

June 5, 2020 Text: 1st Corinthians 1:25-30

God chose the marginalized of the world to shame the privileged

Its been an extraordinary week. (Another extraordinary week!)

In the midst of the Covid crisis thousands are taking to the streets:

Not, as was earlier the case in some places, not to demand their right to go out and go back to shopping, but to protest for a real cause: demanding the end of brutal oppression of people of colour by law enforcement.

In the last week, the long, century old problem of racism has once again pushed into white people's awareness . Its there, usually, in the back rooms of my conscience, but this week has offered another extraordinary learning curve.

As you know this was prompted by the cold blooded murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. What is different is that this murder was filmed and made its way around the world. The dying man's words were transcribed and again can be read everywhere. The dying man pleads for breath, pleads for life and the offender's stares into the void, he just continuing to choke him to death are there for all to see. It is horrific just to read the account of it. I have chosen not to see it so far. The account is too painful already.

What I did see is a video of another incident, the one in New York's Central Park, where a young white woman (Amy Cooper) verbally abuses a black man who asked her to put her dog on a leash. The video I saw is the one recorded by the man who was abused (Christian Cooper) on his cell phone, but its this video edited with comments by black author and activist Baratunde Thurston.

The incident becomes a lesson in white supremacy – the editor addresses Amy Cooper and all white folks. He shows how she abuses the power she has as a white woman in New York by falsely accusing a black man of aggression towards her and her dog. The reason? She can not stand that he asks her to abide by the law.

Step by step Baratunde explains whats happening and exposes the scope and shame of such behaviour.

Here is the link for those of you with video connection.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceFK5S7ACs4>

The video shows so clearly how irrational, emotional and daily ordinary racism can be, yes, even among the educated, among the liberals and among young women. No law enforcement boogymen here. The sheer ordinariness of outrageous racist behaviour was filmed and revealed. We may think that this is exceptional, but countless voices of people of colour, from the clergy to the cornerstore mom and pop store owner are pointing out yet again: No, the incident in Central Park is is not an exception. This happens to us all the time in the USA. And we are sick and tired of it. We are done.

Now in a small place like our Annapolis Royal in Canada we assume that things are better. And to some extent they are. Yes, we elected the first black female mayor in North America in Doreen Lewis. And yes, we had in Annapolis Royal her ancestor Rose Fortune, a black woman who was a skilled entrepreneur and possibly the first female law enforcement officer in Canada. Yes, we know successful women and men of colour in our community today. But things are far from all good. You and I know fellow white locals whose relationship with people of colour (including aboriginal people) is openly biased or even hateful.

Racism in Nova Scotia is just under our polite surface. Who has heard all the stories that need to be told? I haven't, but I know they are there. Many stories of discrimination and abuse are kept under cover because no one wants to be seen as someone who is ungrateful, or "stirs the pot", or "make things worse". We can not put the responsibility on local people of colour to come forward with stories and accusations. Would it not be up to us white skinned folks to break the silence? About the interactions we have observed? About the comments we have heard? About the prejudice in our own heart? What I have learned this week is that polite silence is not ok. Black brothers and sisters , clergy south of the border, and in the United Church of Canada are calling on white skinned folks (especially fellow Christians!!) to use our influence to call each other out when we notice behaviour that discriminates.

I know that in a small town we all want to get along, need to get along. This can lead to tolerating racist behaviour silently and to make excuses for people. But people like Baratunde Thurston are showing how we can call someone out on their behaviour and still remain polite and respectful. I am impressed by the combination of absolute sharpness and clarity and respect that I have heard from people of colour this week. I have lots to learn. I

admit that I get tongue tied or so angry that I am afraid I will boil over when something objectionable is said in my presence. However I do not have the gift of hiding what's inside my heart, and for that I am grateful. You and I, we have lots to learn and pray for the right words at the right time.

With all this in mind, I invite you to read Paul's words to the church community in Corinth. This time in the "Voice" translation.

27 But celebrate this: God selected the world's foolish to bring shame upon those who think they are wise; likewise, **He selected the world's weak to bring disgrace upon those who think they are strong.** **28** God selected the common and the castoff, whatever lacks status, so He could invalidate the claims of those who think those things are significant. **29 So it makes no sense for any person to boast in God's presence.** **30** Instead, credit God with your new situation: you are united with Jesus the Anointed. He is God's wisdom for us and more. He is our righteousness and holiness and redemption."

Shaming or being shamed is not pleasant. Often it's wrong. But as we see in our text, it can be a tool of Divine Love to make "those who think they are strong" see the truth. We saw a lot of this last week on Tv or social media.

"He (Christ) is our righteousness and holiness and redemption", Paul says. He is our righteousness, that means we all fail to some degree at living the love God demands of us. No one, in Paul's view, fulfills God's great commandment of love of God and love of neighbour- though some are certainly amazingly good at that. Still, true for all:-even well intentioned we fail to do all the all that is asked of us.

Yet, we do not fall out of the circle of God's love. God's love alone is perfect and all inclusive, a huge bonfire which draws all in and refines us if we are not too afraid to be changed by Christ's love.

Paul is also clear about everyone's potential to make better decisions, to act more justly, to treat others more kindly. For those in Christ, a new beginning is always just a day away.

Someone who did not stay silent this week was the chief of police of the little island of Man, in the Irish Sea, where our oldest daughter lives. We have visited and it's a very white, pretty and friendly island- blessed by incredible scenery. We've often observed that it seems to have much in common with Annapolis Royal. So their chief of police released this statement which I render here because it's so small town like ours and yet so clear and personal.

After commenting on the shocking footage of George Floyd's death the constable writes:

“What has this got to do with us? We live in a safe place. We pride ourselves on being a welcoming and tolerant community. Making a fuss about the death of a black man three thousand miles away is about political correctness, isn't it? Or is it?”

For as long as I can remember, one of the very few things that has caused me to lower whatever guard I have in place is sport. Sport can bring all manner of emotions. Five years ago I can remember feeling as if I was going to burst with pride as I watched a brilliant young Manx athlete win a bronze medal at the world youth championships. I didn't feel that way because I had known and liked Catherine Reid, her brother Joe or her mum, Jackie, for several years; I felt that way because Catherine (or Coob as I always knew her) was from a small village on a tiny island and she was there, on a world stage getting her reward for years and years of hard work. I remember thinking how special someone is if they are hugely talented and really nice. The fact that Catherine is mixed race should and must be irrelevant, but to some people it isn't.

In yesterday's Manx Independent Catherine told her story. I was shocked and ashamed. In year 3 older kids called her a monkey and made monkey chants at her. She was told she was only good at athletics “because she is black.” Every day she faced some form of racism.....in a welcoming and tolerant community. It has taken her an age to come to reach the point where she can be confident and proud of who she is and where she has come from. Yet, as she says in the article “too many people on the Isle of Man are turning a blind eye to this.” She is right and it shouldn't have taken the murder of a black man by police officers, or the eloquent, articulate anger of a brilliant young local athlete to make us realise this. Not being racist is no longer enough. Every decent person, everyone in the Constabulary, needs to do something about racism. We need to confront it and tackle it. And, in doing so, we need to confront and address our own prejudices, our own tendency to make snap judgements, our own

assumptions about things built on the fact that we haven't been exposed to the sort of racism that Catherine Reid and her family have lived with.

On Tuesday of next week a protest march will be held in Douglas. A large number of people will attend. We are working with the organisers to make the event a safe one, which complies with social distancing and gatherings rules. The right to protest is a fundamental human right and we must do what we can to allow people to express themselves, even in such difficult times.”

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Thank you Constable Gary Roberts.

What we are seeing today is that some inside the church are completely "blind" to God's transforming power, while some outside of the established churches, and some of different religions or of no professed religion are modelling the ways of inclusive community that protects everyone's human rights.

So that too, can be a bit disgraceful to the church, those of us who love the church and see its limitations of course wish that the church would lead the anti-racist charge.

But its equally cause to rejoice and be confident in the potential of all the people of this world -together.

Of course God would act big - who can tame God's fiery love?! Thanks be to God!