

16th June 2020

Dear Friends

When I was a child, in a time some of you will remember there were only 3 television channels and it was quite common for people to watch in black and white. If you wanted a different channel, then you had to stand up and press a switch. I remember watching Star Trek and seeing Captain Kirk flick open a small hand held device to be beamed up to the Star-ship Enterprise, never imagining that one day many of us would be walking about with a similar hand held device, on which we could see hundreds of television channels.

One of the television programmes Trish and I love is called 'A house through time'. You can see it on BBC2 or watch on BBC i-player. This is the third in a series by the historian David Olusoga in which he takes a house and discovers the history of the people who lived there. What he discovers is fascinating. The first house was in Liverpool, the second in Newcastle and the third is in Bristol. David Olusoga has a remarkable gift for telling stories. He is a good listener and encourages people to tell their own stories too and what he discovers is fascinating. One of his best interviews was with an elderly Salvation Army officer who had lived in what is now a very smart town house when it was a Salvation Army hostel. He listened attentively as she shared her testimony and it was wonderful to hear on national television.

David Olusoga begins when each house was first built using historical records to tell the stories of people who would be otherwise lost to history and as he does so, he illuminates the history of our nation and of each of these cities. The House in Bristol that he is currently describing was built as a sea captain's house in the eighteenth century and it's surprisingly topical because what the sea captain traded in was human beings. It is shocking. He was part of the transatlantic slave trade at about the same time as Edward Colston the slave trading merchant whose statue stood in the heart of Bristol for over a century. One of the things I like about the programme is the way David Olusoga presents everything in a clear and compelling style. Without glossing over the facts, he helps us to see the human beings at the heart of the story and

understand what was happening more clearly. In doing so he helps us see the way our history has shaped the society we live in today.

As I walk about Huddersfield, I often wonder about the houses that I am walking past. We live in a town that includes the grand mansions of Edgerton and the small stone terraces of Marsh and all of these houses have stories to tell. I can't help wondering about who has lived in these houses and the lives that have unfolded there, about the people lived through the great events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and experienced so much change in their lifetimes.

As I grow older I am mindful that I when I am talking about something that happened thirty or forty years ago that seems like yesterday to me though it can sound like ancient history to people younger than me. We have all lived through remarkable changes, changes that we have welcomed and changes that we have resisted, changes that we celebrated and changes that grieved us and through it all the promise of God remains for he is our strength and refuge in every generation.

At the Zoom gathering on Sunday, Dave Carrins explained the story behind the song, 'These are the days of Elijah' as a moment when the author was wondering about the presence and power of God at the time of the Rwandan Genocide. The author describes his sense that God is calling his people to live with integrity through such challenging times. We are faced with the same call in our own day; to live with integrity for then we can speak with integrity, in a way that may be prophetic as we face the challenges of our own time. Christian integrity begins with simple things, not least practising kindness, showing goodwill for all our neighbours and choosing to speak the truth.

Sometimes we can learn from people who are not practising Christians about how to do this and I think we can learn from David Olusoga. Some members of our church heard him speak about the Windrush scandal at Huddersfield University. In many ways he is a contemporary prophet and I really like him. I believe we can learn from his gentle and plain-speaking style, informed by a deep knowledge of what he is talking about. To that we can add the passionate love of our Lord Jesus Christ for every human being and seek to share this through what we do as a community of God's

people at New North Road Baptist Church. I see this happening in the steadfast quality and neighbourliness, in the sacrificial love and in the welcome you give and the lives you lead, so I don't believe we need to start rushing about and doing more things. I do believe we should be waiting on God in prayer, listening for his voice and waiting for the opportunities he presents us with.

Our neighbours at the Blackley Centre that is led by Jo and Andy Williams are part of a network that includes the Corrymeela Centre in Northern Ireland that is concerned with peace-making and reconciliation. Recently I was listening to Andy describe his vision of a new society as we emerge from lockdown. At the heart of his vision was listening and I thought this was really helpful.

When we listen well, we are making ourselves available to other people in a Christlike way, that shows their genuine worth. When we are listened to, we know our own worth, as someone gives us their complete attention. I know I am at my best when I am listening and that when someone listens to me, I have found that my soul can breathe. Listening helps us address arguments kindly and listening bridges the gap between people, because we have a much greater insight and appreciation of why people see the world through different eyes. Listening well helps us address problems without fear and find a common purpose. Listening is something we can all do.

God often speaks in a still small voice. John Greenleaf Whittier, a Quaker who wrote about this still small voice was concerned that people were not tuning into God because of all the hullabaloo in his own day.

He wrote 'Drop thy still dews of quietness till all our strivings cease, take from our souls the strain and stress and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace.'

I leave this blessing, with you.

Your friend and pastor

Mark