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Dear all,

Briefing 16: Wednesday 3rd June, 2020.

"For you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

I imagine there won't be any of you who haven't yet seen the shocking video of the US police officer killing an unarmed black man by the name of George Floyd, by kneeling on his neck for over eight minutes. Despite his pleas for help and air, and those of people nearby, the officer kept kneeling on his neck even after George Floyd became non-responsive, and until he was dead. It's perhaps not surprising that there have been demonstrations in many American towns and cities and that some of those demonstrations have turned violent.

I've read quite a number of comments and posts on this subject this week. The whole world, it seems, was appalled by what they saw and church leaders, sportsmen, celebrities and of course politicians, have all rushed to make comments and to show their support for the protesters and to demand change.

But that's the tricky part, isn't it? You can outlaw racism and make it illegal. You can run campaigns and educational programs. Countries across the world, including the US and the UK, have done all of these things, and yet still racism persists. Sometimes it turns ugly and violent, as it did last week. Sometimes it's more subtle, with people being passed over for jobs and opportunities. But however it shows itself; racism is evil.

Just like other parts of society, the church has not been and is not now immune from racism, whether overt, unconscious or otherwise. Christians across the ages and across the world have often led the charge for equality and fought hard to outlaw slavery, but the church is made up of fallen, weak individuals who have often not lived up to their calling. So racism was there in the early church as Greek widows were overlooked in the distribution of food (see Acts 6). It was there in later centuries as Christians viewed the Jews as subhuman. It was there in the supposedly Christian slave owners and traders of the 18th and 19th centuries. It was there in the churches of apartheid era South Africa. The church should always have been a place of racial equality and harmony but we sadly have not always lived up to our calling, nor called out racism in our societies.

Although all sin, including racism, will persist in the world until Jesus returns, the route to deal with racism lies in the teachings of the Scriptures and the work of God. Societies are changed not by laws or education programs, although they can help. Societies are transformed as individuals are changed from the inside out, by the renewing of minds and the work of the Holy Spirit in individuals, as God's truth settles into hearts and takes root and bears good fruit.

What is that truth? Let me mention 3 things:

1: That all people, whatever their skin colour, religion, language or wealth are made in the image of God. George Floyd wasn't primarily a black man, but a man. A human being, made in God's image with inherent dignity and value. He deserved to be treated as such. Instead he was treated as worthless trash.

2: That in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, black or white. It's not that our race or cultural background isn't important – it's part of who we are. What's important is that those things do not divide us from Christ and they cannot and they must not divide us from each other.

3: That perfect love casts out all fear. Sometimes we can fear people who are different to us and that fear can lead us to hold on to or develop racist attitudes. But if we are united in Christ, we have nothing to fear from one another but much to learn from and learn with one another. And what a joy it is to see that our family, our brothers and sisters, are drawn from every part of the world!

As disciples of Jesus, we must make sure that there is no root of bitterness, or fear, or pride or racism in our hearts, or in our church. And if we find such a root, then, like other sins, we need to be honest about it, confessing to God, and ask for his Holy Spirit's help to change.

So may God unite us truly in Jesus. May He fill our hearts with love one for another, so that we value one another, are hospitable to one another, and serve one another, so that all people, whatever their skin colour or language or background, feel welcome among us, and the world see that we belong to Jesus Christ: the Saviour of all.

Yours in Christ,

Dave

PS: If you think there are steps we might take to ensure that we do live up to this calling, please do get in touch.

Notices and Updates...

CHRISTIANITY EXPLORED began last Tuesday, but it's still not too late to join in. You can watch the first video on line to catch up and I'd be delighted to drop off a gospel and study guide to you. Just let me know!

READING FOR SUNDAY: If you want to read the passage ahead of Sunday, it is Psalm 19!

CHURCH FAMILY QUIZ NIGHT: This Sunday 7th June from 6pm-7:30pm. Come and join us for an online family quiz via Zoom. Email me if you'd like to come along and I'll send the link out on a couple of hours before. There will be 3 rounds of questions for households/individuals PLUS a team round!

NIGEL BROWN'S FUNERAL: Nigel's funeral will be on 16th June at 2pm at Harwood Park. Whilst there can be only a few invited guests present, everyone is invited to watch the live stream. The link will be published next week.

WALKING AND TALKING: With lockdown restrictions now somewhat eased, I've enjoyed a number of social distanced walks and chats with people. If you no longer need to shield yourself, why not do the same? It's a great way to ease yourself back into society and enjoy being out in God's glorious creation.

SOMETHING FOR YOUR SOUL...

Video for the week: Sharing our faith isn't easy, especially with loved ones. In this short video, Rico Tice explains why is it vital that we do try- and gives us some tips to help. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65wQs2tUkP4>

The song for the week is a slightly new take on the great hymn, How Great Thou Art. You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EueRjHaGbS4>

THE LATEST VIDEOS...

There is a new **all age family worship service** available – this time on the parable of the Sower! Do take a look. **PLEASE** remember to **share, like** (that's the thumbs up sign!) and **leave your comments** to any video you watch! Our YouTube Channel is at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzRGAalRTsJuKFRBvkLjAtQ>

REMINDERS...

PREVIOUS LETTERS AND INFORMATION: These can all be accessed via our websites or Facebook pages.

If you'd like to lead the **PRAYERS** or do the **BIBLE READING** for our on-line service, please get in touch!

KEEPING IN TOUCH: Please do keep going with the **4UP/4DOWN** challenge and call people regularly and let me or Lynda Matthews (Pastoral Team leader) know of any concerns you have. Let's not let 'lockdown fatigue' stop us from loving one another.

SERVICE DOWN A TELEPHONE LINE: A reminder that our '*service down a telephone line*' is now up and running. The message will be updated every few days with Evening Prayer services and the Sunday sermon. Simply dial this **local number 01438 907143** (**you'll need the area code as well**), and listen.

PRAYER: We are still gathering on Tuesday mornings from 7am to 8am for a virtual prayer meeting. If you'd like to join us, send me an email and I'll send you an invite.

NEED HELP? Do ask! We are a family after all. If you or a neighbour need help that you can't provide, contact Herts Help on 0300 123 4044 or via <https://www.hertshelp.net/hertshelp.aspx>.