



Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 8 February 2026 - The Second Sunday Before Lent / Racial Justice Sunday

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Genesis 1.1 - 2.3; Psalm 136 [or 136.1-9, 23-26]; Romans 8. 18-25; Matthew 6.25-34

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Sharon Byrne, Assistant Curate in Training, Fen Ditton Benefice; Bishop's Advisor for Racial Justice

Racial Justice Sunday is an ecumenical custom that began in 1995 in Britain and Ireland. The day was created in response to the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a Black teenager in South London, on 22 April 1993.

While many might think that racist attitudes and actions have lessened over the years, the stark reality is that racism today is as persistent and as devastating as it's ever been in the past. According to the charity Stop Hate UK racially motivated hate crimes are the highest reported type of Hate Crime in the UK. In 2021-2022 43% of reported incidents were motivated by race hate.

In 2025 we witnessed emerging Christian nationalism, distinct from mainstream Christianity and criticised for its far-right politics, anti-immigration and opposition to LGBTQ+ rights.

Racial Justice Sunday offers us the opportunity to reflect upon the pain experienced in our country and consider how to respond. We can start by acknowledging the beauty and diversity of our humanity is made in God's image.

Throughout the ancient world an image was believed to contain the essence of that which it represented. Genesis reminds us that all of humanity was created to embody God's qualities. We are symbols of God's presence to act on his behalf as his representatives in this world.

As his representatives we are invited to think about how we can create safe places of love and belonging by challenging racism, prejudice, discrimination and its effects in our parishes.

Creating a safe place for belonging comes with many benefits and blessings for those who experience racism, prejudice or discrimination. Matthew writes that Jesus urges us to “seek first the kingdom of God.” It is a place, a domain where God has kingly power, where he rules and reigns. A place where we can partner God in creating a safe place for others. As we dwell in this place, we will find a safe place for justice, mission and ministry underpinned by sharing Christ's love to our neighbour.

The kingdom of God is also a gift for all of us to receive and to take into our hands. It is a place where God's will is done, characterised by his righteousness, peace, joy and love. For this reason, Jesus urges us not to worry, a word used six times in this passage.

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry." Do not be anxious or be concerned. Jesus telling us not to worry may at first sound impossible, overly simplified, unrealistic, even glib.

He understands our proclivity to doubt, and we are challenged again as he asks, "can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" Jesus asks us to consider how God works in the natural world. What if we considered replacing worry with trust?

The expectation in the passage is that we can trust the Creator to care for all creatures and vegetation. We are then asked to consider, "Are you not of more value than they?" We can trust in Jesus' words that each of us has intrinsic value. We can trust that our heavenly Father knows what we need. We can trust the biblical record of a faithful God providing in the midst of scarcity, crisis, failure and despair. He will not forget us, as Psalm 136 proclaims, "It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever." We are the beneficiaries of this steadfast love and his righteousness.

And in turn Jesus reminds us to seek God's righteousness. A righteousness that is in agreement with God's standards. Loving our neighbour and working for justice and equity wherever we find ourselves.

Last summer our news reported riots and violent threats towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Following this, flags in cities, towns and villages across the UK were flown creating a feeling of unease or fear for many.

In December 2025, the Unite the Kingdom movement organised a carol service with the slogan promising to put "**Christ Back into Christmas.**" Many church leaders criticised the event and the use of the name of Christ being used to politicise faith and exclude the other.

In his introduction to Racial Justice Sunday 2026 Richard Reddie reminds us, "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." As his representatives in his kingdom this year we will have opportunities to create safe places for belonging. Together we can demonstrate the characteristics of the kingdom in our parishes by:

- Consider if we are treating others differently because of their race
- Actively learn about and understand other cultures to our own
- Take action or speak up when you see racist behaviour or attitudes
- Try and do things to make our world less racist
- Let people of different races know that you are their ally

These are not new concepts, rather actions that we see and hear Jesus engage with throughout his earthly ministry. When the opportunity arises, each of us can contribute to the gospel imperative of loving our neighbour.

As we think about the people in our parish and our nation, consider those who may be experiencing racism and discrimination today. Let us contemplate the intrinsic value of every individual made in the image of God.

If the opportunity arises for us to act justly even if it feels like a small thing, we are on the way to creating a safe place of belonging as endeavour to seek his kingdom and righteousness as his representatives in the kingdom of God.

The full resource can be accessed here:

<https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Racial-Justice-Sunday-resource-2026.pdf.pagespeed.ce.dCns4cfhgC.pdf>

Also see link from 'Churches Together' <https://ctbi.org.uk/category/witnessing-together/racial-justice/racial-justice-sunday/>

The Diocese of Ely have brought together a group of diverse people to form their own Racial Justice Action Group that seeks to contribute to greater racial justice within the diocese. Using the Five Pillars listed in From Lament to Action: Participation, Education, Training & Mentoring, Young People and Structures and Governance we have created a project action plan to think through and implement several desired outcomes that include:

- Increase UKME/GMH participation including appointments in Ely Diocese of Ely
- Increase support for UKME/GMH with the Diocese of Ely
- Increase diversity in schools including in recruitment/appointments
- Minimise the risk of children, staff, parents and wider school communities feeling marginalised
- Increase openness to understanding unconscious bias in educational institutions, and to seek change
- Embed anti-racism practices on a broad scale, including discernment, selection and recruitment, online and ongoing intercultural awareness training
- Make youth groups more inclusive
- Promote UKME/GMH young people's life chances
- Policy, structures, and governance used to identify and eradicate racism
- Policy structures, and governance used to increase representation and participation of UKME/GMH at all levels

The Revd Sharon Byrne is the Bishop's Advisor for Racial Justice, guiding and advising, especially in the significant wider agenda of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, ensuring that UKME/GMH matters are not considered in isolation.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to

feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Loving God, you created each one of us in your own image.

Yet yours is a world made glorious by its rich diversity. This we sometimes misunderstand, sometimes fear.

Gracious God – hear our prayer

Give us the patience to build on what unites us, to celebrate our differences and to learn from them.

Grant us the wisdom to recognise your Church, beyond the walls of a building, reaching out across all communities, countries and cultures.

Gracious God – hear our prayer

Give us the courage to offer refuge to those in need, to challenge prejudice and seek justice for all.

Help us see that you created us in your image.
Neighbour or stranger, always our brother or sister.

Gracious God – hear our prayer

(Based on a prayer by Yashoda Sutcliffe/CARJ (Catholic Association for Racial Justice)

God of our past, present and future,
as we pray for end to suffering caused by racism
lead us this day to walk with one another,

pray with one another and work together,
so that we create a future based on justice and healing,
where all can fulfil the hope you have for all peoples.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen

(Based on a prayer from Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for Racial Justice Sunday 2023)

Suggested hymns/songs

- Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy
- Beauty for brokenness
- God of Freedom, God of Justice
- Longing for light, we wait in darkness (Christ be our light)
- Brother, sister, let me serve you
- My song is love unknown
- The church's one foundation

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://engageworship.com) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)