

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

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Once upon a time all the news was of Brexit, with the pundits telling us all the pros and cons and trying to persuade us what to think and do as a nation. Did we do the right thing?

Then came the coronavirus pandemic, with the pundits telling us all the pros and cons of maintaining physical health – and economic health. What were we to think and do as individuals, as a nation - and even worldwide?

Then came the horrific murder of George Floyd, with all the righteous indignation around racism, prejudice and discrimination of every sort. Sadly some reaction and protests have degenerated into riots and vandalism, which are neither honouring to their cause nor productive. What are we to think and do as members of the world-wide community, as individuals, and especially a Christians?

I suspect the answers to all these questions are a whole lot more questions – and involves much more than just a “thought for the week”. As we have seen and heard from so much media cover, the reaction to the senseless murder of a black man has raised many more issues than racism. Whilst I think I can honestly say I have never been a racist, I cannot say I have never, indeed, am never, prejudiced; prejudice is an attitude which covers a much wider range of issues. A group of a dozen American ministers of different denominations and different ethnic backgrounds have produced a video rejecting all forms of oppression, reminding us that Jesus showed us the way of servanthood, not domination. You could watch this for yourselves at <https://tinyurl.com/ybm2cgje>

Let’s not kid ourselves that discrimination does not occur within the church. It’s one thing to say we find it easier to worship God in the format we have come to love and share at AFC, but who are we to say that God’s spirit is not at work, or to be found, in other churches? The present Baptist Union president is partly Nigerian by birth; he has had fellow ministers dismissive of his church’s successful outreach to the community as “a black thing”. How would we like to be told our success at Tea@3 or Lunchbreak

is because we are white? What's the colour of our skin got to do with anything?

I'm sure I'm not the only one who has experience of natural customs and reactions, with which we are familiar in the UK, being totally misunderstood in other countries – and vice versa. In India the nod of the head from side to side means agreement, whereas for us that means “not sure”. When my parents welcomed some American servicemen into our home during the war, telling them to make themselves at home because we are “just homely” people, they immediately contradicted that statement. For them the words meant we were ugly! For a black child to look you in the eye directly would be disrespectful, for us, not to do that suggests at best shyness, but at worst being shifty.

In our own community, let us beware of being judgmental of each other as we make our individual decision about the timing of return to congregational worship in our church building, as and when we are permitted. Let's not think we know other people's reasoning for their actions.

It seems to me that we all have a great deal of thinking to do. How do we decide what is right? There was a time when many young Christians wore bracelets bearing the inscription “WWJD?” – What would Jesus do? He wasn't always placid or passive. Think of when he overturned the tables of the crooked money-changers in the temple, or some of the outspoken things he said about the Pharisees (Matt 23). If we look to “experts” for guidance, we will only hear what they, in their prejudice, consider to be right.

Surely our only guide can be the example of Jesus himself, interpreted to us in our present situations by God's Holy Spirit. That might sound almost too simple - if only it were. In the months and years ahead will we be able to look back and believe we have done the right thing?