**Holy habits - Service: Week 6**

I referred last week to some interviews in Connexion, the national magazine of the British Methodist Church. Five black people including Ministers who have grown up in our church explained why they do not feel that they have been treated equally to white people. These extracts give a flavour of what they say.

Professor Anthony Reddie concludes, *I have lost patience with a Church that has treated Black people with benign neglect for far too long.* Rev Faith Nyota writes, *Having served in different church roles and contexts for the last 20 years, I have sometimes felt treated as being less.* Rev Sylvester Deigh says, *I have learnt to keep my hurt and pain to myself, and that there is no point complaining when I am treated less than others.* Our current national Youth President, Thelma Commey, states, *Sympathy is simply not sufficient.* Winnie Baffoe, a “Fresh Expressions” worker at Bermondsey Central Hall, pleads, *Let us stop apologising for institutionalised racism and do something … Begin by dismantling appointment and recruitment processes which remind black people and others of our difference.*

These statements and feelings are not unique to the British Methodist Church. I am sure they are also found in all churches and in very many other institutions in this country and in other countries. But what these statements do very well is reflect a deep failure in human behaviour which is not limited to the treatment of black people. That same edition of Connexion includes an equally distressing article about antisemitism in British society. Again, some extracts: *An orthodox Jewish friend said that she now felt nervous walking down the street … Graffiti on synagogues, graves and shops have increased … I fear it will be a long time before our country is free of fear based on one’s religion.*

My primary school was in Golders Green and my secondary school was in Edgware. Most of my friends were Jewish, and I still have Jewish friends. After university, I lived in a small town in the Ivory Coast for two years where my friends in the local Methodist church were all black. In Britain it is common to see teenage girls walking around arm in arm; it is a sign of friendship, no more. In the Ivory Coast it was common to see young men walking around hand in hand; it is a sign of friendship, no more. When a black friend held out his hand to me, I took it. Because of these formative experiences in my life, I feel strongly that Black Lives Matter, and that Jewish Lives Matter, and that All Lives Matter.

I believe that the Bible in general, and the New Testament in particular, and the words of Jesus most of all, reinforce the truth that *God so loved the world.* No distinctions, no exclusions, no hierarchies. Jesus said, *I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep ... I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me. And I am willing to die for them. There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them, too; they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd (John 10 verses 11, 14-16).* Jesus makes it absolutely clear that He loves his flock enough to give His life for us. He makes it equally clear that His love is not limited to the Jewish people, but to all people. He calls us to listen to His voice and to become one flock, one people, with no distinctions, no exclusions, and no hierarchies other than we all follow Jesus, the One Good Shepherd. That is the basis of our Service, both within the church and also in the community and the world at large.

*Produced by Glenn Evans on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John Wilkins).  You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme on the Sheffield Methodist Circuit website and also the Sheffield Methodist Circuit Facebook page.*