

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY 23rd APRIL 2018

Good Morning,

Sometimes in the news there's a convergence of events that together make an even greater impact.

We've had the 50th Anniversary of both the assassination of Martin Luther King and Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech; and yesterday was the 25th anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence. These events form the jagged, discordant notes that accompany the 70th Anniversary of the Windrush. Together they've stirred much soul searching about racism.

I heard a leader of one of our black-led churches say that when he left the Caribbean in the 1950s his mother told him to find three things: first, find a church to give thanks to God; second, find a Post Office to write home and tell me you've arrived safely; and third, find a friend. He paused and said wistfully, "I eventually found the Post Office."

The week before Easter, Holy Week, I was in St Louis Missouri where a few years ago in the suburb of Ferguson a policeman had shot down an unarmed black teenager and provoked mass protest throughout America.

Christians remember Jesus making his own protest in Holy Week. He cleared out the traders who had put up their stalls in that part of the Temple set aside for other races to pray.

Jesus raged against the racism that denied them their own holy place. He rubbed it in quoting the prophets, "My house shall be a House of Prayer for ALL races". Jesus believed in a God without borders. But it's said in America that Sunday morning, when so many go to Church, is still its most segregated hour.

When Enoch Powell made his speech in 1968 I was a student at Exeter University. He came to our campus next after Birmingham. The Great Hall was packed. I cannot remember a word he said but I do recall vividly an air of anxiety hanging over us.

Over four decades later I returned to that Great Hall for a Graduation Ceremony. The transformation could not have been greater - for there presiding over every one of the 15 ceremonies was the then Chancellor - Baroness Floella Benjamin, born in Trinidad and brought up in Britain. The Doyenne of Play School awarding degrees to her now grown up children of every colour.

Racism may well be endemic in all societies, but the virus is not without its antibodies, not least in the river of grace that has flowed over the last 25 years from the parents of Stephen Lawrence.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE