

READING MINSTER
PASTORAL LETTER FOR WEEK BEGINNING 27th JUNE 2020



I have recently had a few days away with my family who live in Yorkshire and we had a wonderful a trip to Swaledale in the Yorkshire Dales. That combined with us returning to collective worship in the Minster has meant this Pastoral Letter has been deferred. Please see the message at the end of this letter though about going forward.

I have written already on the “Black Lives Matter” issue which quite rightly has been much in evidence in the media and at major sporting events as the campaign maintains momentum. The picture above (no guessing which team is featured!) shows the take the knee position which signifies support for the cause. And it is right that the cause is treated with such importance. We are all wherever we come from and whoever we are loved and cherished by God. I was not intending on writing about this again, but I watched a television programme last night which had a profound and moving effect on me so much so that I was shedding silent tears as the credits rolled at the end.

Anthony was a talented young black person living in Liverpool. He had recently completed his A Levels and was destined for university. He was a gifted sportsman and was much loved by his family and his community. In 2005 when only eighteen he was viciously attacked, and murdered, under the cover of darkness in a Liverpool Park by two racists (who were subsequently detained, tried and imprisoned for this terrible crime). It is a true story so there is no spoiler alert here, but I would recommend you watch it on BBC iPlayer (it was originally broadcast on Monday 27th July on BBC1 and simply entitled “Anthony”).

Why do I refer to this programme? Yesterday morning on the radio, the former Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, spoke movingly about this programme and this family. And quite rightly he said that why did it take the murder of a black man in the USA by a policeman to start the Black Lives Matter campaign when we have in the past few years seen young black men murdered here in the UK. It was a very challenging statement by the retired Bishop but one that prompted me to sit and watch the programme. For in his description of these event James Jones quoted the mother of the murdered young man. When asked if the loss of her son, who she was devoted to, had affected her faith her reply was immediate. She said it had strengthened it because now she “only had God”.

There are times in all our lives when things happen to us, and to those we love, that can quite easily knock us of course and challenge our relationship with and belief in God. I do not say this lightly, but it is true. It is though at these dark times, when the light seems to have disappeared from our life, or our world, that we need to turn to the Christ Light, that one enduring, on-going, never ending source of light in this world.

There was another scene in this programme which moved me very much. The way the play had been written was to imagine what this young man's life would have been if he had not been so brutally killed. He met a young school teacher and they were married, and they had a child. Anthony's mother went to her church and she knelt before the cross in the dimmed and beautiful light of a modern building and simply said, with tears in her eyes, "thank you, thank you" as she gave thanks for the birth of her granddaughter.

Two important life lessons for us all in our ongoing relationship with God. The first is to realise that even when things seem bleak, when all seems lost, Jesus Christ is there with us in that moment of darkness. His light shines through the darkness of our anxiety - we only must look to find it and it is there.

The second is to give thanks. It is easy (if that is the right word) to turn to God when things are not good. Our God though is not some kind of universal insurance policy, God is living, loving and with us wherever we are in our life journey. So, when things do go well just spend a few moments to give thanks. For the God who is there in our moments of sadness, shock and loss is also there in our moments of joy. For the sense of joy, we feel is shared equally by God. Like any "parent" he only wants and yearns for the happiness of his children.

Two life lessons taken from a moving and beautifully crafted television programme. Anthony's mother's faith shone through the darkness. Her loss has meant the creation of a Trust (in Anthony's name) to overcome racism, wherever it lurks, by promotion of art and sport which can and do bring together people whatever the heritage, wherever they come from, or whatever badge society pins on them. If you get a chance watch it and you may well (like I did) shed a tear but you will feel the better for watching it and seeing (and appreciating) the power of faith and the love of God.

Revd Andrew Bond | Associate Vicar | Reading Minster 28th July 2020.

It has been a long haul through this pandemic, and I have written pastoral letters throughout this challenging time. With the "holiday season" upon us I propose to suspend sending these letters for the time being. I am very happy to continue to write them going forward - perhaps less frequently? They could form part of a series addressing certain issues of the day? I would though genuinely welcome your feedback (about the way forward) so the Ministry Team can collectively decide what is appropriate.

If you do want to give some comment, please send an email to contact@readingminster.org.com