

The Colour of Faith!

Isaiah 56⁶⁻⁸; Psalm 67; Romans 11^{1-2a,29-32}; Matthew 15²¹⁻²⁸

*And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord ... these I will bring to my holy mountain.
(Isaiah 56⁶⁻⁷)*

Those of you who follow me on FaceBook will know that I gave blood 10 days ago. I took a picture of a promotional sign: it said, 'Proud to be a black blood donor.' My simple comment was that I didn't know that blood came in different colours. Little did I expect that in just a few days the issue of colour would become such an issue as the catastrophic events in Charlottesville in the USA, made much worse by President Trump's response.

Let me be quite clear on the main point I believe God wants us to hear today:
belonging IN God *trumps* belonging TO anything else!

Before we get to the readings - and they have, providentially, a great deal of relevance to what is happening in the world - it is a moral duty to be candid and clear in responding to the President of the United States. I give way to Bishop Nick Baines of Leeds who went into print in *Christianity Today*, saying:

'It appears that many Americans regret having voted for Donald Trump. Apparently, they believed his promises of magic restoration of greatness without asking questions of his empty rhetoric, 'His misogyny, amorality, financial track record, sexual behaviour, narcissism and nepotism (to name but a few of the obvious challenges) would have ruled out the candidacy of any other semi-reputable politician for the Presidency of the United States of America. His subsequent lying, shamelessness, vindictiveness and inhabiting of some "alternative reality" (in which things that happened didn't happen and things that didn't happen did happen; in which things he said he didn't say and things he didn't say he did say) cannot have come as anything but a disappointing revelation to anyone with half a brain or ears to hear.

'His espousal of the alt-right has not come as news. His condemnation of anyone and anything he sees as a challenge to himself ([former President Barack Obama, for instance) is weighed against his silence in the face of inconvenient truth or facts.

'Yet, none of this is a surprise. It was all there to be seen before he was elected.

There are moments in history where a tipping point is reached and it matters that people stand up and challenge the danger. This is one of them.

If he damns Islamic terrorists and wet liberals for their actions, we can expect him to damn right-wing militias and neo-Nazi criminals when they walk his streets and drive cars into ordinary people. Silence.

Silence isn't an option, especially as we note what Scripture says to us today:

- ✦ Isaiah tells us that foreigners are 'in' and Paul tells us that Jews aren't excluded in the family that God creates and renews in Jesus. Those were real challenges to the status-quo in Israel in the 6th Century BC and in the early Church in 1st Century Palestine.

The people of God, the Church, has to be an inclusive community in a way that stands outside of contemporary politics and as a challenge to any lack of equality or lack of respect for difference. I refuse to give examples of who is 'in' because every time you do that you open up the possibility of those who might be excluded.

Let me remind you of the main point I believe God wants us to hear today:
belonging IN God *trumps* belonging TO anything else!

So does the Gospel excuse rudeness to those from different races and different faiths?

- ✦ This woman is clear in her aim - for her daughter to be healed and the disciples don't know what to do with her. They pass the buck to Jesus - **send her away!** His response is to them, **I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel!** That could justify some segregation. But, surely Jesus is saying to *his* disciples: I am here to sort you out: you sort her out!
- ✦ However, the exchange continues to show that she is tenacious and that Jesus has a sense of humour! I see the twinkle in his eye when he says, **It is not fair to take the children food and throw it to the dogs.** It is rude, but it reflects the historic break-down between Jews and Samaritans. The woman responds with the same sharp wit, **Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.**
- ✦ The result of the encounter shows what matters - **Woman, great is your faith!** That is the things that breaks down barriers, for we were all outsiders that God welcomed in and in that is our healing and in that equality the potential of healing in our divided world.

Let me restate the main point I believe God wants us to hear today:
belonging IN God *trumps* belonging TO anything else!

What colour is your blood? We are all the same!

What colour is your faith? I know that, for me, it isn't black or white; it isn't even tartan and it certainly isn't rainbow! My faith is red - blood red! Jesus didn't give a pint - he gave it all and he gave it for you and me!