



# God is for Justice & Unity

***Do not take advantage of each other,  
but fear your God but fear your God.”***

## INTRODUCTION

“I remember the first time someone asked me ‘What denomination are you?’ I didn’t know how to respond. I could merely shrug it off. As a child I didn’t understand the concept that there were subcategories of Christians, or that we were divided. I just thought we all worshipped and loved Jesus and this gave us the label as followers of Christ. You may call this naive, but I think there is a beauty to this understanding of unity. This doesn’t negate the tapestry of churches, or remove the importance of theology, and differences that exist here, but there is a profound joy in seeing all of us coming together as one, despite our differences and shortcomings.

What does it mean to be a united church? The command for church unity can be particularly difficult when we consider a God of Justice. For we are a broken church, who have, in many instances, been guilty of oppression, exclusion and wrongdoing. Yet in the midst of this reality, the Holy Spirit meets us, and unifies us. Allowing us to heal, change and move.”

# ICE BREAKER

**Did you know?** In 2020, there were 174 victims of trafficking within Oxfordshire from 26 different nations. Sadly, this figure only represents those that are identified and there may be many more unjustly trafficked into the region.<sup>12</sup>

**What does Justice mean to you?**

# REFLECTION

***Read Leviticus 25:8-38 aloud***

God is instituting the restorative and redemptive practice of the Year of Jubilee to the Israelites. This year was a great reset for the whole community, to maintain justice and to ensure equity for each family, clan and individual and to promote unity amongst the Israelites. Each of the jubilee laws are established to avoid exploitation and injustice being perpetuated from generation to generation. The laws involve proclaiming liberty throughout all the lands, not taking advantage of one another, cancellation of debts, redemption for the poor, care for the land and alleviating poverty. The laws and principles at play involve the social, economic and natural environments, further highlighting the Lord's character and God's desire for all of creation, for all of His people and for their ultimate material and physical wellbeing. It demonstrates God's demand for social justice amongst His followers as well as unity for them to live in harmony from generation to generation.

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<sup>12</sup> UK Government, Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK

Divide into groups of three or four and reflect on these questions:

- What does this passage reveal to you about God's character?
- What is your reaction to the call for redemption socially, interpersonally, economically and in nature?
- In what ways can you see this restorative justice enabling unity?

***Read Acts 10:30-35 & 44-48 aloud***

Prior to these verses, we are introduced to Cornelius, a God-fearing Roman centurion, yet to encounter Christ. At the time, his subsequent decision to follow Christ and spread the gospel was paradoxical as Roman centurions notoriously limited the growth of the gospel. But Cornelius gave generously to those in need and regularly prayed to God (Acts 10:1-2). In response to a vision from God, Cornelius sends people to get Peter. When we reach verse 30, Peter is at Cornelius' house. Roman centurions would not associate with Jews, and would especially not welcome them into their homes. Yet, God has chosen to use this Roman Centurion to spread the gospel. Peter's reaction is shown (verse 34-45); and he says that God shows no favouritism, as he still chose to reveal himself to Gentiles. God desires unity amongst peoples and nations, across political, societal and power divides.

Later, in chapter 11 Peter has to explain why he chose to interact with the Romans. This would have been seen as out of the ordinary. However, later in scripture (Galatians 2:11-21) we see how Peter falls into his old ways of discriminating and choosing not to associate with gentiles.

Divide into groups of three or four and reflect on these questions:

- What do you think about Peter's actions here?
- Can you identify with Peter in any way?
- It would have been costly to the Roman Centurion to follow Jesus. What comes to mind when you think of the cost of pursuing Christ & unity?



### RFJ Remarks

In Luke 4:16-19 Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-2: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” Jesus proclaims this mission at the start of his ministry, alluding to the Year of Jubilee. Seeing this highlighted in key passages in the Old & New Testament demonstrates how integral God’s heart for justice is demonstrated throughout scripture, and is modelled for us to follow. We’re also reminded in Galatians 3:28 that all those baptised into Christ are children of God, and take on a new identity, where we are all one in Christ. Therefore, we should desire to live in unity, guided by the Holy Spirit.”

## CURRENT ISSUE

**“We write cheques to end human trafficking but lack concern for how our demand for cheap, disposable clothing generates a larger system of exploitation...We abstract injustice, allowing ourselves to believe we no longer have a direct hand in it”<sup>13</sup> - Soong-Chan Rah**

There are many injustices in our immediate context, financial difficulties amongst individuals and families struggling to make ends meet, trafficking, violence, social divides and access to services. Within a church community, disunity can be at play, when people have been a part of a community for several years, but never had an invitation to a fellow believer’s home. Some have entered a church building, but felt unwelcome, leaving without speaking to a single person. The church, at times, has not fully embraced God’s heart for all people. We too, may choose not to engage with or advocate for those who are foreign or different to us. We can fall into a trap of wanting to only engage with people like ourselves, rather than seek unity in differences.

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<sup>13</sup> USoong-Chan Rah, Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times, p.49

# RESPONSE

Our actions as a response should be grounded in prayer. We need the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts, to transform our words and actions. In a sense it is comforting to know that Peter, the rock, was not perfect in his ways, he needed to confront the patterns of behaviour and cultural norms that he continued doing but were displeasing to God and counter to His desire for unity. We are called to love our neighbour, regardless of where they are from, and to seek restorative and redemptive action in place of injustice. The early church desired to live according to the Holy Spirit, who brings a marker of unity. What would it look like for us to seek the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts individually, to welcome our neighbours, those of other backgrounds, the refugee, the vulnerably housed? To seek restorative justice in our actions, opportunities, finances and lifestyle?

# PRAYER AND MINISTRY

- Pray for the courage to denounce racial injustice, in all of its forms, as individuals and as a church.
- Pray for repentance from patterns of behaviour or thoughts which contribute towards injustice or work against unity.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to bring about restoration and redemption to brokenness caused by injustice - personally, in our church and in our nations.
- Pray for unity in our church community.

# ACTION

This week:

- Learn about a local initiative in Oxford dedicated to raising awareness of the racial disparities in health, income, education or an area of interest particularly on your heart. Looking at the [Ethnicity Facts and Figures page](#) on the government website could be a helpful place to start.
- Bring in the name of the initiative, and perhaps provide a link to donate to share with your small group the following week.
- Pray individually and as a small group for each of the initiatives shared, and pray for any area of racial injustice or disunity that you encounter within what is shared.