

Thought for the Day 27th July 2020

Good morning.

On Thursday this week it'll be the 15th Anniversary of the murder of Anthony Walker, and tonight on BBC 1 Jimmy McGovern's play 'Anthony' will tell the story of the life he never got the chance to live.

I led Anthony's funeral in Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral and last year on Good Friday I interviewed his mother Gee Walker here on Radio 4. When I asked her to describe him she said, "He was just every mother's dream child. Thank God he gave me everything I ask for. Tall, dark, handsome. Sensitive. Loved me, loved God, loved people."

Gee wanted him to be a preacher, Anthony wanted to be a lawyer. He used to taunt his teachers with a cheeky grin, "Go on Miss. Smile. Have a nice day!" He was fit and strong. No-one would mess with him. Except one night on 29th July 2005 Michael Barton and Paul Taylor hurled racist abuse at him and his friends at a bus stop in Huyton and Taylor sank an ice-axe into Anthony's head.

When Gee got to the hospital and insisted on seeing him she told me all she had to do was to follow his blood. "His blood led me to him".

By this time Gee had got hundreds of people all over the world praying for Anthony but "he never regained consciousness" and died.

When I asked her, "What did that do to your faith?" I didn't expect what followed. "That increased my faith because I realised that now all I've got is God."

I wish I could replay the whole 60 minutes we recorded. Or better still, see the full three score years and ten that Anthony should have lived. For he had the faith and the values of his mother.

As I've looked back over the last 27 years and the deaths of Stephen Lawrence, Damilola Taylor and Anthony Walker I've wondered why it's taken the killing of an unknown man in Minneapolis to make us in this country 'take the knee'. Why did not the murder of three of our own black teenagers drive us to our knees.

As I've watched Anthony's mother – her willingness to forgive, her refusal to be consumed by hatred - I've wondered if we've presumed too much on the decency of the Lawrences, the Taylors and the Walkers.

On this programme Gee Walker said she hoped the play tonight would "honour" Anthony.

Unlike a statue it'll make him come alive, breathing life back into his wounded body.

It'll be a vindication - and a Resurrection.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE