

**Sunday 7 June 2026**  
**Evensong on the First Sunday After Trinity**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: 1 Samuel 18.1-16**

**NT: Luke 8.41-56**

It feels like there could hardly be any connection between this evening's Old Testament lesson and this evening's gospel reading. The story of the relationship between Saul and David, and Saul's insecurity about losing power vs David, the songwriter shepherd is a powerful, even if it feels archaic narrative, a narrative of the love of power and the good shepherd David. And then we have the gospel, a story busy with one incident of healing sandwiched within another incident of healing. The intervening story of the woman with a haemorrhage leaves the necessary time for the situation in the first half of the story with Jairus' daughter to develop towards the climax in the second half of the story. In both parts of the gospel story, we have Jesus engaging with women and touching the unclean. Jesus does not seem to be in line with the settled order and comfortable relationship established by the religious law of his time, but reflects a new startlingly inclusive attitude towards not only women, but outcast unclean women.

There are a couple of things to think about that come out of these readings: First, remember that if your identity or your belongings, your loyalties get in the way of life-giving truth, you have to turn your back on it. If you are so imprisoned by what is so familiar and comfortable that you cannot see the offer of transforming life and joy for what it is, you have some work to do. What is familiar in the gospel story gets in the way of what is naturally the answer, the truth of Jesus among them to heal and restore. It's familiar for those around Jesus to express loyalty to the people they know, the environment they know, the ideas they know. Yet, Jesus behaves and says that life, truth, reality is larger than that. And if the loyalty to what is familiar stands in the way of life, let's say it again, we have work to do. If we are imprisoned by what is so familiar that there is no way of responding in a lifegiving way to God, then not only do we not receive life, but we also become incapable of giving life too.

Back to our Old Testament story. Saul is clearly imprisoned, self-imprisoned by what is familiar and what keeps him in power. On the other hand, when David was questioned about his credentials to take on the giant Goliath, earlier in 1 Samuel, he replies by saying 'Whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and stuck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, and kill it' (1 Sam. 17: 3-5). To be a shepherd is a tough job, living alongside the sheep, sometimes using their own body as the gate to the fold, lying down in the entrance to keep predators at bay. It's a 24-hour job, which is made worse by the fact that they could not regularly fulfil religious duties, and like the woman with the haemorrhage in the gospel story, they became religious outcasts. Unlike Saul, who is concerned simply about his own position, David is constantly watching.

And Jesus stands in our gospel story today for life in the community, where the reality of the neighbour, strange or familiar, is going to be the most important thing. The most significant part of these healing stories is that the outcasts are restored back to their own community, more than simply the physical healing itself. Life is life in a community, where all are set free to live. And if we live in a community where not all are free to live for whatever reasons, we are at arm's length from God's truth.

So, we need to look carefully and patiently at ourselves, our society and ask if there is some level in which simple familiarity is blinding our vision of the truth. This takes us to the second point. The question of what 'I am so loyal to, what is familiar that keeps me disloyal to the summons of God in the unfamiliar' is a very apt question for the tragedy of Henry Nowak, a question for his own killer, and the way the police has responded, and raises a bigger question about how we define racism itself. The discussion among the public tends to be rather elementary because most people think of 'racism' as essentially a question of 'attitudes'. For what is normally thought of as the 'scientific' definition of the racism emerged with the Enlightenment and the rise of sociology, with thinkers like Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, as a result of the impulse to categorise things generally; but many have argued this categorisation needs to be seen within a bigger historical context.

Most civilisations of the world historically have had different ways of defining the 'Other'. This applied to the Greeks and the Romans, and indeed to the various Islamic empires where we had a distinction between a believer and non-believer, or an Arab with the 'franks'...and where slavery has not been categorically denounced. According to some recent works, it's not clear that Islam condemns the institution of slavery at all. The Ottomans famously had white slaves. In all of these contexts, the issues at large relate to the definition of the other, the power over the other, and decisions made about the other. Understood in those terms, racism is not very different, therefore, from the injustice experienced by the very poor in Britain, for example. Racism, like class prejudice, allows fantasy to be acted out. This may be why one finds some white working-class communities supporting far right policies; but the fantasies apply to everyone involved in society, such as the killer of Henry Nowak himself. Understanding racism, therefore, requires understanding a human crisis overall, which is where the Christian tradition can or should in theory make a difference. This gives us another example of how the state is poorer when it refuses to engage with the wisdom of its Christian heritage, which teaches us that human nature is not simply perfectible through law or even education, however important both are.

Christianity supports the rule of law; the Church, the longest surviving institution in Europe, preserved for us what we call today civil law as applicable to all; but Christianity does not believe that human beings can be made perfect by law, or discipline alone. Human beings, made in the image of God, still need to face their own victims for their transformation – with Christ being our ultimate collective victim; that is the only possible source for relational grace. It is not easy to face that; according to St Augustine of Hippo, it requires a

particular type of humility and caritas to accept that. It is clear, however, that the problem here is not simply a political one, but an anthropological one too.

As we keep all of this in our prayers today, praying for our wider nation and society, we pray that we may learn life and life in abundance in our communities through our rootedness in the life of Christ, be liberated to rejoice in one another for what we are, not to possess, or limit and shrink the reality of the stranger and not let our own particularity be shrunk by others either, but to grow into a fullness of life that is always expressed in the fullness of generosity and welcome that all may be healed.

**Fr Yazid Said**