



SERMONS

by

Anthony Baateng

Date: 19th July 2020

Preacher: Anthony Boateng

Bible readings: Romans 8:12-25 and Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Title: *"Institutional racism"*

In our gospel reading this morning, which I have intentionally paraphrased, Matthew presents a parable about the Kingdom of God using the analogy of seeds, along with our response, to highlight the symbolic conflict between good and evil.

Jesus, the Son of Man, is the one who sows the good seed, while the enemy sows the bad seed discreetly when no one is watching. The bad seed symbolizes the institutional network often referred to as a religion, filled with discrimination and institutional racism. Conversely, the good seed represents the Church as a faithful community empowered by the Holy Spirit to practically challenge institutions and nations to dismantle discrimination and the structures which promote, sustain, and enable institutional racism. Jesus teaches us in this parable that both coexist in our world.

In our wider Church, I believe we have genuinely good lay people and ministers (of all races) who are filled with the Holy Spirit and desire to be vehicles of change. However, we also have those who are complicit and embedded in the system, often intending to systematically suppress the oppressed by creating division, forcing conformity to the status quo, and exploiting them.

Across many parts of the world, the anger and distress over the killings of black people and those who have been abused reverberate through movements such as 'Black Lives Matter'. In response to this, I recently participated in an interview with BBC Radio 4 and the Methodist Church for their podcast, which has been broadcasted.

In our wider Church context, the virus known as institutional racism is widespread. We are busy pulling each other down instead of raising each other up. If you're black, you're less likely to rise into senior leadership. If you're black, you're more likely to find yourself on committees in a voluntary capacity. Black people rarely transition into full leadership in the Connexion. The question is, are we children of a lesser God? Do we worship a lesser God? Or is our worship in vain? The answer to my rhetorical questions is a resounding NO. In response to some of these issues, with my active involvement, the Methodist Conference recently voted to increase work on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Jesus tells us in our parable this morning that there will be a day of reckoning. Brothers and sisters, I'm afraid the time is near. So we can either work together to get our house in order or hide through hypocrisy and tokenism, but that will not save us or solve our problems.

The good news is that God is with us. This morning, God is telling us that a change is coming. So wait, keep watch, and take heart! Through Christ's death and resurrection, we have received salvation; forgiveness for our sins as he paid the price with his blood on the cross. Upon His ascension, the power of the Holy Spirit has brought heaven on earth to untangle institutional racism, sickness, and oppression. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee that God's plans for us and the work have been fulfilled.

Moving forward, we need to recognize that the kingdom of God is already here in our midst, not a part of some distant future. It carries the authority to transform lives and set the oppressed free. This does not mean everything is perfect; rather, Paul in Romans 8:12-25 urges us to fulfil God's righteousness by living in the power of the Spirit and according to the Spirit, trusting that God will bring good out of current sufferings. In light of COVID-19, the 'Me Too' and 'Black Lives Matter' movements, the Church is being called to take dominion by playing a significant part in bringing hope and establishing God's Kingdom on earth.

Luke 17:21 states, "nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." Luke reveals the corporate and public nature of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we need to be image-bearers of Christ by practically demonstrating to the world that we are taking all necessary actions to correct injustices, combat racism, and stand in solidarity with victims. Brothers and sisters, as a Church, I believe God is urging us to proactively seek, with greater commitment, to address the lack of diverse representation in leadership positions and dismantle institutional racism.

I submit to you that the Kingdom of God is found squarely in the middle of institutional racism, social evil, discrimination, suffering, and exploitation. However, God works maturity and redemptive good in the midst of evil. And we are called to be partakers of God's work and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

There's a famous quote from Martin Niemoller who said,

"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionist, and I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for."

Brothers and sisters, this morning, I don't know where your head is at. Perhaps you're facing a difficult period in your faith journey. Perhaps you are feeling helpless and confused? Maybe you have been directly or indirectly affected by racism. Whatever the case, I want you to know that God cares for you. He is calling you – it is a divine invitation. So come, unload your burden, and trade them for joy. Take a leap of faith and respond to His open invitation of love, and your life will never be the same again. Amen.

Gracious God, give us strength and courage to be a faithful community empowered by the Holy Spirit to practically challenge institutions and nations to dismantle institutional racism and the structures that promote, sustain, and enable it. **Amen.**