



Sermon preached on Sunday 25 October by Revd Nigel Uden.

Readings: I Thessalonians 2.1-8; Amos 5.18-24; Luke 10.25-37

A fourth way to mark Black History Month is to make sure that we are committed to black lives mattering for not just a few weeks of the year, but all of the time. It's about this subtle but significant journey from 'not being racist' to 'being anti-racist'.

In the end, preachers can only speak for themselves. I dare not impute my shortcomings to you. But if I *do* speak for myself, I know that my aspiration is not to be racist. I profoundly do not wish my attitudes, actions and words to suggest that black lives do not matter. The problem is that I know how easily, if unintentionally, racist things happen, just like sexist ones do, too. Last time I realised it had happened with me was when I was aware of an entirely irrational anxiety as someone from another culture sat next to me late at night on a train. I had to restrain myself from wanting to move to another carriage. As Paul has it, 'the good I would do, I do not do.' (Romans 9.19) So I feel the guilt of hypocrisy, that I talk the talk without always walking the walk.

Jesus' parable of how people treated the one beaten up by robbers and left for dead is well known. We might say well-loved; *so* well-loved that we can miss the challenge of its call not to walk by on the other side when we see people suffering. But Amos's prophecy has more urgency to it. Having expressed God's disappointment in those who enjoy pious festivals but tolerate injustice, he says, 'let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.' The language here has something of the obligation about it. It's not an invitation but an instruction. Not an idea but an imperative. LET just roll down. It urges doing something definite and active. And what that does to me is to help me see that 'not being a racist' is fine – especially if I succeed - but actively being anti-racist – 'rooting out this wrong' - is the ideal to which to aspire, as individuals and as Downing Place Church – or wherever the church is to which we belong. It's about working for a society that not only *says* black lives matter, but strives for one in pursuit of that day about which the choir sang: *when every hand joins every hand and together moulds our destiny: that's when we'll be free. ...when [we] live in dignity: that's when we'll be free; when everyone joins in our song and together singing harmony: that's when we'll be free.*

Rather like Black Lives Matter, Black History Month is not only the stuff of cultural events and newspaper articles. It's the clarion call to become what God made us to be, and gave Jesus Christ to redeem us to become. And because I know I can get this stuff so badly wrong, *that* is why I must pray, in order to open myself to the work of God's Holy Spirit, by which alone, I can do the good God calls me to do. The blessing is, that fuelled by that Spirit I can get nearer to loving as I am loved by God, and that's the source from which true joy, like justice, rolls down like an ever-flowing stream.

So we do indeed pray, again enabled to do so by the spirituality of Africa, in words from a South African active in the campaign to replace apartheid with that democracy, which, at its best makes real how the entire rainbow of lives matter.