

OT: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8
NT: Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32
Gp: Matthew 15:21-28

There is a play by David Buck, *Conflict of Doves* which was recently broadcast again on BBC radio. It's not an easy listen given that the lead character is Adolf Hitler together with his close inner circle. Set in 1936, it centres on the Olympic Games of that year. Games which Hitler saw as an international opportunity to promote his great ideology of the purity of humanity in the Aryan race.

Desirable Aryan traits included blonde hair, blue eyes and a tall, athletic stature. Ironically, none of which could be attributed to Hitler himself! He thought that the Games would showcase this prowess and convince other countries of its benefits. Thus widening his power and influence.

In the play, Hitler works to exclude any Jews taking place but he allows a number of, what he refers to as 'black' people to participate. As you probably know, the Nazi plan to win everything through their Aryan athletes fails due to the overwhelming abilities of Jesse Owens, a black athlete who went on to win four gold medals in sprint and long-jump and who was the standout champion of the 1936 Games. If Hitler had known anything of genetics, he would have known that it is not restricting but widening the gene pool which breeds strength and survival.

Unfortunately, ninety years later, there are still those who cling to this abhorrent philosophy as a way to stir up some elements of the population in order to promote their own agendas of attaining power and wealth. But if they want to turn to the Bible for support in this dire aim, they will be sadly mistaken.

In the reading from Isaiah, while the Jewish people remain the chosen race, it is clear that God will call all people into his house of prayer. Ultimately, it is not race but faith that saves. And scattered throughout the gospels, there are examples of Jesus' interaction and ministry to people of all backgrounds. The Samaritan women at the well, the Roman centurion and in today's gospel, the Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon. In her response to her cries for help, Jesus initially says *'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'* But the woman persists in her plea for help, believing without question that Jesus has the power to save her daughter. So that it is her faith, regardless of her ethnicity which brings this response from Jesus, *'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.'* And her daughter was healed instantly.

In a time when, in this country, certain newspapers like to maintain headlines referring to the immigrant boats crossing the channel, when there are rumours that in the US, ICE officials are to be issued with gloves that give electric shocks, when the police are obliged to disclose the ethnicity of any perpetrator of a high profile crime in order to prevent the type of hatred riots we experienced in our own city after the Southport murders, in such a time we need to hold on to the knowledge that we are all created in the image and likeness of God.

We need too to be mindful of the experience of so many who no longer feel safe in their own countries, of so many whose lives are riddled by grinding poverty, whose lives are without hope. Yes, there will be some who have ulterior motives, who as in any population are bent on exploit and evil. But none more so than those who are making fortunes through the grief and desperation of so many.

I'm not keen to get on the Mersey Ferry so I cannot begin to imagine the desperation it must take to sell all you have to pay for a place on a packed, flimsy inflatable boat and attempt to cross one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul want to make it clear that in welcoming Gentiles into his kingdom, God was not excluding the Jewish people, those to whom the word of God was first revealed. *I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.*

In God's eyes, it is not either one or another, it is all people. All of us are called by his grace and the richness of God's creation is revealed in the vast variety of all living creatures, humanity included. Each one of us is a vital thread in the tapestry of God's kingdom, each one of us has our unique place regardless of race, gender, creed or any other human definition which limits and discriminates. And so let each one of us be grateful, thanking God for the blessings we enjoy while working to share such bounty with those whose lives have been wretched beyond our comprehension.

At the end of the play, *Conflict of Doves*, the composer Richard Strauss describes Nazism as a vast, limitless hatred which only calls people to fight, kill, die for it. We know that just three years after those Olympic Games, the world was at war and Strauss's prophecy was sadly true.

May we be people of love, kindness and empathy, bringing hope and peace and challenging those who would spread division for their own selfish purposes. Because we are all one in Christ Jesus. We belong to him through faith, heirs of the promise of the Spirit of peace.

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