

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 08.02.26



churches
together

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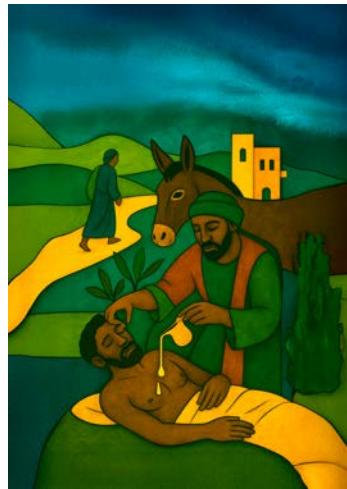
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FOR THE WHOLE LAW
IS SUMMED UP IN A
SINGLE COMMANDMENT,
‘YOU SHALL LOVE
YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS
YOURSELF’

Galatians 5:14

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Introduction

If you are of a certain age, you may remember, or wish to forget, a British sitcom from the 1970s called *Love Thy Neighbour*. It featured a White working-class couple called the Booths, who lived next door to a Black couple of Caribbean heritage, called the Reynolds, in Twickenham, West London. Although the ‘comedy’ was called *Love Thy Neighbour*, there was very little love shown between the two men, Eddie Booth and Bill Reynolds. The so-called ‘comedy’ aspect involved one poor excuse after another for exchanging racist epithets and sharing bigoted stereotypes, with the Black man invariably getting the worst of it.

Such is the offensive nature of this programme that it is not repeated on terrestrial television. Even the more obscure satellite channels, which pride themselves on broadcasting other comedies from that era, with the requisite warnings about ‘language and attitudes many may find unacceptable or offensive today’, do not have the gall to show it.

I believe that some things should be placed (and kept) in the ‘dustbin of history’ marked, ‘Do not open’. Yet we are now experiencing attitudes, behaviours and language that has been resurrected from that era. Hardly a day goes by without some politician, social media commentator or activist using inflammatory, racist language to stoke up hostility towards asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and Black and Brown people *per se*.

Moreover, akin to the 1970s, there are those who are now asserting that to be ‘truly’ British and Irish you have to be White. Those who do not fall into this category are regarded as ‘immigrants’ or ‘migrants’, irrespective of whether they were born on these shores or have lived here for decades.

Allied to those notions is the unsavoury and unsubstantiated connection between ‘immigrants’ and crime, which suggests that immigrants are more disposed to commit crime, especially of a violent nature. A key aspect of the far-right, anti-asylum protests is to keep ‘women and children safe’ from predatory male asylum seekers.

Ironically, during the 1970s there was also the counternarrative that immigration was a phenomenon that enriched society. It gave a country greater cultural, social and religious assets, variety and kudos. Today, the abiding, misguided narrative is that immigration (from the Global South) leads to social division and results in ethnic tensions. Yet the Bible tells us that there is a better way, a more excellent one that is based on love and compassion (1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13).

When Jesus was asked by a teacher of the law, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ Jesus answered:

The most important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:28-31)

Consequently, Jesus calls on his followers not to 'tolerate' or even 'accept' their neighbours, but to love them, regardless of how they look or what they believe. This is not an easy ask, but it is one that is demanded of those who follow a Saviour who gave his life for all, out of love. What is more, while we often hear about who belongs in or who should be excluded from a country or kingdom, as Christians the only 'kingdom' we should truly be focusing on is the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). This is a kingdom built on love, justice, compassion, mercy, truth, unity and hope.

In these resources we explore what it really means to love our neighbour, especially given the current narratives of hostility, fear, suspicion and hatred of the 'other', especially asylum seekers, refugees and anyone who is not British or Irish 'enough'. We discuss how the Bible provides a blueprint for a world where everyone belongs; where everyone is loved, valued and affirmed for who they are, and not what they look like or have to offer. And one in which our identity is ultimately to be found in Christ, as brothers and sisters of one 'race': the human race.

I believe that this message is 'for such a time as this' (Esther 4:14). It is one that speaks through the 'flags', banners, protests and invective, relaying a message of unity and hope. Just as the greatest commandment speaks about loving God and one another, Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross offers us all the hope of being united with God and with one another.

Let us use Racial Justice Sunday (and other Sundays) to stand together in love, rejecting those words, actions and behaviours that go against Christ's teachings, and embracing those biblical principles that foment unity, cohesion and engagement.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who worked tirelessly to produce these resources, especially the Racial Justice Sunday Writers' Group for their inspiration, vision and ideas. Our group reflects the diverse nature of the Christian faith in both Ireland and Britain, and is all the better for doing so!

Richard Reddie

Director of Justice and Inclusion,
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



"...while we often hear about who belongs in or who should be excluded from a country or kingdom, as Christians the only 'kingdom' we should truly be focusing on is the Kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33)

Racial Justice Sunday Writers' Group

MINISTER SHERMARA FLETCHER-HOYTE

Minister Shermara Fletcher-Hoyte is the Principal Officer at Churches Together in England for Pentecostal, Charismatic and Multicultural Relations. She also has responsibility for racial justice and young adult ecumenical engagement.

A dedicated minister and international speaker, Shermara is committed to fostering holistic and flourishing lives. Her leadership was notably highlighted when she read before a global audience of 4.1 billion at Queen Elizabeth II's funeral on 19 September 2022. Shermara's expertise and passion has led to her speaking on platforms like BBC Radio 2, BBC Radio 4, BBC World News, Talk TV, The God Channel, TBN, UBC Radio and Premier Radio.

She is also a writer, contributing to works such as *Young, Woke, and Christian*,ⁱ *Coming Home: Christian Perspectives on Housing*,ⁱⁱ *Black, Christian and Single*,ⁱⁱⁱ and *Anglicans and Pentecostals in Dialogue*.^{iv}



DENZIL JOHN

Denzil John is a retired Baptist minister who lives in Caerffili and was the minister of Tabernacl Welsh Baptist Church in the Hayes, Cardiff. He has served on many denominational and inter-denominational panels and committees over the decades. He has served on Christian Aid Committees in Wales and the UK, and is currently a board member of the trustees of Cardiff Baptist College. Denzil is also a poet and hymn writer, and enjoys music, acting and gardening. He hails from Pembrokeshire and is a keen Welsh historian.



ⁱ Victoria Turner (ed), *Young, Woke and Christian: Words from a Missing Generation* (SCM Press, 2022).

ⁱⁱ Graham Tomlin and Malcolm Brown (eds), *Coming Home: Christian Perspectives on Housing* (Church House Publishing, 2020).

ⁱⁱⁱ Marcia Dixon (ed), *Black Christian and Single: A Collection of Essays about Singleness in Britain's Black Pentecostal Church* (MTD Publishing, 2022).

^{iv} David Hilborn and Simo Frestadius (eds), *Anglicans and Pentecostals in Dialogue* (Wipf and Stock, 2023).

JUSTIN LAU

Justin Lau was born in Singapore, raised in Japan and is currently based in the UK where he studied for an MA in English Literature and an MA in Theology and Ministry. He has served as a worship leader in all three countries, and has empowered ethnic minorities in the western church while seeking to be a bridge between the East and the West. His MA dissertation was about what the western church can learn from East Asian theologies, and he writes a Substack newsletter called '**Decolonising My Faith**' about his journey to integrate his faith with his East Asian culture and heritage. He now lives in London where he is Worship & Discipleship Year Pastor at All Saints' Woodford Wells.



PHILL MELLSTROM

Phill Mellstrom is the Worship Development Worker for the Church of Scotland. He is an accomplished musician, gifted songwriter and a published author. He is the co-editor of the recently published *God Welcomes All*, a supplement to the Church of Scotland's popular hymn book, the *Church Hymnary Fourth Edition*. This new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world. Phill is also a member of the Joint Liturgical Group which is concerned with the demands of worship in Britain and the development of common liturgical thinking and texts in the worldwide Church.



REVD MANDY RALPH

The Revd Mandy Ralph was a nurse, who then spent five years as an Ordained Local Minister before becoming a full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Church of Scotland when she was inducted to the linked charges of Annbank and Tarbolton in South Ayrshire in 2019. She sits on the Church of Scotland's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group.



RICHARD REDDIE

Richard Reddie is Director of Justice and Inclusion at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. He is a writer, researcher, cultural and religious commentator and broadcaster and is the author and editor of several books, including *Race for Justice: The struggle for equality and inclusion in British and Irish churches*, a collection of 14 essays on racial justice in the different Churches (Lion/SPCK), *Abolition! The struggle to abolish slavery in the British colonies* (Lion Hudson) and *Black Muslims in Britain* (Lion Hudson).



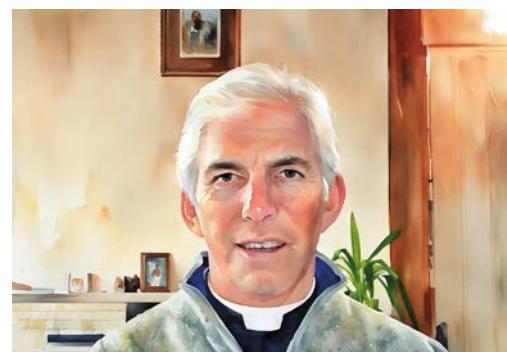
REVD LORRAINE SHORTEN

Lorraine Shorten is a minister for the Moravian Church in the British Province, and serves two congregations in the Bath, Somerset area. She trained for Ordained ministry as a mature student but has served the church in many roles throughout her life. Her first call to ministry was serving two congregations, one in inner-city Birmingham and a rural one in Leominster, these diverse settings gave her a good understanding of the many joys and challenges of ministry. She is an Ecumenical officer for the Moravian church and a member of the Churches Together in England Racial Justice Working Group. She enjoys being creative not just in her spare time but also in her ministry by encouraging people to experience God through creation and creative activities. She also loves the Godly Play approach of learning and leads regular sessions with children and adults.



FR PHIL SUMNER

Fr Phil Sumner is currently the Parish Priest of Our Lady and St. Patrick's Parish, Oldham. He is currently a Trustee of the Catholic Association for Racial Justice and of the Oldham Interfaith Forum. In September 2006, he was named in a British national newspaper as amongst the top fifty British "campaigners, thinkers and givers transforming our world" (The Independent Newspaper's "Good list", 1st September 2006). He has lectured for UNESCO (Catalonia) on "Intercultural mediation processes" in Barcelona, and in Brazil at the World Conference on the Development of Cities. He has, twice, been a witness on BBC 4's "The Moral Maze", once on Multiculturalism and once on the decolonisation of the university curriculum.



REVD DR MAITHRIE WHITE-DUNDAS

Revd Dr Maithrie White-Dundas is an ordained minister in the Church of Ireland. She is a member of the *Ethnic Diversity, Inclusion and Racial Justice* committee set up and chaired by Most Rev John McDowell, Primate of All Ireland. She also serves on the Board of Contemporary Christianity, Northern Ireland. She did her doctorate in Cultural Studies, in Nottingham, during which she set up and chaired the UK National Christian Postgraduate Conference for 15 years. She was Head of the Department of English in the University of Jayawardene, Sri Lanka. She is married to Paul Dundas, and they have one dog. She enjoys gardening, music, dancing and comedy. She walks, reads extensively and writes poetry, fiction, and articles (including for the Church of Ireland Gazette).



‘LOVE YOUR
NEIGHBOUR AS
YOURSELF’

Mark 12:28-31

SECTION ONE:

WORSHIP MATERIAL



In the midst of our current cultural dynamic throughout Britain and Ireland, there are many frightened and vulnerable people. It can often be a simplistic act to ‘draw dividing lines’ and make ‘sides’; but in all of the dialogue, in all of the protesting and counter-protesting, in the heated exchanges and in the spaces in between, it is essential to seek God and to understand how God would have us be with each other, our neighbours and those we may perceive as the enemy.

May these prayers help us to do all of this, and so much more, as we gather around Racial Justice Sunday 2026.

OPENING PRAYER

God of all creation,
gather us in – stranger and friend,
bring us into Your loving presence,
that we might know that Your love for us never ends
and has no terms or conditions.

God of love,
on this Racial Justice Sunday 2026,
point us towards Your dream for all people,
that we might work together in hope,
for justice, peace and unity throughout Your world.

**Give us grace,
show us mercy,
that we might live and love in Your name,
now and forever.**
Amen

[This can be followed by the song ‘God Welcomes All’ by John L. Bell as a song of gathering and praise, reaffirming God’s love for all that never ends.]

GATHERING PRAYERS

OPENING SENTENCES/RESPONSES

All of creation belongs to God,
the world and all God's children.

Heaven and earth rejoice.
**May our different voices,
 be joined in one song of praise to You.**

Justice and peace embrace.
**Bind us together in unity,
 for the sake of Your Kingdom.**

Open our hearts, O God of Love,
that our loving actions may speak louder than words.
And now, we worship You together, in spirit and truth.

CALL TO WORSHIP

All of creation declares the glory of God;
 the skies display the work of the Maker's hands;
 day after day the oceans pour forth chorus of God's great worth;
 night after night they reveal a deep knowledge of God's love.
 They use no words, yet so eloquently their declaration sings out to all the earth;
 their harmonies of praise echo to the ends of the world,

God our Maker,
 Breathe life into our thinking,
 grace into our speaking and our singing,
 and mercy into our hearing and knowing.
 Join our praises with Your timeless rhythm and Your ageless melody.
 May every tongue confess,
 may every knee bow
 and may all our hearts be united in Your great love
 for all of Your dear children.

**May the words of our mouths,
 The meditations of our hearts,
 The work of our hands,
 Be pleasing to you and instrumental
 In the peaceful making of your kingdom –
 Where all are loved, cherished and redeemed.**

Amen

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS, OURSELVES AND THE WORLD

When we are searching for hope
in the midst of difficulty,
as we are challenged to the point where we are tempted to withdraw,
or are stretched to a place near breaking,
Lord, in Your grace and in Your mercy,
reveal Yourself to us.

When we are reaching out for help,
for the touch of care and concern and compassion,
may we find it in the vulnerability of a neighbour,
in the courage of a stranger.
Lord, through Your children,
reveal Yourself to us.

When we are called to be the answer to prayer,
to be the peacemakers and the prophets,
the ones faithful to Your way of peace and love,
grant us the courage to be compassionate,
the grace to be generous
and the hearts, hands and minds to show mercy.
Lord, in Your mercy,
reveal Yourself through us.

Amen

PRAYER

(Based on the greatest commandment)

Love the Lord your God with all your heart.

Help us, Lord of Love,
to welcome and embrace all of Your dear children;
to make spaces of belonging,
that when we are vulnerable, we can find community and connection;
when we are scared, we can find peace and hope;
when we are suffering, we can find healing and wholeness.

Love the Lord your God with all your soul.

Help us, dear Maker,
to hold with care all those made in Your image,
upholding the dignity of all,
that we may find space to express our God-given identity,
that we may find solidarity and courage within the midst of division,
that we may celebrate our uniqueness and differences
in creative and life-giving ways,
that all may be accepted and affirmed.

Love the Lord your God with all your mind.

Help us, God of Wonder,
to understand Your plan for us fully and deeply,
to know that You desire each and every one of Your children
to live to their fullest potential,
that we might know Your word made real and true in our lives,
in our churches and in our communities.

Love the Lord your God with all your strength.

Creator God, You made the cosmos,
threw the stars into space,
shaped the wonder of creation that we encounter each day.
You knit us, each and every one, together,
knew us before we were born,
and You journey with us now.
Teach us Your rhythm of love, of breathing life and creating beauty.
May all that we do be for Your glory,
and for the coming of Your Kingdom here on earth as in heaven.
We say together now
the words that Your Son, our Saviour,
Jesus Christ, taught all who follow Him to pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are Yours
now and for ever.
Amen**

PRAYER

[This prayer poses questions that are ambiguous as to sides or points of view, and perhaps show a common space of humanity?!]

We want to recognise You, God,
in the midst of placards and protests,
as we see national flags flying high,
or painted on roundabouts and scrawled on buildings.

Where are You, Lord?

Are You in the hands of those who shake a fist at injustice?

Lord, in Your mercy,
let us see You.

We want to recognise You, God,
as many gather to voice their frustration, their anger, their version,
in words chanted or prayed, in noise and fury,
in anger and angst.

Where are You, Lord?

Are You in the cries of those seeking recognition?

Lord, in Your mercy,
let us hear You.

We want to glorify You, God,
as we grapple with how to love in the midst of hate,
as we work for peace,
as we long for the violence to stop,
as we seek justice,
as we crave mercy.
May we show grace,
may we embody compassion
and may we all be united in the pursuit of Your dream for all people.

Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

We come before the Vulnerable God,
 You who took on flesh and bone –
 willing to be all that we needed You to be and so much more.

As we remember Your birth,
 in the midst of occupation and exile,
 we ask for forgiveness for all the things that we have done
 and continue to do that would oppress and dehumanise,
 when we speak words that would curse and condemn,
 when we are party to the sins of racism and oppression,
 when we stay silent or walk away because it is the easy option,
 forgive us, Lord.

As we remember Your death,
 in the midst of empire, corruption and systemic violence:
 we ask for forgiveness for all the choices we make that make us complicit in their evil.
 When we choose hate over love, violence over peace, division over unity,
 confront us, O God,
 with Your light and love, with Your grace and mercy,
 and forgive us we pray –
 in the strong name of Jesus Christ,
 the Prince of Peace,
 the Hope of the Nations,
 and the Saviour and Redeemer of all.
 Amen

PRAYER

Listening God,
 we ask that You would incline Your ear towards those of us
 who feel isolated, exposed and vulnerable.
 We cry for mercy.

Suffering Christ,
 we ask that You would be with those of us who are suffering.
 In our pain and our fear, may we know Your gentle, loving presence with us,
 and Your tender care as You wait with us.

Spirit of Grace,
 be our compass as we seek justice and peace,
 as we journey together towards the Dream of God made real,
 for all people – in this time and place and for evermore.
 Amen

PRAYER OF BELONGING

Triune God,
Three yet One,
unending circle of love and life –
we ask that You encircle us,
wrap us in Your grace and mercy,
hold us in Your embrace as we are welcomed into Your sustaining presence.

May we know and feel deeply
that we fully belong in You,
that we find our home in You.

You are the One who made each of us in our mother's womb,
the One who crafted our very being and calls us into harmony with You, with
each other and with all of creation.

Help us to live out this call with humility and passion,
as we journey between the now and not yet of Your Kingdom coming.
May we recognise the signs,
may we heed the warnings,
may we build together,
and may we know the enduring love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and always.
Amen

BLESSING AND SENDING PRAYERS

God of Justice,
inspire us to live with fierce grace
as we lean into our God-given identity.
May we be the fire that ignites Your love,
may we be the rolling water that brings justice,
may we be the light that guides others towards a home in You.
Send us out in the power of Your Holy Spirit.
Amen

BLESSING

God of love,
send us out in Your name,
with humble hearts,
to seek unity and to work for justice.

May Your love break down the walls of prejudice and division that are before us,
and may we build together, in love and unity,
Your Kingdom here on earth.

Amen

BLESSING/SENDING

Holy Spirit,
draw us into the spaces where You are present.
May we be dreamers and builders
of a world made new,
refreshed and redeemed,
repaired and renewed.

We ask this in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen

BLESSING/SENDING

Lord Jesus Christ,
You walked between communities, crossing boundaries,
reaching hearts and minds in compassion, in mercy.
You confronted injustice with courage and grace,
breaking down barriers and turning over tables.
May we be inspired and empowered to do the same,
and, in meeting the challenges of racism and bigotry,
may we overturn it and uproot it
in ourselves, in our communities and in our society.
All this is for Your glory and in Your power.
Amen

CREATIVE PRAYERS

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

Who do you say I am?

Stranger

Friend

Dissident

Refugee

Who do you say I am?

Troublemaker

Instigator

Pariah

Perpetrator

Who do you say I am?

Lawbreaker

Disruptor

Destabiliser

Fire-starter

Who do you say I am?

Rebel

Rabbi

False prophet / Rabble rouser

Saviour / Redeemer

Read this reflection again and, in considering all of the different names that Jesus was called throughout His life, consider what your experience is of being named and naming.

In Matthew 16:13-20 Jesus asked the disciples, ‘Who do you say I am?’

In our journeys of faith, we, too, are confronted by that question, and we can daily make the choice of who we consider Jesus to be, and how we live in light of that.

We witness the naming and labelling of people, whether in the news, protests or local conflicts across social media and news outlets, 24/7. Each and every person is made in the image of God, and in each moment, we can choose to see God’s artistry or to dehumanise. Read the reflection again, and take time to consider:

1. ‘Who do you say I am?’ – Who is Jesus for you right now?
2. ‘Who do You say I am?’ – If you were to ask God this question, what do you think God would say about you?
3. ‘Who do you say I am?’ – Bring to mind someone you have been unkind to. Take a moment to consider the people displaced and seeking asylum in your area – who do you think God says they are?

In a moment of quiet, consider what your prayer is in response to reflecting on these three questions.

1. THE HOLY FAMILY AS REFUGEES

We hear the phrase, 'The Holy Family were refugees,' and we don't know what to do with it. It's a strong statement, yet it is there in the story. They flee; they are warned by angels to go and not look back.

How often God's hand is in the rescuing of those dear ones, loved and cherished by the Almighty, who find themselves far from what they know and far from where they once called home.

God, may we see those guided into peace and safety
as Your children, loved and cherished,
preserved and saved by You –
and may we treat them that way,
continuing Your care for them
by living up to our responsibility
to love our neighbour and to welcome the stranger.

Read the story from Matthew 2:13-23 a few times, using the practice of Lectio Divina, or 'Divine Reading' – an ancient practice of slow, contemplative reading and praying the Bible. As we spend time in the presence of God, reading through the text slowly, several times over, we are invited to listen deeply for the still, small voice of God. Go at your own pace, or the rhythm below may be helpful:

- Read the passage – notice what words or phrases you're drawn to.
- Reread the part of the story you're drawn to most.
- Read this part once more, asking what God might be saying.
- What is your prayer in this moment?
- What will you do now in response?

Take time to consider who you know, or who you have perhaps seen in your area, that are the beloved children of God, displaced and seeking refuge.

How might you pray for them, in word and in action?

2. JESUS OF NAZARETH

'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked.

'Come and see!' was the reply.

Rather than standing at a distance and assuming the story of that 'other person', why not dwell, abide with, take time to get to know or even just to listen?

Perhaps, in these simple acts of kindness, we'll see the preciousness and belovedness of the one who, though different from us, is part of God's work of art.

Jesus, forgive us when we write people off,
when we stereotype and profile.

Help us to see the humanity that You, Creator God,
breathed within them.

Help us to extend grace and welcome,
compassion and caring,
and to take time to appreciate Your work of art.

Read the story from John 1:43-51 a few times, using the practice of Lectio Divina. As we spend time in the presence of God, reading through the text slowly, several times over, we are invited to listen deeply for the still, small voice of God. Go at your own pace, or the rhythm below may be helpful:

- Read the passage – notice what words or phrases you're drawn to.
- Reread the part of the story you're drawn to most.
- Read this part once more, asking what God might be saying.
- What is your prayer in this moment?
- What will you do now in response?

Take time to consider the people in your communities (local, work, school and so on) in the differences and diversity. How have you experienced this as both positive and negative?

What might your prayer be in response to considering this?

3. JESUS, SITTING AT THE WELL

*He wasn't the sort of person who should be there.
Not from the right place –
but then again, neither was she.
A woman who had seen life.
Who are we to judge?
She recognised what it meant to worship in spirit and truth.*

Holy Spirit,
Guide us to places of refreshing,
to the presence of people we least expect but who turn out to be a blessing to us, and us to them.
God, Your fingerprints are all over us;
they are all over those whom we meet, or walk past, or judge, or sometimes worse.
Help us to recognise You, and to entertain angels with every opportunity we have.
Teach us what it means to live in spirit and in truth.

Read the story from John 4:1-42 a few times, using the practice of Lectio Divina. As we spend time in the presence of God, reading through the text slowly, several times over, we are invited to listen deeply for the still, small voice of God. Go at your own pace, or the rhythm below may be helpful:

- Read the passage – notice what words or phrases you're drawn to.
- Reread the part of the story you're drawn to most.
- Read this part once more, asking what God might be saying.
- What is your prayer in this moment?
- What will you do now in response?

Consider a time when you felt like you belonged or were made welcome. Now consider a time, when you were not welcomed.

In light of recalling or sharing stories of these times, consider people in your communities (local, work, school and so on). How might you pray in word and action with and for them?

FLAG – PRAYER STATIONS/ACTIVITY

As we have witnessed the appearance of national flags on lampposts and painted in various ways, we `might reclaim these symbols of national identity in ways that are creative, life giving and unifying.

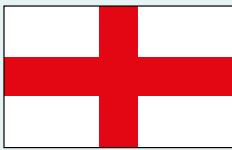
Using various national flags – noting how they have meanings that reference cultural heritage and values and so on – we can be inspired to learn more of the cultures of our neighbours and to share in the richness their heritage and culture can bring into dialogue with our own. And as we do so, we can find common ground, and we can be inspired to pray, in word and deed, for the unity of God's children and the gentle making of the Kingdom of God together, piece by piece.

You may know the nationalities of the people in your local area, but if not, selecting a few flags from different countries can be done through a simple search online. Flags have a significance to their design arrangement and layout, and to their colour scheme.

Many who come from different parts of our hurting world are seeking compassion and mercy, searching for a place where a life of wholeness can be found. In discovering the richness of culture, we can use this to empower prayer for related nations and for the people from these places in our communities.

You may wish to select a few images of flags as examples and begin to outline shared values and common spaces that they represent that allow us to meet in prayerful unity. Encourage people to research the flags of those in their community, and follow the same process of finding commonality and shared space.

Some of the places where people come to the UK from to seek refuge and asylum are: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Eritrea, Syria, Sudan, Ukraine. Historically, we have seen many people from Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean, India, Pakistan, China and so on.



THE FLAGS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

The flag of each nation in the UK represents parts of culture and the hopes of the people.



Take some time to look at the history of the flags, to consider the designs and colours and what they represent and perhaps consider who the saint of each nation is and what they were known for.



As you do this, you may well be inspired to pray for each nation and for the complexities of how we work together as the UK!



IRELAND

The National Flag of Ireland, a tricolour of green, white and orange, is intended to symbolise the inclusion of and the aspiration for unity between people of different traditions on this island. The flag is twice as wide as it is high. The three colours are of equal size, and the green goes next to the flagstaff.



PAKISTAN

A green and white flag with a white crescent moon and white five-pointed star. The green of the flag represents the Muslim majority in Pakistan, with the white representing the religions in the country. The two symbols are side by side on the flag, symbolising space for all in the midst of the culture. The star and crescent, while often representing Islam, also represent progress and light and knowledge.



ERITREA

The flag consists of three coloured triangles:

- green, representing the agriculture of the area;
- blue, representing the marine element of the country;
- red, representing the fight for liberation.



BANGLADESH

The flag consists of a green background with a red disk in the centre. Green represents the country's lush landscapes and a youthful optimism. The red circle represents the rising sun of hope and a new beginning.



SUDAN

The flag is made up of a green triangle and three stripes of red, white and black. The red signifies struggle, the white signifies peace and optimism and the black symbolises the land and the people of Sudan. The green is seen to represent the fertility of the land.

ACTIVITY

As you bring these images and information about the designs of the flags together, you can create line drawing versions that can be coloured in. Sharing a few simple prompts/thoughts to consider while doing this activity is a gentle way of creatively praying. You may also wish to print off full colour images of the flags and create a prayer station for each nation and people group.

There are numerous ways you can gather around the ideas of flags, and the hope is that it will inspire compassionate prayer for those coming to our communities, for all the people who call your local community home and for the beautiful heritage we have throughout Britain and Ireland of people from different countries coming here and enriching our lives, our society and our culture.

Explore the different ways that you can share stories with the many different people in your area.

REFLECT

There are many different areas throughout Britain and Ireland where division and unrest around migration is escalating. This is not a universal scenario, so take time to consider what things are like in your area. Whether there is tension or not, ask:

- What would progress look like in your area, specifically in the area of God's Kingdom being made real – with love, compassion and mercy being present, and all who are in the midst having provision and fulness of life?

PRAY

Give thanks for the beauty of diversity that God has created in the different nations of the world.

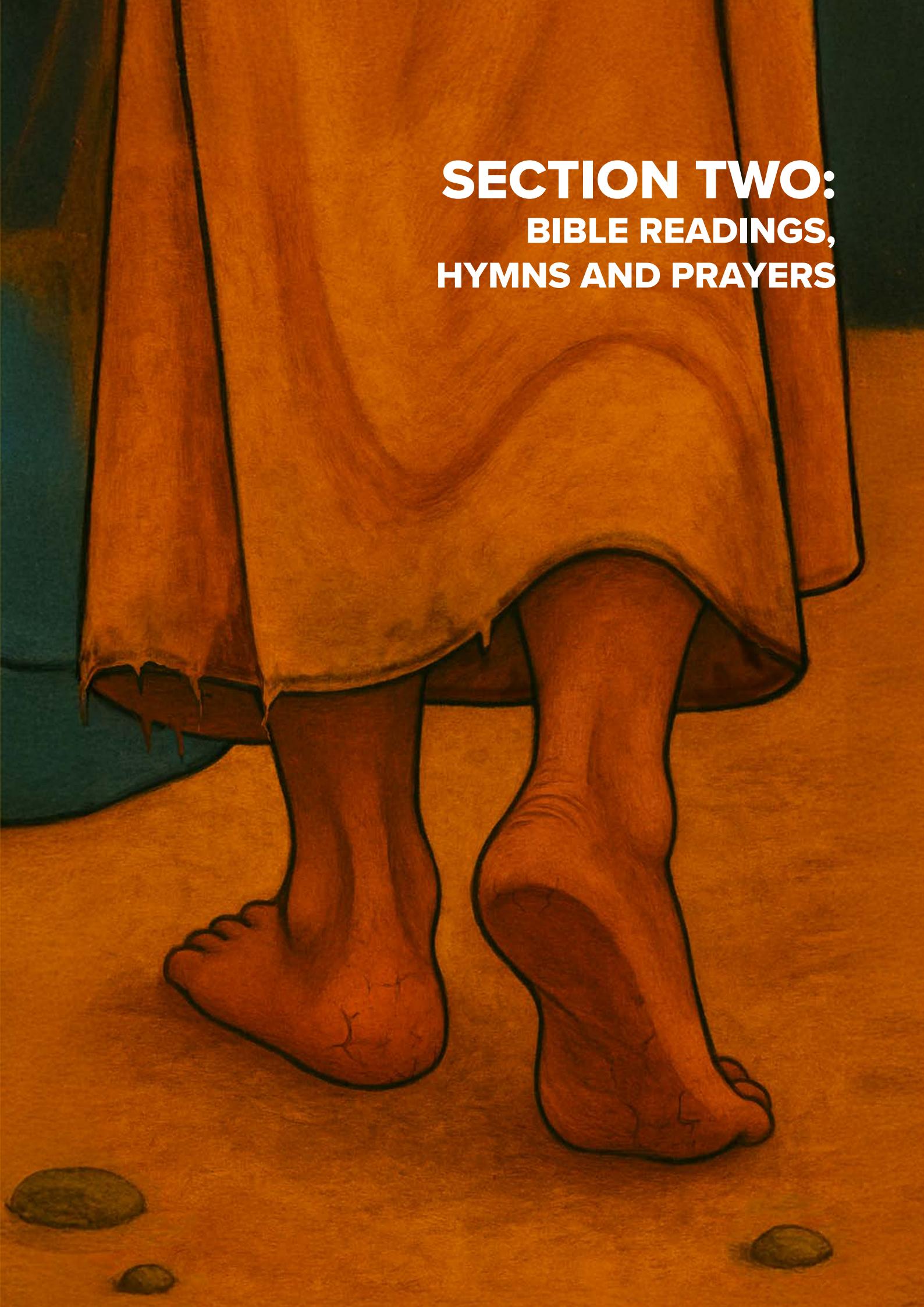
Ask God that peace and tolerance might be made real, or deepened, in your community – with people from different cultures finding ways of working together for the building of God's Kingdom.

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you consider ways of ministering to others and building God's Kingdom together.

Pray that you would have opportunities to receive blessing and the ministry of others to you.

“AND WHAT DOES THE
LORD REQUIRE OF YOU?
TO ACT JUSTLY AND TO
LOVE MERCY AND TO
WALK HUMBLY WITH
YOUR GOD.”

Micah 6:8



SECTION TWO: **BIBLE READINGS,** **HYMNS AND PRAYERS**

SCRIPTURE VERSES THAT CAN BE USED

Hosea 12:6

But you must return to your God;
maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Proverbs 22:2

Rich and poor have this in common:
The LORD is the Maker of them all.

Acts 10:34-35

Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.'

Colossians 3:9-11

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Proverbs 31:8-9

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Micah 6:8

And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

Amos 5:24

But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
plead the case of the widow.

Psalm 82:3

Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

HYMNS AND WORSHIP SONGS

- All Are Welcome
- Be Thou My Vision
- Beauty for Brokenness
- Bring Forth the Kingdom
- Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You
- Christ, Be Our Light
- Come now O Prince of Peace
- Cry Freedom! In the Name of God, and Let the Cry Resound
- Extol the God of Justice
- From Those Forever Shackled
- God Forgave My Sin
- God is Working His Purpose Out
- God of Freedom, God of Justice
- God, Your Justice Towers
- God's Spirit Is in My Heart
- Great God and Lord of the Earth
- How Good It Is, What Pleasure Comes
- How Shall We Sing Salvation's Song
- I Got a Crown Up in the Kingdom
- Jesus Christ Is Waiting, Waiting in the Streets
- Jesus Heard with Deep Compassion
- Let Us Build a House Where Love Can Dwell
- Lord, for the Years Your Love Has Kept and Guided
- Lord of All Hopefulness
- My Love for You
- My Song Is Love Unknown
- One Bread, One Body
- The Church Is Like a Table
- The Church's One Foundation
- They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love
- This Is Amazing Grace
- This We Can Do for Justice and Peace
- True Religion
- We Are One in the Spirit
- When Israel was in Egypt's Land
- With the Lord, There Is Mercy and Fulness of Redemption

PRAYERS

A PRAYER FOR PEACE

Lord, in the turbulence of our times, we pray for peace.
As we watch the reports of violence
and see the destruction of life,
we pray for peace.

As we witness the grief of families and communities
in war-torn countries, such as Gaza and the Ukraine,
we plead with the tormented and the grief-stricken
that there would be an end
to the atrocities of war.
We pray for peace.

As we follow the reports of political manoeuvrings
along the streets of negotiations,
each with their portfolio of self-interest,
and ever watchful of their supporters' reactions,
we pray for hopeful reconciliation.
We pray for peace.

As we sense compassion towards
the homeless and the hungry,
the sick and the injured,
the refugees in their own land,
we recognise our own inaction
and feel remorseful and guilty.
Lord, forgive us for lapsing
into an unshockable mode.
Wake us up, Lord, to the reality of others
as we pray for peace.

In the name of Jesus.

Amen

Denzil Ieuan John

A PRAYER FOR COMPASSION

Lord of every nation and the God of all,
 hear our prayer for the refugees
 who enter the UK seeking a secure home.
 It troubles us, Lord, that there are so many who leave their homeland,
 in desperation and fear for their own safety,
 looking for security for themselves and their families,
 risking their lives and paying heavily to unscrupulous gangs,
 finding their hopes shattered
 and then finding themselves living in fear.

It concerns us, Lord, that there are those within Britain and Ireland
 who show racist traits dressed in political ideology,
 folk who are inspired by pro-nationalist thinking,
 without a heart for those who are desperate for normality,
 those who are reaching out for a community of care
 and receiving rejection at each juncture.
 Father God, may they know that You love them,
 and may all political opponents understand that these men and women
 need to feel the love of Your church in their lives.

Father God, help us to meditate on Your inclusive love
 and Your far-reaching grace in today's world.

Father God, forgive us if we assume that people
 can ring-fence Your grace according to where people were born,
 and not engage the needy wherever they are currently.

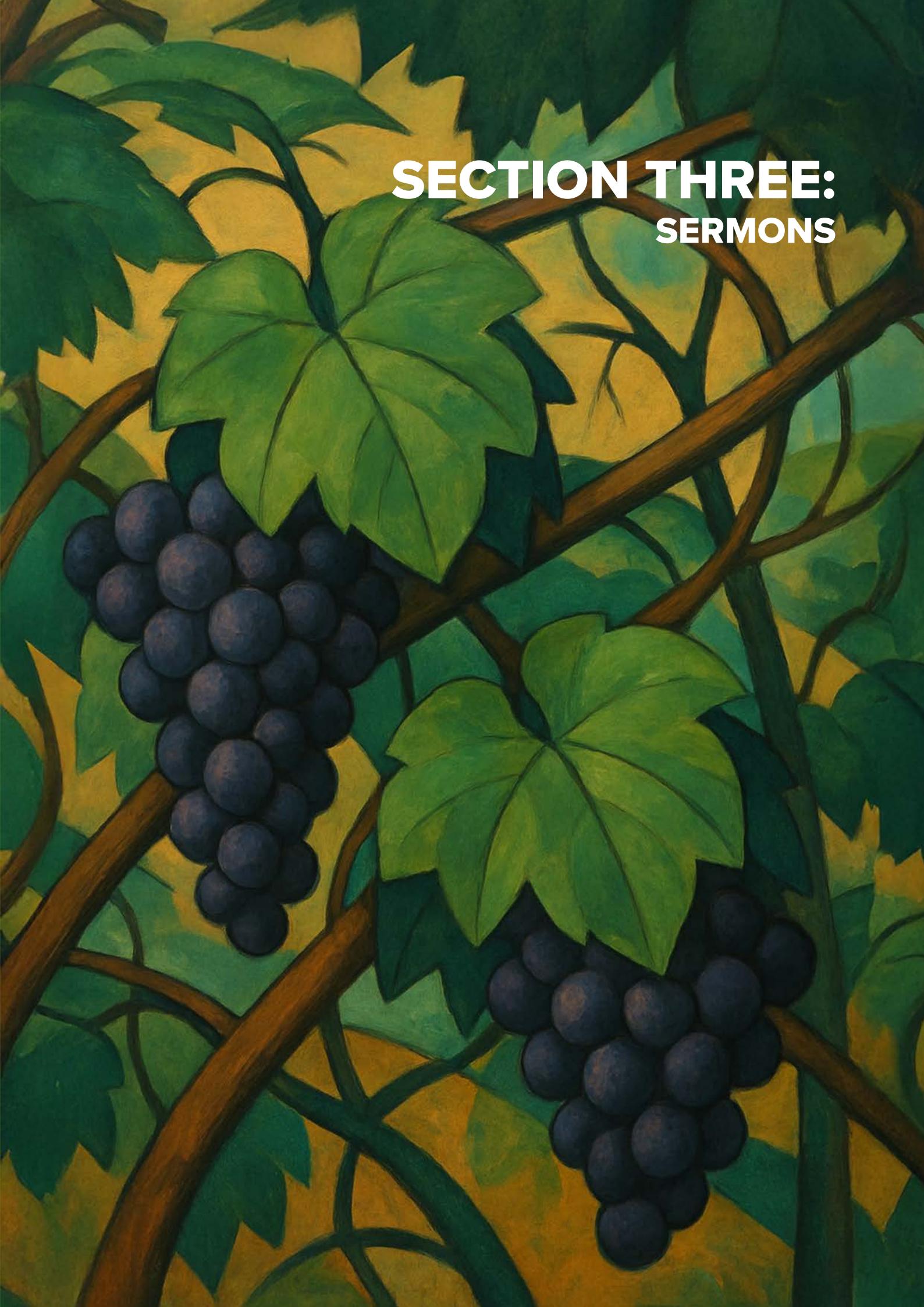
Father God, bind us together with peoples of all nations,
 whatever their race, colour or creed.
 May we accept our common humanity
 as we see the whole of humankind as Your immediate family.
 In the name of Jesus.

Amen

Denzil Ieuan John

MY COMMAND IS THIS:
LOVE EACH OTHER AS
I HAVE LOVED YOU.

John 15:12

A painting of a grapevine with large green leaves and clusters of dark grapes.

SECTION THREE: SERMONS

1. LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR – MARK 12:28-34

REVD MANDY RALPH

Jesus teaches us that loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbours as ourselves are the two most important principles for Christian living. They are core to following in faith and being in relationship with God.

Surely that seems simple enough. Love. There is no complicated jargon, no pages of guidance, no risk assessment required. Just a command – or, if you prefer, a request – to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. But hold on – is that my next-door neighbour, the neighbours that I get on with, the ones who think like me, worship like me? Or is it the neighbours who look different, talk differently, whose culture is different from mine? Is it the difficult ones, those who have different points of view from me and who are, to be honest, quite irritating? Jesus tells us that is a resounding YES!

As Christians, we are asked to love all our neighbours, irrespective of who they are. Yes, that does mean even the ones who can try our patience! If we stop to think about it, we are first asked to love God with all our heart, mind, body and strength – all in, no exceptions. When it comes to loving our neighbours, it's the same thing – it is all of them, all in, no exceptions. That is what Jesus asks of us when we are in relationship with God. Loving God and loving our neighbour are intertwined, and so, in faith, we cannot do one without the other.

But do we love all our neighbours? Can we, hand on heart, honestly say we love our neighbours? The protests about immigration that have taken place across the country, shown on TV, shared on social media over the past few months – the rhetoric, the language, the posts, the actions of others: these are a far cry from loving our neighbour.

Protests against immigration, asylum seekers, those with cultural backgrounds different from our own; people of colour, who are not deemed or no longer deemed to be our neighbour. The spread of misinformation, fear mongering, persecution and hate. That does not equate to loving our neighbour.

If we have given our all to God, profess our faith to be Christian and undertake to walk in the ways of Jesus, then that means loving all our neighbours, not being hateful and abusive towards them. I am a Black, female, now disabled minister who, when told to 'Go back home,' responds, 'Well, that would be Glasgow,' as I was born and brought up in Scotland. I am Scottish. Probably not the expected response, but I should not have to prove I am your neighbour. No one should have to do that. We are all made in the image of God and are all part of the family of God.

Our faith asks us to be loving to God and to each other. We are not asked to be perfect, for none of us is, but to be willing to follow in faith.

Loving our neighbour requires from us all an active love: that includes standing up for our neighbour who is suffering from racial abuse; it includes showing love and welcome to those seeking safer shores to live in as they flee from conflict and other terrors. It includes not blaming our neighbours for all the wrongs of this world as an easy option and taking the time to understand the real issues being faced today.

We are reminded, too, of God's love for us, shown through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Jesus gave His all for us; He died for us on the cross so that our sins might be forgiven and so that we might know eternal life. Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself in love for all of us. He didn't pick and choose who it was for. It was once and for ever and for all.

Therefore, why should our love be any different? In faith we can embrace our neighbour and see immigration and the coming together of different cultures as a blessing. A wonderful tapestry of life in all its glorious colour and fullness. In faith, each one of us can be the hope for a better tomorrow, when we walk in the way of Jesus. After all, God's love for us is a love that is beyond expression, immense and all encompassing.

It is human nature to want to belong, to be part of a community, to have a sense of identity. As Christians, we are part of and belong to the family of God. Most of us have a church family that we belong to, whether that is online or in person; in England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales; on the mainland or on an island. It is somewhere we can go and share in worship and fellowship together with other Christians.

Being church together transcends any and all barriers when we put love of God and our neighbour first in all we pray, say and do. For being church together is not an exclusive social club; it is a worldwide movement that strives to reach out in love to our neighbours and to live out the gospel message, where all are welcome and included.

Welcome is a big part of what I know to be my Scottish culture. We would never dream of not offering a visitor something to drink and some food, for we cannot have someone going away hungry. A phrase often said of someone who willingly helps their neighbour would be, 'Aye, they would guie you their last.'

God gives us love unconditionally. Let us do the same. Let's not put barriers and boundaries on the love we show and share with our neighbours. Together, as a community founded in the love of God through Christ, let's grow a love that, as Christians pulling together, can be immense. Let us use that love to bring about hope, blessings and actions that reveal the love of God in us. Let us welcome all our neighbours, so they truly feel they belong and have a place at the table.

Amen

2. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR: THE IMPORTANCE OF RACIAL JUSTICE IN 2026 – LUKE 10:25-37

RICHARD REDDIE, CTBI

I was born in Bradford, West Yorkshire, and I grew up in a very working-class part of that city. If you've ever watched the soap opera *Coronation Street*, it was that sort of street, with terraced houses, outside toilets and cobbled streets, but in West Yorkshire rather than Lancashire. At the time when I was growing up, everyone on my street knew their neighbours – in fact, you could say that everyone knew a little too much about their neighbours. I knew the names of everyone on my street; I knew what they did for a living – or did not do. I knew which schools all the children of my age attended, and I would often play football with boys of a similar age. Moreover, if you saw a neighbour in the street, especially an older person, and failed to say hello, you would be told off. They would say, 'Where are your manners?!"

Certain neighbours, especially some of the women, would have elongated conversations over the garden wall. They would have a cup of tea in their hands and they would talk about everything under the sun – often gossip about another neighbour in the street.

They also had this strange habit – it was strange for my parents, who were Jamaican – where you could be sitting at home, watching the TV in the evening, and your neighbour would just open the door and come into your house unannounced. Sometimes they might knock first, or ring the bell, but they would open the door as they did so, and just come into your house and start talking to you. This would be seen as being very 'neighbourly', but my parents never got used to this over-familiarity and so would lock our front and back doors – even during the day, so that this could not happen. I don't think our neighbours liked this much, but they probably thought it was something that Jamaican people did!

The thing is, I took all of this for granted until I moved to London and realised that people do not know their neighbours that well in bigger cities or towns. For instance, how many of us know at least 10 people on our street or estate, or in our flats or tower block?

The theme of this sermon is 'Love your neighbour'. What is interesting in this Scripture passage from Luke is that the lawyer asks Jesus this question as a way of testing him. He is not really looking for the right answer to a vitally important life question, but is trying to catch Jesus out. He starts by calling Jesus 'Teacher' or 'Rabbi', and then asks, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' This is a loaded question – one for which the answer is found in the Mosaic Law – which is where the lawyer's expertise lies.

Jesus naturally responds with, 'What is written in the Law? ... How do you read it?'

The lawyer then answers, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

This is the textbook answer. In Matthew's account of this event (Matthew 22:34-40), it's Jesus who provides the answer, in response to the lawyer's question about the most important commandment. Jesus makes the connection between loving God and loving one's neighbour as yourself, as does the lawyer in Luke's Gospel. So, in reply to the lawyer's model response, Jesus says, 'You have answered correctly ... Do this, and you will live.'

But, as we know, the lawyer is only interested in catching Jesus out, hence he asks the supplementary question, 'Who is my neighbour?' In response, Jesus provides him with the parable of the good Samaritan. In verse 30, Jesus begins, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers.' When I was in Israel in 2019, I made this journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. If you've ever done this route, you'll know it is literally all downhill – the route to Jericho takes you below sea level and is full of caves. In Jesus' day it was where bandits would hide out in order to rob gullible individuals who chose to take this lonely, dangerous journey.

In this parable we read that a priest and a Levite pass by the beaten-up man. However, Jesus then says that it was a Samaritan who 'took pity on him' (some Bible translations use the word 'compassion'), and he helped the man. Verses 34-35 say:

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

What I find fascinating is that when Jesus asks the lawyer who was a neighbour to the wounded man, the Jewish lawyer cannot find it in his heart to say the word 'Samaritan', but says, 'The one who had mercy on him.' This shows the prejudice that the lawyer held towards Samaritans.

Racial Justice Sunday is an occasion to 'remember', 'reflect' and 'respond'. **Remember** that racism is real, **reflect** on the fact that ethnic diversity is part of God's divine plan and should be celebrated, and **respond** by working for racial justice through prayer and action.

We know that racial and ethnic prejudice took place in biblical times. In John 4:9 we read that 'Jews do not associate with Samaritans'. This verse is part of the passage of Scripture where Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman by the well. We can see from this story and Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan that the Samaritans were a marginalised community. In making the Samaritan the hero of his parable, Jesus is showing us that God values all life, that all people are made in His image and loved by Him and can be used by Him to further His Kingdom. What is more, the woman at the well was the first person in John's Gospel to whom Jesus revealed that He was the Messiah. This woman then went off and shared this news with her fellow Samaritans, thus becoming the first evangelist – the first person to share the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' parable, we should be the Samaritan – we should be the people who have love and compassion. I'm sure you've heard this before, but it is significant that the first seven letters of the word 'compassion' spell out the term 'compass'.

All compasses point north. However, as Christians we should have a moral compass, and that compass should point to Jesus, who is the personification of compassion and mercy. Such was Jesus' love for us that He suffered and died for our sins. This same Jesus offers us a new life with God if we put our faith in Him. However, as Jesus states in John 15:12, 'My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.'

I believe that love and justice are two sides of the same coin. For me, justice is love in action. The academic Cornel West says that 'justice is what love looks like in public'. If you really love someone, you want to ensure that they are free, equal and treated with respect and dignity. In short, you want to ensure they have all that you have, which is tantamount to loving 'your neighbour as yourself'.

Jesus had a clear focus on justice, which we can see at the outset of His earthly ministry. In Luke 4:18-19, He reads from the Book of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Theologians have argued that 'being, doing and saying truth and justice' were central to the life of Jesus. So what is Jesus saying to us right now regarding justice?

We are told to love our neighbour, but the real question is the one asked by the lawyer: who is my neighbour? In Jesus' parable, our neighbour is the person in trouble – the person in need. Therefore, our neighbour should be anyone who needs our help. The lawyer who asked Jesus this question was probably expecting Him to signify a best friend or a fellow Jew. However, Jesus widens the term to mean anyone in need of assistance.

What's more, Luke's Gospel tells us that we need to help our neighbour in practical ways. The good Samaritan could have dismounted his donkey, gone over to the stricken man and said some prayers for him, before getting back on his donkey and riding off. Now, I'm not saying that prayers are not important; indeed, prayers are the heartbeat of the Christian faith.

However, as James 2:20 states, 'You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?' Basically, our actions are as important as our words – both are needed in tandem.



How should those in the corridors of power “walk humbly”?

What would have happened to the injured man had the Samaritan not intervened? Maybe someone else would have come to his rescue. What we do know is that he would probably have died if he had been left to fend for himself. In Jesus’ story, the Samaritan gave the man emergency treatment on the spot, and then he took him to the innkeeper for further treatment, all of which means the injured man was in a bad way – he needed more than a few painkilling tablets to help him recover.

Also at the heart of today’s parable is the importance of loving the stranger. The Samaritan did not know the injured man – he was a complete stranger. The Samaritan probably knew nothing about the man, but he showed him compassion. As we know, thousands of Britons have opened their hearts and homes to Ukrainian refugees, offering them sanctuary and a warm welcome. This was demonstrating the compassion Jesus speaks about in today’s parable – the importance of loving the stranger.

The sad truth is that we live in a world where the refugee situation in the Ukraine is only the tip of the iceberg. According to the United Nations, more than 120 million people have been forced to leave their homes and homelands on account of war, persecution, the climate emergency and poverty, and around 35 million of these are classed as refugees. The question we need to ask ourselves as Jesus’ followers is: are those we see on the news crossing the Mediterranean Sea or the English Channel our neighbours?

If so, should we respond in the same way that the Samaritan did to the injured man, just like we did towards the people from the Ukraine; or should we walk on by, like the priest and the Levite?

We know from Jesus' life that true compassion and real love are always costly and involve risk. The Samaritan took a risk – he didn't know if the injured man was pretending to be hurt; he might have had accomplices waiting in the bushes to rob him the minute he dismounted his donkey to help him. The Samaritan didn't know this; all he knew was that a man was in need, and out of compassion he took a risk and helped him.

I'm sure we have all helped people in the past, only for them to sadly take advantage of us. As Christians we should be shrewd and streetwise, but these traits should not stop us from being compassionate and merciful, especially to those who really need our help. My mum, who was what I would call a commonsense theologian, would often say that the hardest decision or choice is often the right one to make. When it comes to refugees or asylum seekers, what is 'harder': for us to help those who are in need of our assistance or to turn our backs on them?

We are often told that 'charity begins at home'. Well, charity does begin at home, but, as we see in Jesus' parable, it does not end there as far as loving our neighbour is concerned. Because our neighbour is the person next door, as well as the person in the next street, and the person in the next town, and even the person in the next country – basically, the person in need of our help, wherever they are. The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbour.

We know that God loves our neighbours. He loved our neighbours so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for them – whether they know this or not! What about us?

One of my favourite verses in the Bible comes from Micah 6:8:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

We do all of this when we love our neighbour!

Amen

3. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF

REVD LORRAINE C. SHORTEN

We all know the phrase, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. It rolls off the tongue easily, but let’s be honest – it’s a lot harder to live out. Because our neighbour isn’t always the friendly face next door. Sometimes our neighbour is a stranger. Sometimes our neighbour is the person who turns up in our town with nothing but a backpack, speaking a language we don’t understand. And sometimes our neighbour is the person we’ve only ever seen in the headlines labelled ‘asylum seeker’, ‘migrant’ or even ‘illegal’.

For years, immigration has dominated the headlines here in Britain and Ireland. Every week there seems to be a new debate about ‘small boats’, asylum seekers in hotels or promises from politicians to ‘fix the system’. Behind those headlines, though, are real people. According to the British Home Office, there are still tens of thousands of people waiting for decisions on their asylum claims. Some have been stuck in limbo for years – unable to work, unsure if they’ll be allowed to stay, living in temporary housing that can change at short notice. But loving our neighbour means finding ways to help that are honest *and* humane.

The command, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’, is rooted in Jewish and Christian teachings but asks for more than just thoughts and prayers. So, what does ‘love your neighbour’ look like? Do we let fear shape us, or love?

Fear says:

‘There isn’t enough space.’
 ‘There isn’t enough money.’
 ‘There isn’t enough to go around.’

But love says:

‘Here is a person.’
 ‘Here is a neighbour.’
 ‘Here is someone made in the image of God.’

When Jesus told us to love our neighbour, He didn’t add, ‘So long as they were born on your street.’ He didn’t say, ‘So long as they look like you, sound like you or vote like you.’ He just said, ‘Love them.’

And the truth is, when we meet people face to face, everything changes.

‘Migrants’ stop being a category. They become names and stories. A father who fled war. A mother hoping her children will be safe. A teenager who just wants to play football. That’s when we realise our neighbours aren’t threats; they are just people longing for the same things we long for: safety, dignity and hope.

You might have heard or read about Craftivism. Craftivism is activism through craft, things like sewing, embroidery and knitting. Sarah Corbett, who writes about it, calls it ‘gentle protest’.

HOPE

LO
VE



WELCOME



And I think it's a beautiful picture of what love-your-neighbour activism can look like. Craftivism invites us to slow down, to use our hands as well as our hearts, and to create something that speaks of justice, dignity and belonging. It is resistance expressed through beauty. It is prayer made visible.

This picture is of a tree I embroidered that was used as part of a large Craftivism project called 'Stitch A Tree' by Thread Bearing Witness in 2017.

The project aimed to connect communities and individuals globally to show support for displaced people around the world. More than 10,000 stitched trees were arranged into a large embroidery called 'Forest', by artist Alice Kettle.^v



Here are some Craftivism suggestions you could consider doing, on your own or as a group:

- **Sew or knit** squares with words of love, hope and welcome using colours, fabrics or images that represent the diversity of your community, symbolising how each unique piece forms part of a greater whole. These can then be stitched together into a communal banner for your church or neighbourhood.
- **Write and decorate prayer cards** for racial justice, which could be placed around your church, given to neighbours or tied to a prayer tree.
- **Paint or embroider symbols of unity**, such as hands clasped, circles interwoven or rivers meeting: reminders of our interconnectedness.

These small acts may seem simple, but they carry meaning. A handmade object speaks of care, time and love. It is an invitation to conversation and a spark for deeper reflection. Craftivism reminds us that justice is not only fought in courts and parliaments; it is also nurtured in kitchens, living rooms, church halls and community groups, where hearts are softened and new stories are told.

Neighbours aren't just the people we choose. They're the people we're given. And how we treat them says everything about who we are. In a Britain that feels divided and defensive, maybe the most radical thing we can do is to live as if 'love your neighbour' really means what it says.

One stitch at a time.

One welcome at a time.

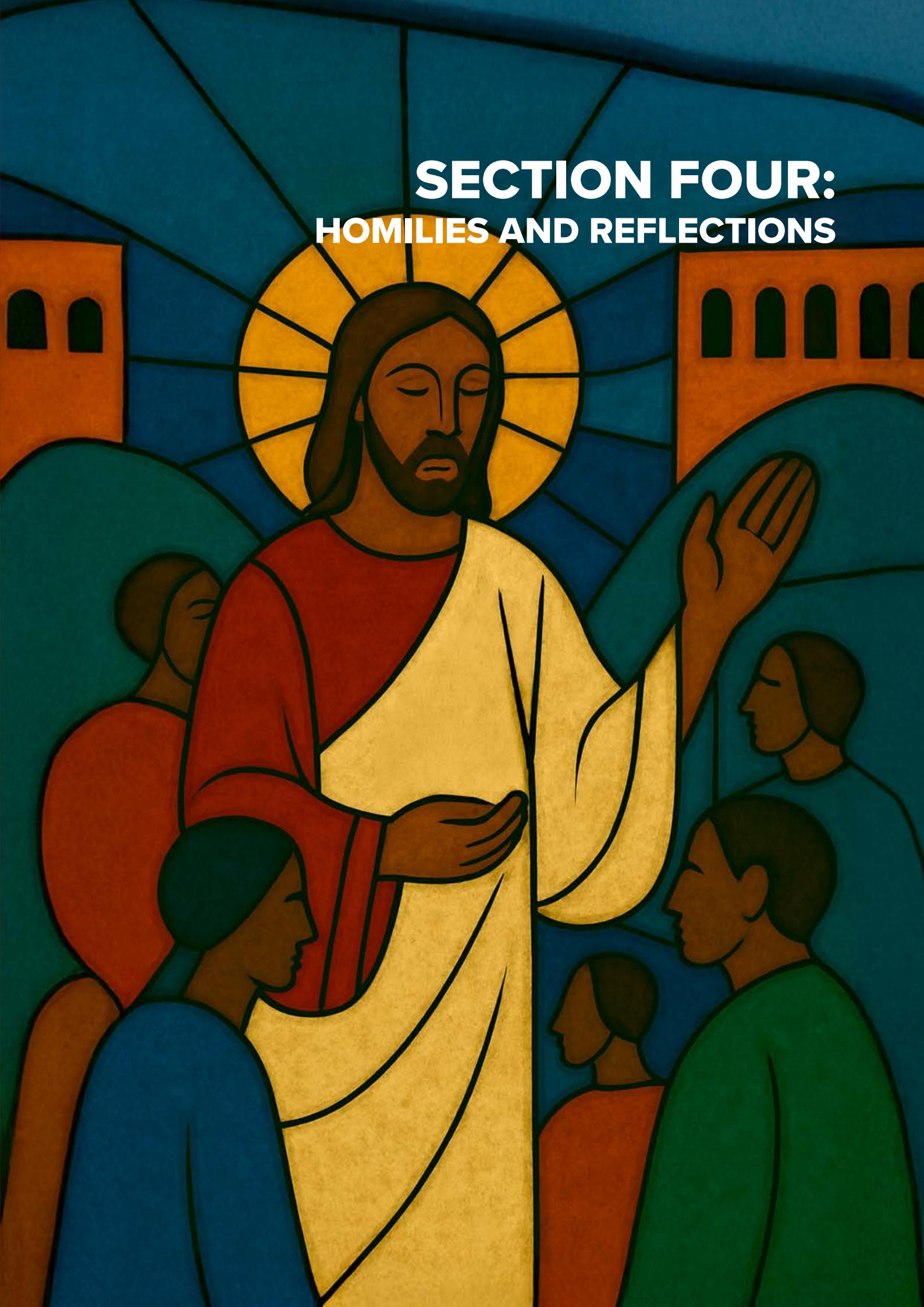
One neighbour at a time.

^v 'Thread Bearing Witness', <https://threadbearingwitness.com/stitch-a-tree-project/> (accessed 17 November 2025).

AGAIN JESUS SPOKE TO THEM, SAYING, ‘I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NEVER WALK IN DARKNESS BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.’

John 8:12

SECTION FOUR: **HOMILIES AND REFLECTIONS**



1. HOMILY FOR RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 2026

FR PHILIP T. SUMNER

The rise of populism in parts of our world over recent years has caused what Pope Francis referred to as the ‘virus’ of racism to mutate. During the last year, we have witnessed the targeting of asylum-seeker hotels by angry crowds. Some of the protesters have apparently used Christian language and symbolism to justify their intimidation. After one such protest in Portsmouth, the Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops of that city wrote a powerful joint letter. They stated how they were ashamed of the intimidation and scapegoating of asylum seekers and refugees. They went further to claim that they were horrified when protestors used Christian language to justify their divisive chants.

It’s the scapegoating of whole groups, portraying them as the source of so many of our country’s ills, that unjustly demonises often desperate people. It’s the use of purportedly Christian language that allows many, like the priest and the Levite in the good Samaritan story, to ‘[pass] by on the other side’ (Luke 10:32). It’s this scapegoating that enables many to negate, in their own minds, the requirement of the Gospels to love our neighbour (Luke 10:27), or the Deuteronomic demand to ‘love the stranger’ (Deuteronomy 10:19, NRSVA). This love requires us to re-humanise those concerned, to listen to their often-desperate stories and to be moved by them. There’s no suggestion here of an ‘open-border’ policy; Catholic Social Teaching has always been clear on the right of states to control their borders. But surely we must not simply scapegoat asylum seekers as the source of our problems.

Indeed, loving our neighbour requires much more; it’s not simply about allowing people to enter this country, but it’s also about enabling them to belong once they are here. Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* reminds us that ‘there is no worse form of alienation than to feel uprooted, belonging to no-one’.^{vi} Dina Nayeri, the author of *The Ungrateful Refugee*, argues that immigrants and refugees ‘need the dignity of becoming an essential part of a society ... what they most urgently need is to be useful. To belong to a place.’^{vii}

Back in 1989, a Black religious sister, Thea Bowman, was asked to speak to the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops in the USA about racism in the church. She began her presentation by singing a ‘spiritual’: ‘Sometimes I feel like a motherless child ... a long ways from home!’ Although she was a religious sister of some considerable standing, she was saying that she still did not really belong. She went on, powerfully, to explain that in a so-called ‘participatory church’ she rarely, if ever, experienced any Black musical genres or prayer styles or artistic expressions in the decoration of the places used for services.

vi The Holy See, *Fratelli Tutti: Encyclical on Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Orbis, 2020), paragraph 53.

vii Dina Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* (Catapult, 2019), p.338.

The encouragement of Pope John Paul II in 1982 had clearly not been heard: ‘Faith that does not become culture,’ he said, ‘is not fully accepted, nor entirely reflected upon, or faithfully experienced.’ This ‘inculturation’ is not just for taking the gospel to other countries, but also for enabling people from different cultures to belong here.

One of the examples of institutional racism given by Lord Macpherson, who led the government enquiry after the murder in 1993 of the Black teenager Stephen Lawrence, was of established groups in the exercise of power. He was speaking of people who say things like, ‘We’ve always done it this way!’ or, ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do!’ It’s this sort of attitude that resists attempts at inculturation. Dina Nayeri suggests that what is required is ‘allowing newcomers to affect you on your native soil, to change you’.^{viii}

Pope Francis, in his autobiography, warned against expecting people to assimilate, and to conform to the practices already in existence. He wrote, ‘To confuse unity with uniformity is a diabolical temptation. Unity does not mean forced integration nor harmonised marginalisation. Rather it is a reconciled diversity’. Pope John Paul II called this ‘a spirituality of communion’, where we see the face of God in each other and know how to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each other’s burdens’.

^{viii} Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee*, p.342.

2. THE COST OF PEACE: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21

DENZIL IEUAN JOHN

History records the horrors of all wars, but, in the future, when historians will note these earlier years of the third decade in the 21st century, they will mention the circumstances of the people of Ukraine having faced the onslaught from Russia, and the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip suffering the bombardment from Israel. No doubt politicians and historians will analyse the turmoil of those who didn't initiate the wars but have suffered beyond our understanding. Yet no one will be able to grasp the reality of war unless they experience it for themselves. At the time of writing, these horrors continue, and we are all praying that the wars will finish and a collective plan will be developed to rebuild the future of these peoples.

2025 was the year to note the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. The numbers remaining of those who were involved in the armed forces at that time will naturally be fewer each year. There have been many other wars, particularly on the African continent. These are civil wars in the main, yet no less horrific and tragic. Humankind needs to remember the cost of all wars, not only in fiscal terms of armaments and the need to rebuild the infrastructure, but the cost in human lives, in the destruction of communities and their inherent fabric, in the trust between one community and the next, and the relationships between nations.

Peace is not only the opposite of war, but it is also the positive engagement with our neighbours and fellow human beings. Therefore, we need to ask, in 2026, whatever the events of 2025 may have been, how does the church grow peace, and who pays the price of reconciliation? It may seem relatively easy for theologians to agree on a given plan, but enabling those who have suffered to achieve such a glorious aim is something else. When war ends, building peace is a monumental task. It calls on former enemies to reach across no-man's-land and extend the hand of peace to each other.

Planning the building of physical bridges may be done by a computer; building bridges across troubled waters calls for spiritual resources. From the cross of rejection and shame, Jesus offered forgiveness to those who nailed his hands and feet to the plinth, to those who jeered bitter words of hatred and cheered in celebration of their political victory. Jesus was able to forgive, but is such grace within the grasp of Christians in Ukraine and in Russia? When Pope Leo XIV appeals for peace between Russia and the Ukraine, has the Orthodox Church in both countries the spiritual strength to appeal for mercy towards each other and petition a plea for forgiveness for their own appeasement?

Racial justice is essential in the prayers and the attitude of all Christians. In the time set aside for racial justice in our own traditions, we need to seek God's strength and grace for everyone, including ourselves, to grasp the significance of the cross in our turbulent times. The cross is essentially the place to leave our pain and guilt behind as former enemies seek God's help to journey towards reconciliation.

Peace is the result of justice and grace at work, creating opportunities to confess our sins and seek forgiveness. The Revd Morgan John Rees, a Welsh theologian who travelled to France during the civil war in order to learn about a new democracy, often said, 'Peace is the child of Justice.'^{ix} He learnt that the British Parliament wrongly understood him to be a threat to the authority of the king, and he escaped to America, when civil war was in motion. He empathised with the First Nations communities in the USA and pleaded for justice.

The Revd Dr Gustavo Parajon led the churches in Nicaragua following the civil war there (1978–1990) alongside the Archbishop of Managua in the healing of the nation. Likewise, Bishop Desmond Tutu led fellow church leaders to bring all the various factions involved in the struggles of their country to seek harmony among the various Indigenous African communities and the White community.

Many will remember the horror of civil war in Rwanda (1990–1994), and the genocide which the Hutus decreed on the Tutsis. Dr Rhiannon Lloyd from North Wales wrote her account of the efforts to restore trust and harmony between the different factions, which can be read in her account, *Fire Lillies*,^x or read on her website www.healingofthenations.

There has been serious unrest in Britain and Ireland that has focused on the influx of refugees crossing the English Channel seeking asylum. Certain factions within the British and Irish populations have argued that they must be returned whence they came, but what would Jesus say to the refugees who have arrived in Britain and Ireland as well as mainland Europe? 2026 will be a time for the church community in Britain and Ireland to awaken its theological understanding of seeking justice in an unjust community.

We can but ask, how do we build peace in an unjust world? Perhaps we can understand that true justice is rooted in grace and not in revenge, and that all hatred is counteractive to love. The 'light of the world' (John 8:12) challenged all darkness and forgave those who nailed Him to a cross, rejecting His invitation to follow Him. Racial justice will only be real when we love one another as Jesus loves us.

ix <https://biography.wales/article/s-RHYS-JOH-1760#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=15&manifest=https%3A%2F%2Fdamsssl.llgc.org.uk%2Fiiif%2F2.0%2F6004378%2Fmanifest.json&xywh=367%2C918%2C1672%2C1443>

x Dr Rhiannon Lloyd, *Fire Lillies: Finding Hope in Unexpected Places* (Healing the Nations Publishing, 2021).

3. AN ISLAND OF NEIGHBOURS: DIVERSITY, DIGNITY AND A MOVEMENT OF LOVE

JUSTIN LAU

I love this country and its people. I moved here 13 years ago after growing up in Japan as a Singaporean Chinese missionary kid, and now consider the UK my home. Over the years, I've found myself eagerly embracing more and more of British culture. I feel the same sense of solidarity as everyone else when I'm queuing, or moaning about the weather, or both simultaneously. Even things that initially surprised me – the midday pints, the absence of brollies, the overly sweet puddings – have now become second nature. I remember being struck by how people would greet me by name: 'Hi, *Justin*,' or, 'How was your week, *Justin*?' I grew up rarely using people's names to avoid the risk of disrespect in East Asian culture, but I've now come to greatly value this because it affords dignity to the person you're addressing – in the same way that God knows and calls each one of us by name.

My journey of integration, however, has not been without its complexities. When I first moved to the UK, I was very good at being western; the aim was to be as British as possible, and so I would repress my East Asianness in order to not alienate anyone. Locals would remark on how I wasn't like other internationals, meaning I didn't speak English with an accent, nor did I embody idiosyncratic cultural ways. I was warmly welcomed, even accepted, but I never felt truly seen, heard or known. I've since come to acknowledge my status as a minority-ethnic person in a White majority context, and have wrestled with its fraught implications.

At the height of the anti-Asian racism during the Covid pandemic, God told me, 'You're more Asian than you think.' That simple phrase gave me permission to reclaim and embrace my East Asianness to a greater degree than ever before. This has meant being unabashed about certain cultural norms that are normal to me even if they aren't normal to others. It's meant calling others out for instinctively labelling aspects of my culture as 'weird' or 'gross'. It's meant asking them to make the effort to meet me in the middle – to familiarise themselves with my culture – and not just me always meeting them. I do value acculturation, but perhaps a line needs to be drawn when it ends up belittling or disparaging your ethnic and cultural heritage.

I've since developed a robust theology of diversity, where the whole Bible attests to the beauty and significance of diversity, right from the very beginning in Genesis 1:27 (all humans created in God's image) through to the very end in Revelation 7:9-10 (prophetic vision of God's Kingdom people). Every year, I have the privilege of pastoring discipleship students from all over the world who are eager to see and join in with what God is doing in the UK. They learn our church culture, as well as British culture, but I also emphasise that each one of them has something vital to contribute to build up the Body of Christ. I especially love the image of an international potluck, where every single person has something to bring to the table. Ultimately, I long for the Kingdom values of every culture of the global church to benefit and enrich the western church.

I'm acutely aware that the UK is only going to become more diverse, with ethnic minority numbers already having risen to 18.3% in the UK (2021 Census). This means that our neighbours in Britain will continue to be multi-ethnic and multicultural. Jesus was unambiguously clear that the greatest commandments are to love God and to love your neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:35-40). But how do we love our neighbour? How do we treat someone as a neighbour in the biblical sense, in the Jesus way?

We all have an innate desire to be seen and known, loved and valued for who we really are – our true and authentic selves. I know I do. I want to be treated with dignity; I want to be heard. And Jesus calls us to treat others how we would want to be treated in return (Matthew 7:12). Loving our neighbour begins by viewing every person we encounter as made in the image of God, and treating them with dignity instead of dehumanising or demonising them. And it means learning, not just about our neighbour, but *from* our neighbour. Bill Nye said, 'Everyone you will ever meet knows something you don't.' Mutual respect involves a posture of humility and teachability. The more we learn about/from each other, the more we learn about/from the God in whose image we've all been made.

We mustn't stop at loving our neighbours in Christ; we're called also to love our neighbours in society. We see this imperative in Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), where the ethnic/religious other is lauded for being the truly loving neighbour following in the ways of Jesus. Who is my neighbour? It's M at the local chippy who calls me brother. It's S, the librarian, who always has my reserved books primed and ready. It's Z, the Thai restaurant waiter, who welcomes me with the biggest smile. Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese theologian, emphasised the importance of 'neighbourology', exhorting us in an increasingly international, intercultural and interreligious world to 'move from hostility to hospitality ... from the fear of unfamiliarity to the joy of familiarity' – which ultimately is 'the movement of love'.^{xi} Contrary to what some may claim, we are not an 'island of strangers', but rather an island of neighbours.

There's a great YouTube video of how two Hong Kongers recently took over and revived a 200-year-old British pub (Queens Arms in Eccles, Manchester), where they now serve a Japanese izakaya-style menu.^{xii} As the local community gathers side by side for a pint or a katsu curry or both, we witness the coming together of multicultural neighbours seeking the common good and welfare of their city (Jeremiah 29:7).

The Britain I love and have come to call home is founded on the fundamental value of mutual respect. It's a country where people intentionally call you by name, granting you dignity because you've been created in the image of God. Let's be Christ to our neighbours; let's show them that the people they live next door to, or work with, or queue behind at Tesco's, will treat them with honour, not hostility. Amid increasing strife and polarisation, let's seek to bridge divides with a movement of love for our neighbour.

^{xi} Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God* (SCM Press, 2021), pp.100–101.

^{xii} 'Inside the 200-Year-Old Pub Serving Up Japan's Best Kept Secret', YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loqw7yKjgl8> (accessed 17 November 2025).

THEY CRIED OUT IN
A LOUD VOICE, SAYING,
‘SALVATION BELONGS TO
OUR GOD WHO IS SEATED
ON THE THRONE, AND TO
THE LAMB!’

Revelation 7:10

SECTION FIVE:

TAKE ACTION – ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS



LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Matthew 22:39). We need to be prepared to follow the example of the life and teachings of Jesus, who was prepared to reach out to people across ethnic divides and to embrace all disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Jesus encouraged the creation of communities of inclusion, fairness and equality to reflect God's unlimited love, concern and compassion for all people, and so we need to build those also.

SEE, JUDGE AND ACT

Using the methodology of 'See, Judge and Act', encourage people to:

See: Identify what they would like to change in their parish or community to enhance equality.

Judge: In the light of Revelation 7:9-10, what is Jesus calling them to articulate within their environment?

Questions and thoughts to reflect on include:

- Examining our own biases and positions of privilege through self-reflection, and how to work earnestly to resolve them.
- How can we live by compassion and be consciously inclusive of all individuals?
- How can we affirm the value of diversity?
- How can we promote understanding, inclusion and mutual respect, and thus build communities for all races, ethnicities and cultures?
- How can we transform our institutions into authentically anti-racist communities of action?
- How can we advocate for justice, demand equal opportunities for all and so help create a beloved community for everyone to share?

Act: What steps can they take to bring about the change they envisage?

Read one of the sermons or reflections and pick out themes or topics that could be a 'Thought for the Day'. This can be put on the church noticeboard over a month.

A CALL TO ACTION: BEING AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH

The Christian community has a responsibility to demonstrate the values of their faith, and has a role to play at the cutting edge of transforming society. Invite the congregation or group to discuss how inclusive they really are. Is there real ethnic diversity represented in the church structures? Are prominent roles within the church open to those from diverse ethnic backgrounds? How can the church show a clear commitment to inclusion?

What specific action, however simple, can your parish and church take to help transform society?

Questions to reflect on include:

- How can we reach out beyond our level of comfort to meet and learn about others, hear their stories and be open to their full humanity?
- What kinds of projects can we identify that bring together different individuals, schools, churches, small groups and/or communities to work together on an issue?
- What questions can we begin to ask and how can we examine the policies of our local, national and international community to make sure they do not discriminate against minority ethnic and diverse communities that have not enjoyed full 'citizenship' in some way?
- How can we bring diversity and respect for others into our prayers, our worship celebrations and our holy days and holidays?
- How can we provide a safe and hospitable space for those facing racist discrimination?
- How can we provide suitable training and up-skilling to ensure those who believe they have a calling to perform various roles in the church can do so?

Action: Discuss and agree on something you can do together. Write up a plan with roles, responsibilities and a timetable. Display it on a noticeboard and put it into action.

PASSPORT OF CONCERNs

Invite the congregation to make **passports**, using A5 or A4 pieces of paper folded in half.

Ask them to write where they were born, their nationality and their ethnicity. Under each of these three headings invite them to write a concern about their village, town, city or country or about an ethnic community. For example:

BORN: Aberdeen **CONCERN:** Poverty

NATIONALITY: British **CONCERN:** Unemployment and racism

ETHNIC ORIGIN: Asian **CONCERN:** Young people's voices not being heard

Once these passports have been made, the congregation is free to keep them and take them home for prayer or to swap them and pray with them at home.

THANK-YOU CARDS

Each thank-you card need the maker to fold an A5 or A4 piece of paper in half. Invite the congregation to make/write thank-you cards for God in terms of racial justice and diversity. Ask them to think about all there is to be grateful for.

Once written, invite the congregation to either bring their cards to the front to place in a basket, take them home to pray over them (maybe placing them in their Bible or on their fridge or desk at work) or swap them with someone in their congregation to take home and pray about.

RESOURCES

Below is a list of resources for Racial Justice Sunday. While the list is by no means exhaustive, it contains books, reports and toolkits by Christian authors who provide both the informed and the uninitiated alike with a better understanding of racial-justice-related matters and their significance on these shores and elsewhere.

BOOKS

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- The Church of Scotland – Mission Forum. *Migrant and Multicultural Church*.
- The Irish Council of Churches. 2024. *From Every Nation? A Handbook for a Congregation's Journey from Welcome to Belonging*.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI): <https://ctbi.org.uk>
- CTBI's resources for Racial Justice Sunday provide a fulsome understanding of this annual celebration.
- Baptist Union: Visions of Colour: www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/379637/Visions_of_Colour.aspx
- The Baptist Union's Visions of Colour resource contains material that can be used throughout the year, including Black History Month.
- Evangelical Alliance: 10-step Roadmap to Racial Diversity and Unity: <https://www.eauk.org/what-we-do/networks/one-people-commission/10-step-roadmap-to-racial-diversity-and-unity>

