

Weekly Devotions
South Holburn Church
13th July 2021

READINGS

Football is a sport that I never followed in the US. In truth, I probably never watched a whole match. However, I was definitely watching on 18 June as Scotland faced off against England! Our family was excited as it looked like Scotland might win but were still satisfied when they played to a draw. Of course, we were disappointed when Scotland did not move forward to the next round. I will not tell you who we routed for in the final round of the Euro 2020 championship, but let's just say we were not disappointed with the outcome! Despite Scotland not making it to the championship, I did find the process of watching these two important games intriguing. I enjoyed seeing the calculated interactions and teamwork between the players. Sometimes they passed the ball backwards to move it forward. I loved watching how they each had their part to play. As I was following the game, I was reminded of the image within the Christian community of the 'body of Christ.'

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

1 Corinthians 12:14-26 (NRSVA)

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:15-16 (NRSVA)

In the writings of Paul from these passages, we see the idea that we are joined together as a body, and we are equally dependent on one another as believers. It can be easy to forget that we flourish most when we serve God within community. The Corinthians needed to hear that truth because they were often at odds with one another and had

some issues regarding how to love, serve, and forgive one another (see 1 Corinthians 13 and think of a community rather than a couple and you will see the famous love chapter is all about living in peace with one another).

During the Euro 2020 final match there were so many disturbing happenings. Almost 50 fans that did not have tickets were arrested for trying to gain entry to Wembley Stadium. There were injuries and a general pall overshadowed the evening's events. However, what will be most remembered in my mind will be the racist abuse that England's black football players received for missing penalty kicks during the shootout at the end of the match.

In the US, we see this type of blatant and heart-breaking abuse often, and it was something I was hoping naively would not be as prevalent in the UK. However, it seems sin is everywhere. Though we are one in the Lord, we all want to be first. We all want to blame someone when things go wrong, and it is easy for people who feel insecure to put others down and assert their authority over them. We have something to learn from this blatant abuse, and we cannot put our heads in the sand. As much as we might want to believe that racism does not exist in our circles or in the Christian church, we must face up to the reality that it is surely present everywhere.

The question becomes what can we do to combat it?

REFLECTION

Going back to my earlier illustration of the game of football being a team sport, I am reminded that the best way to challenge and change the world around us is to do it together. When we see oppression, we must call it out. When we see harm and abuse, we must not support it. We must also be willing to look at ways that we may have overtly or covertly participated in such thoughts ourselves, as much as we may loathe to admit it.

These thoughts are not political, they are biblical. Consider this other writing of Paul's in Galatians 3:28 (NRSVA):

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Even well over 2,000 years ago in the ancient world, racism, sexism, and other kinds of oppression existed. Paul said that in Christ we were one and that discrimination did not have a place in the kingdom of God.

You might wonder what this has to do with us today. We were not the ones writing or even thinking the racial slurs that were so detestable...yet we must ask ourselves if we have ever thought of someone else as less than? Have we ever thought our gift or our contribution or our part of the body was more significant? Have we allowed thoughts about different races, people from other countries or who have certain accents change our opinion of them? We might quickly rush to say no, not so! Yet, I want to encourage you to take some time to reflect on these questions. We need to consider them at times like these because the dialogue has been opened, and though we might want to hide from it, many forms of racism can be taught and can occur subtly so that we do not even recognize our thinking as skewed.

As God's people we need to remember that we are one body. We rejoice together, we cry together, we thrive together, and we also grieve together. I am grieving tonight for some fellow people in this world who have been kicked while they were down. Young athletes who have barely had a chance to play were in the spotlight and their humanness shined through. Yes, they were not perfect in their execution of the sport and their kicks did not result in a goal. Yet not one person was perfect in their execution on either team. We are all flawed humans and each of us always make mistakes and that has nothing to do with the color of our skin.

God wants more for us in the kingdom. The Lord wants us to show the world we can be a place of inclusion...we can be a family, one body; working together in harmony. We need to strive for that balance. Sometimes it means sacrificing our wants for someone else's needs. Sometimes it means offering to give up our comfort so someone else can have the spotlight. Sometimes it means speaking out for truth and representing God's heart for all people.

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

~ Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr

Dr King worked tirelessly for human rights and civil rights for all people. He was a minister and theologian. His civil activism came from his deep understanding of God's love, justice, and compassion. No, he was not a perfect person, but he stood for what he believed in and lived a life that showed the world that our faith does inform our actions.

We need to celebrate diversity and not be afraid of it. Years ago in social work school, an illustration was used to show a picture of life together that I will never forget. Many in the US were taught our society was a melting pot where we each had equal opportunity. Of course, we learned quickly that this picture was not reality for most Americans. The picture they gave us instead was one of a salad where there were all kinds of interesting pieces...celery and tomatoes, rocket and romaine, cucumber and chickpeas, etc. Wouldn't it be awesome if we could celebrate our differences and learn about one another and celebrate the beauty we each bring to the table?

I am working for a world in which diversity is seen as a source of celebration rather than a cause for alarm.

~Toni Morrison

Walking in true Christian faith, we are called to serve together knowing each part of the body has equal importance and input. Let's live out our Christian faith and practice together, making room for everyone to be loved and appreciated and celebrated!

With Love, Julia

PRAYER

Compassionate and merciful God,
When you see injustice you hurt, you cry along with those who have been harmed,
Help us not to turn our face away as though it does not impact our world,
Help us to remember we are all in this world together.
Lord may we work, walk, and serve together as one people.

As Christians may we not think of ourselves more highly than we ought,
May we not hold onto our privilege while others are defamed and slandered.
Lord, break our hearts that we might truly work as a team.
Give us wisdom to speak out about injustice and help us to be unafraid to take a stand.
Lord, we thank you that you give us courage and strength to make a difference in this
world.

In Jesus name we offer our prayers,
Amen.

