 4:16, the writer puts it this way: "And so, we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." The second is that we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and loved by him. The Genesis verse forms the basis of the notion that there is only 'one race – the human race' - despite the fact that there are differences in phenotype or skin colour. What is more, ethnic, cultural or linguistic 'differences' should be acclaimed as a clear outworking of God's divine stratagem (Genesis 10:32) and (Revelation 7:9). Anything that is part of God's plan should be celebrated and

affirmed. Consequently, ethnic diversity is to be celebrated, as it recognises that all human beings are created to live in communion with one another and God.

If we are all made in the image of God, and meant to live together in tranquillity, if we treat others differently or detrimentally, we are bringing God's creative plan into disrepute. This is not only wrong, but also sinful. Consequently, racism, which seeks to treat people differently, is sinful. So, all who perpetrate it are guilty of sinful behaviour. Equally, all who fail to challenge it in Church and/or society are guilty of condoning or colluding with sin.

While God is a God of love, he is also a God of justice. There are 130 references to 'justice' in both the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament and the New Testament.) In Hebrew, the term *Mishpat* can be translated as 'justice' in English, and there are 115 references to this word in the Hebrew Bible – 30 of which are in the Book of Isaiah. Equally, there are 15 references to 'justice' in the New Testament.

There is an abundance of scripture verses, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, which tell us that Yahweh or God calls on us to be 'justice seekers'. We see this in Micah 6:8, which says: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

These scriptures chime with what some call the "Four features of justice" paradigm, which state that:

1. There is a God of justice who is active in the world
2. The word of God has the power to change lives
3. God redeems and restores the victims of injustice
4. Christians are to embrace the biblical call to justice.

All the above should be a clarion call to remind Christians of God's predisposition for justice, and to encourage us to also emulate the Almighty to "...let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

Also, the four Gospels, the Book of Acts, several of the apostle Paul's epistles and the Book of Revelation, advance cogent theological arguments for racial justice. Indeed, Jesus' life and mission saw him engage with marginalised individuals and communities, and his parables (the Good Samaritan – Luke 10: 25 - 37) and interactions (the Woman at the Well – John 4), invariably reveal both the innate *righteousness* of these excluded people-groups, and God's all-embracing love.

As well as being justice seekers, we are also called to be reconcilers, and the final 'R' is 'Repair'. Over the last 30 years, we have witnessed the disappearance of community spaces; places where people from local communities could congregate together. For instance, there are no community centres where I live; they were 'low hanging fruit' that were plucked by the council when they had to make budgetary savings. Consequently, up and down the country there are limited opportunities for people from different walks of life to meet socially and informally. Instead, folks meet online on social media platforms that pander to their belief systems, and often their prejudices.

I would argue that the one institution that is still to be found in most communities is the Church. The Church is open to all, and should be accessible to all. They should be considered honest brokers to communities that are often broken, enabling opportunities for engagement, bridge-building, and ultimately repair in our society. For the purposes of our discussion this evening, a place where people of differing views can meet in a safe space, and disagree agreeably.

We are commanded to 'Love our Neighbours' who may be people we like or dislike. In fact, they could even be our enemies. Yet Christ commands us to love them. This is a hard teaching because we tend to like those who like us, and often look like us. I believe that we need the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to love like this.

However, at the same time, churches must lean into Gospel values that state what they stand for. For me, the foundation on which all churches are built should be love. Jesus' great command is that 'We love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength', and that we 'Love our neighbour, as ourselves.' Moreover, the columns or pillars of the Church should be 'Peace' (Jesus is the Prince of Peace), 'Truth' (Jesus is the way, the truth and the life), 'Justice' (God is a God of Justice), and 'Mercy' (Jesus famously said in his Beatitudes that 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall know mercy').

These should be the values that characterise the Church's *modus operandi*, and embody the way it engages with all those who enter its sanctuary. This is because it would be inappropriate for the Church to be the preserve or bastion of oppressive behaviour or bigotry. People may come to the Church with bigoted ideas, but those ideas are not the ones the Church should seek to encourage, uphold or harbour. Such ideas run contrary to the Gospel message. Let us not forget that racism kills. Racial Justice Sunday was established after the racist killing of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. So, while it may be appropriate to hear people's concerns around 'race', immigration and asylum, it would be wrong to suggest that they are in keeping with the Gospel. Indeed, they have no place in the Gospel, and no place in the church. The Bible states that the Church is a 'House of Prayer for All Nations', and not an exclusive club for people who look a particular way and hold pejorative views.

This means that clergy need to be equipped with the correct theology and apologetics to engage with those who have questions about Jesus, 'race', immigration and British identity. There are now instances of people who attended far-right demos, coming to church with Bibles tucked under their arms, expecting to sing, *Stand up, Stand up for Jesus* (ye soldiers of the cross) or *Onward Christian soldiers*, (marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus, going on before), and to hear sermons about how a God of vengeance will smite the enemies of his people. However, when they sing *Jesus Lover of my Soul* or hear sermons on 'Loving your Neighbour', they describe these services as 'woke' and not 'proper church'.

Church leaders and our churches need to be salt and light in our communities; voices of integrity, calm and compassion to all who are hurting. Christ's reconciling work on the cross in 2 Corinthians 5: 17 seeks to unite us with God, and with our brothers and sisters who are made in his image. I believe that it will take the entire Church to resist racism and repair the damage it has caused. But we have Jesus on our side. He is the hope of the nations, and we need to share that hope with those who need it most.