

Leavening Methodist Church

Thought for Sunday 14th June (Steve Langton)

Over the last couple of weeks the news has been dominated by the 'black lives matter' campaign, as well as coronavirus of course. This has provoked much debate, going far beyond the original issue in America. I am pleased that both the Anglican and Methodist churches have issued statements that acknowledge past issues in their churches related to race and commit to continued improvement in the future. There is no place for racism in the church.

However, it is worth exploring the wider issue in more depth, and particular the way in which the debate in this country has focused on historical figures associated with slavery. As we reflect on these people, we would be well advised to consider Jesus's words:

'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?' (Matthew 7: 1-3)

It was clearly wrong that the people now celebrated on public statues were able to build their wealth on the suffering of slaves. However, before getting too self-righteous about this, perhaps we need to examine our own eyes for planks of wood. Most people in this country live a fairly comfortable existence by global standards. A lot of that comfort comes from our ability to buy cheap goods produced by under-paid workers elsewhere in the world, often living in appalling poverty and with low life expectancy. The wealth of our society is built on the suffering of others, in a not dissimilar way to 18th century Britain.

So yes, it is good to reflect on the failings of our ancestors, but let us do so with compassion, remembering that our own society also has its failings, which will be similarly analysed by the generations that follow. The figures on statues were sinners in need of God's mercy, just like all of us, and, like all of us, this doesn't mean that they were incapable of doing great good as well as bad,



Whilst we cannot change the terms of global trade single-handed, let us remember that we can all do our small part towards creating a better world. So next time you go shopping, consider whether there is a fair-trade alternative that you can buy, even if it costs a little more. Fairly traded goods are also available online from [Traidcraft](#). And next time you have money to spare, consider those charities working to alleviate global poverty, particularly those like [Practical Action](#) who help local communities to develop their own solutions to poverty.

God of all the nations, so many of your children are crying out to you, worn down by injustice and suffering. Help us to fulfil our goal of helping to make real the vision that Christ spoke of as 'the kingdom of God' where justice reigns. Help us to foster compassion one for another, tolerating damage to no one and oppression by no system. Amen.