

Sermon on Racial Justice Sunday: Luke 18 1-8 & Genesis 32.22-31

Today we mark Racial Justice Sunday which seems appropriate seeing that it falls within October which is celebrated as Black History Month. I will come back to this later, the two scripture readings we just heard have a common thread that links them persistence/ perseverance. In the OT reading Jacob having directed his two wives, 11 children, his belongings and servants across the Jabbok stream to safety was in fear of what his brother Esau might do when they meet so remained on the opposite shore alone. A little reminder of their relationship. Jacob made his brother sell him his birthright for a bowl of soup and deceived their father Isaac into blessing him instead of Esau (the first born) and ran away to stay with their mother's brother Laban for his safety. In today's reading he is returning home with his family, servants, animals and goods. No surprise that he is fearful of what Esau might do to him when they meet as he been told he had 400 men with him. That night Jacob found himself fighting with a man throughout, he won't let go even when he was wounded until he received a blessing. It turned out he was fighting with God, Jacob was persistent. God encourages persistence in all areas of our lives, including the spiritual. I wonder where in your spiritual life you need more persistence? Strong character develops as you struggle through tough conditions. God gave many people new names in the Bible (Abram – Abraham, Sara – Sarah, Simon – Peter). Their new names were symbols of how God had changed their lives. We see here, Jacob's character has changed. Jacob, the ambitious deceiver, had now become Israel, the one who struggles with God and overcomes. Jacob named the place Peniel because he has striven with God and with humans and have prevailed.

This leads me neatly into our Gospel reading, which focuses on a widow who is so persistent that she persuades an unjust judge to change his mind and grant her justice. Not because he wants to be good, he is no respecter of man or God, but purely because she is being a nuisance and he basically wants to shut her up. This comparison with God is what makes this passage uncomfortable reading, and maybe quite difficult to understand. However, the point being made here, is that if someone of such a poor character like the judge can be persuaded to do something good for someone else, how much more generously will a great and loving God, act. How much more will that same loving God hear our cries. This parable is telling us to persevere in what we feel is right. It is a parable about our need to pray always and not lose heart. It speaks to us today of perseverance, of never giving up on God, because God does not give up on us.

When I consider the history of Black people, it is a story of perseverance of never giving up. From the mistreatment of slavery trade to police brutality and the effect of Covid-19 on black and brown people in present day. They have persisted, they have fought and they have taught those coming up

behind them, they have been patient and today I can stand here as a Black person all the better because of what has gone before. There is still a lot to be done, we as a nation still have a lot to learn and change because Black Lives do matter.

Black History Month has been around in some form or another since 1926 in America, when it was originally called Negro History Week, before becoming African-American History Month. It was started in the UK in 1987 when the Ghanaian born Akyaaba Addai-Sebo heard the story of a young six-year-old Black boy ask his mother why can't he be white. He worked on a project with the then Greater London Council (GLC) to bring about Black History Month (BHM) which started on 1 October 1987 and has been going ever since.

Many of you may not know the exact details of how Black History month came into being, but you may have heard of it and know that it has been around for many years. However, I wonder how many of you have heard of CMEAC, and, if you have, do you realise how long it has been in existence? Well you may come as a surprised to learn that it also began in 1987, when it was originally called CBAC (Committee for Black Anglican Concerns). In 1996 it became known by the name we know today, Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC). It was initially created following a report called Faith in the City which was commissioned by the General Synod, where one of the recommendations was to establish a body to address the concerns of Black people in the Anglican Church. The Right Revd Dr Wilfred Wood, the first black Bishop in the Church of England, was appointed chair of the Committee which held its first meeting in April 1987. One of the major issues was to tackle the lack of black people representation in the General Synod structure centrally and although was not set up to look at local parishes indirectly that was expected. It primarily involved addressing the issues nationally, and when the Macpherson report was published addressing the issue of Institutional racism, the church took upon itself to do something about it by looking at its own structures and especially here in the Diocese of Southwark.

So, jumping forward to CMEAC today, in the Diocese of Southwark, we have three Area MEACs, in Kingston, Woolwich and Croydon. I have been a member of Kingston MEAC since 2013. In 2015, the Bishop's council commissioned a review of the role of the Southwark Diocese's Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns Committee. The report is called, The World in the Diocese, and it included many recommendations, among which is that Area MEACs are to report directly to the Diocesan Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns, which is chaired by Bishop Christopher.

We aim to raise awareness of the concerns of the local parishes that Minority Ethnic Anglicans face, and offer support to those who work alongside them such as incumbents of black (BAME) majority

parishes. Hopefully, you saw the notice in our parish bulletin advertising the black history month celebrations at Southwark Cathedral which was held on zoom on the 3rd of October. If you missed it, you may wish to join Kingston MEAC on the 25th of October at 5pm, the zoom details will be published on our parish bulletin nearer the time or you may ask Mark or myself and the theme this year is Black Youth, Police, Justice and Prison.

What keeps you going until you receive your blessing, do not give up. Be persistent with prayer, it does not mean endless repetition or painfully long prayer sessions. Always praying means keeping our requests constantly before God as we live day by day believing he will answer. When we live by faith, we do not give up. God may delay answering but his delays always have good reasons. As we persist in prayer we grow in character, faith, and hope. CMEAC started in 1987 and we are still aware that we have not spread the news to everybody. Black History Month reminds us of the perseverance of all who have gone before us and never gave up. Today, we at Kingston MEAC continue to be a presence and invite you to come on board, to join us, as together we can challenge the structures that caused and still cause so much injustice to other people and to change our attitudes too, it is our duty as Christians to work towards justice for all through our prayers and actions. I conclude with a quote in response to tribal and religious conflict in Nigeria by Umar, a commentator, "that there are two tribes and religions in the world, the good and the bad. Those that belong to the good will continue to do good and be judged by their deeds. Those that have chosen to belong to bad will reap what they sow, however the world will be a better place if we all belong to one tribe, the good tribe whether we are black, brown or white". Amen.

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