

A Churchwarden writes

When I needed a neighbour

Were you there, were you there?

So we sing in the hymn by Sydney Carter.

“Who is my neighbour?” the lawyer asks Jesus. In reply Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, demonstrating clearly that the despised Samaritan was actually obeying, better than they were, the Law of Moses that the priest and the Levite purported to follow. I find my conscience pricking as I reflect on that. It is hard quite often to look beyond the superficial and glimpse the fellow human being behind what may be an irritating or aggressive mask.

In the letter to the Hebrews the writer warns the readers, ‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’ I equate that with the description in Matthew 25 of the Judgment of the Nations when in verse 40 the King says ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.’ My daily prayer is to see something of the divine in everyone and indeed every living thing and so to treat all of creation with respect.

It is with such thoughts as the background that I have felt increasingly disturbed by some of the accounts in the various news media of the treatment of some of our residents of Caribbean origin. That their parents had responded to our country’s invitation to them to come here to help ease the labour shortage after the war and that they have lived here for decades seems to have been forgotten in the desire to reduce current immigration. It was their parents who had met the unpleasant hostility to their presence that I remember from seeing the signs in windows advertising ‘Rooms to Let’, but followed by ‘No blacks, No Irish’ when I was first in London at University.

It wasn’t only the landladies at fault but sadly many churches were less than welcoming too. I like to think that St Mary’s has a big heart and that everyone feels welcomed whether they are coming for a service or for events such as the summer Fete and the various activities in the Hall.

Ironically it is the Ministry of Justice that is responsible for overseeing the implementation of immigration policy as it is hard to see anything just about the way it is carried out. However, we are not helpless and there are ways we can try to see that our politicians are made aware of problems by writing to local councillors or to our MP. I recently had a very encouraging reply to a letter I had sent to Mohammed Yasin about the detention of asylum seekers who have been victims of torture. In it he showed considerable awareness of the problems and his interest and concern. As Martin Luther King said, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice.”

And the creed and the colour

And the name won’t matter

That is how God sees each person so it is how we must see each other too.

I found this prayer in the USPG prayer diary on the shelf by the door in church and it seems appropriate to this topic.

God of justice, you call us to live out your gospel

and to stand in solidarity with those who are oppressed.

Give us the will and courage to faithfully follow you

in the way that leads through the cross to resurrection life.

Jane