

## Inclusive Church - Ethnicity - Jan 28th 2024

Genesis 1:1 - 27

John 4: 1 - 10

Question to congregation - how would you define ethnicity?

What does race, colour, culture mean to you?

Sometimes we use these things to define ourselves as different to others.

Its not wrong, it can be useful. You couldn't have a Scottish referendum or a uk prime minister unless there were borders, boundaries. Differences.

When I was growing up, I was taught to use a knife and fork to eat. Go me.

I was told it was grown up, proper, the correct way to eat.

Then I see on TV, I meet at school, Indians and other people - who eat with their hands.

Wo! Savages - uncivilised? I go to India, I eat with my hands.

Is it wrong, is it weird? Should we all eat with our hands, or all eat with knives and forks?

So - we're looking at Ethnicity today and in a fortnight.

What would it mean to be inclusive of ethnicity?

Well like disability 2 weeks ago, it is something to do with words - black, person of colour etc

And it is something to do with whose problem is it?

Like its building that handicaps the person in the wheelchair - its not their handicap

It seems that race and ethnicity is a problem for us, as white British - its our problem.

Not the others

Quotes from book p10 - Rosemarie

"I was forced to start thinking about teh connections between ethnicity adn faith when I was 7.

That was the age I migrated to the UK as a confident, cheeky Caribbean Anglican. I came from

Barbados as a British subject to join family members, but I learnt quickly that I was not

considered Barbadian or British in my new home, but instead had to accept a new and

designated identity as a 'coloured' West Indian. I also found that I and my family were not

welcomed in the local Anglican Church, and although I was enrolled in teh nearest Church of

England primary school, the family attended the local Methodist church. ...

What I knew was that I felt excluded from the majority community around me by the colour of my skin adn ethnicity, and excluded from my church family that I had been born into."

This book also has some stories from Mukti Barton

- she is Indian, and married to a white vicar named Stephen.

She's surprised - she leaves Hindu India, to come to christian Britain, but she's not welcome!

She goes to a dinner party and the diplomat ignores her - so sorry we left you on your own.

She points out the assumptions people make - your Indian, what religion are you?

When there are millions more Christians in India than in the Uk, and it is far older -going back to

Thomas - than our beliefs in UK.

And you say - but times have changed.

Well I wish - another story from someone who's in tears in 2014, in a mother's prayer group, crying because her 7 year old has just been told by the their kids that they're not allowed to play with him because he is black.

I think its hard for us as white people to believe that such blatant racism still goes on - but it does.

And also its hard for us to know what it would be like - feel like, to have that every time you go somewhere people are staring at you, or you're not sure whether they're friend or foe.

So its hardly surprising, given that churches turned people of colour away - that they set up their own churches. And black majority churches have done very well, far outgrowing the other kinds of churches.

And now we have - black led churches, polish churches, Chinese churches, Asian church etc.

And what's good about those churches is that no-one is bothered about the colour of your skin or your ethnicity. Its not a problem or an issue.

Its very modern too - since the 2nd ww our culture has been gradually fragmenting. We used to feel we were one community, and we gathered around 2 tv channels and talked about the same tv programme. Then there were 4 or 5 channels, and now with you tube and the internet there's a channel for everyone. You'll never have to talk or tolerate or mix with anyone - if you don't like this, find something that is just for you. Its all very individualistic, and niche, and churches do the same. You don't like my theology - find a more fundamental or liberal church, you don't like the age of people here, join something younger or older.

And the other thing about ethnic churches, like black led etc, is its VERY Biblical.

That's what the tribes of Israel were all about. Its what Israel vs Judah were all about. Its what Jews and Samaritans were all about - you can't worship with us.

Adn its was the first problem of Christians - well, that's great Jews for Jesus and all that - but what about those gentiles?

Peter - SAINT Peter goes to visit some gentile Christians, and he makes sure he doesn't sit at the same table as them so he'd not defiled.

So all this church racism is very Biblical.

But its not the kingdom of God, its not Jesus - who ate with tax collectors, sinners, gentiles, women, lepers and all.

Are you ready for some class A theology?  
This is the hard stuff - so watch out.

God loves difference. God loves diversity.  
He created it, he created with it.

His first act is not to make everything the same or draw us all into one lump -  
His first act is to divide - to make a difference.

Here's a bunch of stuff - lets split it into light and dark - lets divide them and make them opposite to each other.

Here some water - what's it all doing together - lets divide it and make it different.

We'll make some sky and something different - land.

We'll make trees - how many types - oh how about 73,000 different types!

Lets make all kinds of vegetation.  
Its like God is addicted to difference  
He can't get enough of things not being the same.  
The night sky - different to the day sky.  
Lets make the night sky move so its not fixed! Hal!

Shall I tell you about the animal and insects and birds and creatures?  
Guess what he made them - DIFFERENT!  
And humans - well I'm glad he made them all the same!  
What? He divided them into men and women!  
And at least all the men were the same and all the women were the same - yes?  
No

Diversity is a God Value.  
In the kingdom of God difference is the norm.

And the amazingness of God is that there is still a one-ness - you can tell what a human is and what a monkey is? But all 7 billion humans are different. A bit like the three ness of God and God's oneness.

So you can see how wrong a black majority church is, or a Chinese church or a white middle class church.  
How far from the kingdom of God.

So when we talk about being inclusive, its about celebrating our differences, coming with our differences, rather than saying - how can we get those coloured folk to join us, and fit in with us.

And its not about saying - we're all the same underneath,  
or trying to diminish the difference

God says - I gave you the gift of difference... enjoy it, celebrate it

Beuase when we accept who we are, our difference, and accept someone else for who they are..  
We become more aware of ourselves, and others and God.

To finish -  
Can you picture some green land, and there are lots of little walled castles dotted around it.  
Everyone is huddled together, looking inwards,  
Sometimes some of them peek over the walls at another castle - and try and see them.  
Sometimes some of them throw rocks and things at the others.

Everyone's safe, with their own kind.

Suddenly someone notices someone standing, in the middle of the grass  
With no walls - saying anyone who wants to join me is welcome.  
And from all the castles, people come out and join.

Now the one thing that unites all teh groups is their fear and hatred of those without walls.

The question is - are behind a wall, or have you joined the middle?  
Which would you rather St James was like?