

Merrylea Parish Church Glasgow

Pastoral Homily by the Locum, the Rev'd Jim Gibson.

Sunday, 14th June 2020

First Sunday after Trinity.

Jesus went round visiting all the towns and villages. He taught in the synagogues, preached the Good News about the Kingdom and healed people with every kind of disease and sickness. As he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. So he said to his disciples, "The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest.

(St Matthew 9: 35-End)

Perhaps the name is not instantly recognisable. Nick Hanauer. He is an extremely wealthy man. Hanauer was the first non-family investor in Amazon. Among his many and varied business interests, he co-founded one that was sold to Microsoft for billions of dollars. Hanauer describes himself as an "*unapologetic capitalist*", but suggests there is something rotten in the state of modern capitalism.

Back in 2014, Hanauer controversially stated, "*If we don't do something to fix the glaring inequalities in the world economies, the pitchforks are going to come after us. No society can sustain rising inequality. In fact, there is no example in human history where wealth accumulated in the way it presently is and the pitchforks didn't eventually come out. You show me a highly unequal society, and I will show you a police state. or an uprising. There are no counterexamples. None. It's not if – it's when.*" He also wrote, "*Revolutions, like bankruptcies, come gradually and, then, suddenly. One day, somebody sets himself on fire, then thousands of people are in the streets and, before you know it, the entire country is burning.*"

Given recent events, one might be forgiven in thinking parts of America are burning. The spark wasn't someone setting themselves alight, but the needless death in Minneapolis on May 25th of a 46 year old African-American, George Floyd. Pictures of him being pinned to the ground, unable to breathe, as a white policeman kept his knee over Floyd's throat are sickening. Flames of anger unleashed against police brutality against black people quickly spread across the United States and, then, internationally. Mass protests have given birth to the *Black Lives Matter* movement calling for police reforms and legislation to address perceived racial inequalities.

In Britain, despite calls for social-distancing to be maintained by politicians, mass gatherings have been held across the country demonstrating support. Some, regrettably, have turned into ugly scenes of violence, disorder and vandalism. Though racism was the foremost cause, we have to question why such unrest can be fuelled so readily within our society. After all, if you have, or expect to have, a home to call your own and savings in the bank, surely you are less likely to want to burn it down. Perhaps as far as the British radical Left and/or populist Right is concerned, therein lies the answer.

As if stunned by the size of protest, senior politicians, civil-servants, police, celebrities and others have been quick to place on social media images of themselves '*taking a knee*'. A symbolic act supposedly aligning them against the action of the American policeman. As if such populist tokenism will increase their standing. One image, however, more than most exposed the uncomfortable reality lying behind much of the current social upheaval. It was a photograph of the notoriously well-paid CEO of the bank JP Morgan Chase apparently '*taking a knee*' in front of a bank vault. It's not that

the ultra-rich won't make losses. Because of Covid-19 there will be many bankruptcies and countless businesses will sadly go under. However, for many, the crass tokenism of such an action is one thing: something more appropriate however might have been an explanation of why he should profiteer when so many can't? When home-ownership is in decline. When rents for many are almost unaffordable. When so many, either individually or collectively, are so deep in debt. When so many individuals and families and communities feel left behind and ignored. These are some of the questions lying behind the unrest presently being experienced within society's minorities. They lead people to think that they simply don't count because of their colour and creed and social background. They are not being asked by black people alone, but articulate the anguish of all people who feel themselves vulnerable whatever their circumstance. They are profound questions about the essential nature of (British) society that refuse to 'go away'. Somehow, answers must be found and given. Pity and condescension will not do.

Pity is a complex word. The natural state of human beings is one of '*pity*': of having a mutual concern, a desire to enter into a caring and compassionate relationship of non-violence with each other. It is something that is written into our DNA: the natural capacity to '*see*' another human being, and encounter and engage with them, as the person that they are and not as a potential enemy or someone, because of skin-colour or lack of education, as being less than oneself.

Presumably, on May 25th in Minneapolis, a white policeman saw an African-American man and his prejudice made assumptions which led to George Floyd's unnecessary death. As a direct result, it has seemed parts of America, Europe and our own country have been on fire. As we view this happening, how do we react? With token gestures? Day in, day out, when we meet folks known and unknown, what do we '*see*' in them? Human warmth? Or, only what we want to see, what we choose to see, what our prejudices tell us to look for?

Prayer:

Jesus taught that love is the God of all. In love all the nations of the world were created as one human family. Jesus also taught that we are to love one another. Yet the peoples of the world seem torn apart with prejudice, arrogance and pride. God of love, help the different races of which we are all a part to accept, understand and love one another better. Increase our capacity for sympathy, tolerance and goodwill that we may better appreciate the gifts that others may bring to us so that in living together as members of one human family we each may be enriched by the other, individually and nationally. So may we rejoice in the diversity of our creation and the unity of your family on earth as in heaven. And so, for an end to racial injustice; and for all who feel disenfranchised, abused and forgotten, I pray. For all grieving lost opportunities, those whose lives have been changed by this pandemic and for all who have recently suffered the death of one they love. As I face this coming week, help me reflect your very being to those I may encounter and, as far as I am able, bring creativity, reconciliation and peace by what I think and do. In Jesus' name I pray this.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us. Do not bring us to the time of trial, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours. Now and for ever. AMEN.