



## **We need to talk about race - when anti-racism is a start but not the end...**

### **Week 4 - Praying with our eyes wide open**

In the years leading up to 2016, the question that kept ringing in Mark Young's ears, the President of the Denver Seminary, was, "Mark, are you a racist?"

As Mark allowed God to search his heart on the matter, he began to realise that racism was much bigger than any personal prejudice; it was really a multidimensional social reality. Through narrowly defining what racism is, Mark realised this alleviated his personal responsibilities but all it really did was make it someone else's problem and allowed him to largely ignore it.

Drawing on a book titled *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, Mark concluded that racism was much broader. We live in "a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships".

This is a very honest and raw reflection. It is one we could benefit from by reflecting on in prayer.

While for a number of us racism is invisible in our daily lives, for many of our First Nation's people and people from different ethnic groups it is all pervasive and, in many cases, extremely destructive. In the end while race blindness is a problem the biggest challenge lies in our silence - our unconscious support of the racial divide that obscures and perpetuates the injustices.

Before you and I take the defensive position, let's pause and ask the Holy Spirit to help us open our eyes widely.

If we are willing to take the risk, ask God for a moment to see racism and the prevailing injustices through his eyes.

I appreciate this is a dangerous prayer.

Take a moment to be still, draw breath and listen to what the Spirit is saying.

There is no need to come to him with a defensive heart. He is aware of what lies at the core of our being; he knows what makes us tick.

Praying with our eyes open wide is about listening to him and being responsive to the invitation he extends to be part of the solution not the problem.

Thank him that all, regardless of race, colour or creed, have been and are created in his image, both male and female. (Genesis 1:26-27)

Thank God that through Jesus' death on the cross the historical racial divides have been broken. There is no longer Jew and Gentile, nor slave or free, nor male or female for he has made them one people. (Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 2:15-16)

Thank him that he has shown you what it means to love the Lord your God, with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind, and how to love your neighbours as yourself. Never lose sight of the fact that Jesus told us that the neighbour we are to love often lies outside our comfort zone.

Thank him for the blessings he has bestowed on you and ask how you can use what he has freely given to address the past and present injustices as you walk humbly with him.

Ask him to extend and stretch your curiosity and care for those who have been marginalised, and to bring into your life those who you can learn from and grow with, as you humbly walk with your Lord in righteousness, justice and mercy.

Pray one by one for those who have been dispossessed through racial injustices starting with our First Nation's People and moving to those who are judged and excluded solely because of their race, colour and creed. Share these prayer concerns with others as you seek to be part of God's solutions and not be the one who either consciously or unconsciously perpetuates injustices.

Back to Mark's question, "Am I a racist?"

Below is a prayer penned by Mark that emerged from the Race Relations Working Group at the Seminary in 2016.

Let's join Mark and others in praying this prayer of lament, repentance and commitment...

**Have mercy on me, O Lord.**

*I have blinded my eyes. In spite of the clear evidence of deeply embedded racism all around me, I have looked the other way. Too many have died. Too many have suffered. Too many have been locked out and cast aside. Too many indignities. Too many injustices. And still I looked the other way.*

**Have mercy on me, O Lord.**

*I have hardened my heart. Believing the lie that blacks [people of colour] have the same opportunities as whites, I could not allow myself to admit that my life was shaped as much by racism as theirs - mine to benefit and theirs to harm. But it was and it is and it will continue to be. I have cared too little. I have grieved too little.*

**Have mercy on me, O Lord.**

*I have silenced my tongue. My voice has not been raised in prophetic rebuke and anger. My feet have not stepped out for justice alongside those who have more courage than I. And in my silence I am an accomplice to bigotry.*

**Forgive me, O Lord.**

*I have sinned against you and against those who suffer the evil of racism. Indifference has smothered my soul and snuffed out fleeting impulses for reconciliation. I ask for your forgiveness and I will appropriately seek their forgiveness.*

**Empower me, O Lord.**

*I need your strength to step beyond blindness, indifference and fear... to step toward those whom I have sinned against. I make no grandiose promises or plans today for I know how easily these can be made and forgotten. But this I know... I cannot be the same... And I will not.*

**Amen!**

*Marc McLaren - Provided for your prayerful reflection before God...*

