

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2019

### Rolling the Stone of Whiteness Away

October is designated [Black History Month](#) across the United Kingdom. Given the reality of intentional erasure of people's stories and histories (especially minorities) such a designated focus is necessary. Any vision of a more just world, and of that of a beloved community we dream of, must give agency



to *all* people's histories and stories.

*Black History Month* provides us with an opportunity to highlight and celebrate the achievements and contributions of 'people of colour', and in the process to unearth the latent histories and narratives that shape our life

together. The idol of whiteness and white privilege is a primary contributing factor as to why 'black history' remains hidden and often erased from our consciousness. This idol was conceived, birthed, and nurtured by human minds and hands in the Northern Hemisphere. It governs cultural, economic, and political norms and it devours victims through physical, psychological, and spiritual violence. It leaves a gaping hole in our collective consciousness.

Toni Morrison may have had this in mind when she describes her historical novels as "a kind of literary archaeology" of the life stories that are missing from the written records. Depending on who is writing, recording or narrating history, it is usually the dominant plot that is given agency. And that plot is largely a White, Male, Hetero-Sexual and Abled-Bodied one. And, many from the minority communities have also internalised the stories and histories as told and retold from the dominant narrative. Arundathi Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997) underscores this and offers one way out:

Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away....[Chacko] explained to them that history was like an old house at night, with all the lamps lit, and the ancestors whispering inside. "To understand history", Chacko said, "*we have to go inside and listen to what they're saying.*" [1997:52]

*Black History Month* is an invitation to enter inside and hear what the ancestors have said and have done, and to unearth/tell their stories – their struggles of life and living and of faith and faithfulness.

Idols, though, are strong and systemic with very long reach. They do not wish to be confronted or challenged. To take on the specific idol of 'whiteness' will be a costly challenge. It will require more than human minds and hands. The disintegration of idols (whiteness only one example) and the transformation of death into life, must also be a matter of faith and faithfulness. Otherwise, the idol will consume us and refashion us in its own image.

To those of every marginalised group who have fought for and continue to advocate for the dignity of all human beings, *Black History Month* says: your stories, sacrifices, and contributions will not be forgotten. Because we are all created in the image of God and God's offer of full life is for all: Black

lives matter. All lives matter. Black history matters. The stories of all minorities matter. We must mind the intersecting factors that create an unjust and unequal world.

Mindful of the intersecting and systemic nature of oppressive forces, *Black History Month* says NO to: insular politics, fenced borders, xenophobia, creating a hostile environment, migrant bashing, sexism, racism, homophobia, trans-phobia, Islam-o-phobia, anti-Semitism, environmental rape of mother earth, economic inequalities, and every form of discrimination and inequality that impoverish the one world we have been gifted with. *Black History Month* is for all of us. Together we can make a difference towards a just, sustainable and peaceful world.

Perhaps the following suggested activities may stir your own creative input in facilitating further reflections:

- Try mapping the stories of minorities in your midst: eg. interviews and write up in your church newsletter. You will, of course, need their permission. It is 'mapping with', not for, them.
- Use a film for viewing and conversation (can be opened to the community). For instance, consider [Hidden Figures](#) among others. Or look up some of the [Video Clips of our own Kevin Snyman](#). There is a wide range, so select as is appropriate.
- Do a write up in your local newspaper.
- Get your local library to do a display (and perhaps you can also offer your Church Hall as a space for a roaming display.)
- If you wish to dig deeper:
  - In a small group consider discussing/reflecting on how 'privilege' works and especially what is white privilege.
- have an honest and open conversation on ethnicity, class, racism and economic disparities etc.

The resource that follows this reflection is intended to link each week's lectionary reading during the month of October with Black History Month and a social justice focus as identified by [Joint Public Issues Team](#) Calendar. Kindly use and improvise as is fitting for your own context.



### Wonderful Youth – Baptist Union Resource

[https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/551148/Wonderful\\_Youth\\_2019.aspx](https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/551148/Wonderful_Youth_2019.aspx)

Designed to be used during Black History Month in October 2019, *Wonderful Youth* also provides a window of opportunity for churches and youth groups to explore and celebrate some of the historical and current unique contributions from people of colour.

## WEEK 1

6<sup>th</sup> October Good Money Week <http://goodmoneyweek.com>

### Lectionary

Lamentations 3:19-26

2 Tim 1:1-14

Lk 17:5-10

### Lamentations 3

'The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!'

### 2 Tim 1

'Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.'

### Lk 17

"Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'?"

### Short Reflection

African American motorist Rodney King was beaten on the side of the road by four white Los Angeles police officers in March 1991. A year later, a verdict that all but cleared the officers triggered the Los Angeles riots, the biggest case of civil unrest in the city's history.

King's younger brother, Juan, an alcohol and drugs addict, recounts how the glare of the media tore the family apart. "I've been homeless off and on for 25 years now," he said. Juan fits a common profile of a homeless person in today's modern, western world: black, male and middle-aged. "Life right now is unpredictable for me," said King. "Unfortunately, a lot of people of colour are suffering worse."



Monetary policies are seldom created with the poorest in mind. Very often policy priorities are determined within the isolating bubble of privilege, almost always by white males, or 'honorary members' of this tightly controlled club.

Jesus admonishes his follower for being caught up within the system of domination of his day. *"Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'?"*

It's not how the system operates. Modern slaves must sweep city streets, serve cafe lattes, pack Tesco shelves, and vote the elite back into power every four years while the 1% dither over which Greek island to book for next year's holiday.

Brexit, according to some commentators is less about 'taking back control' and more about tax dodging. Back in 2015, Britain rejected plans announced by Brussels to combat 'industrial-scale tax avoidance by the world's biggest multinationals. Britain had built a corporate tax haven for multinationals that included slashing corporation tax and creating a favourable tax regime for multinationals like Fiat and Starbucks. The failure of these and companies like Amazon to pay tax

means less money to pay for the NHS, for social housing, drug rehabilitation programmes and food for the poorest families.

Let us take time to reflect on whether we are prepared to follow Jesus in challenging governments, banks and corporations for their business-as-usual practices. The current economic system locks the 99% - many of them black and socially deprived – into poverty while ensuring that most of the profits going to the 1%, many of them white.

### **Prayer**

God who is just, give us courage to re-imagine and rebuild the world without debt, inequity and economic injustice. Cast light upon immoral dealings in government, business and church. Help us to shift wealth from the richest to the poorest, so that all may have enough. Show us how to heal the bias and privilege of whiteness that infects so much of our practice of economics. Amen.

### **Further Resources**

- [Some Case Studies](#) [Good Money Week website]
- [Good Money Guide for Faith Group](#)
- [Good Money Week Fair](#) [Church of Scotland and Partners]
- [Poverty Injustice](#) [Making a Difference]
- [The Ethical Consumer](#) [A wide collection of resources and links]
- [Joint Public Issues Team](#) [Webpage will have related resources]
- [Council for World Mission](#) [Related web resources]

## WEEK 2

13<sup>th</sup> October Freedom Sunday ([www.stophetraffik.org/](http://www.stophetraffik.org/)) ([www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk)) Prisons' Week ([www.prisonsworld.org](http://www.prisonsworld.org))

### Lectionary

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

Psalm 66:1-11

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Luke 17:11-19

**Jeremiah 29** 'You have laid a heavy burden on our Backs'

**2 Tim 2** 'I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal.'

**Lk 17** 'Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?'

Human trafficking is one of the most widespread crimes of our times. This includes sexual exploitation, organ harvesting, child soldiers and labour exploitation. There are children as young as four who are used for military purposes. Children may be used for frontline combat – which means they are made to commit acts of violence – or within auxiliary roles, such as informants or kitchen hands. Often, the children are also sexually abused. Also, human trafficking includes people (often poor) who are forced to sell their organs so that the wealthy can live healthier lives. Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people are disproportionately affected by human trafficking. Of course, neighbours or family members may be implicated, but often it is their shared poverty that forces this behaviour. They are caught up in a global, financial/economic system that commodifies human life, that consigns such people to the lower tiers of the pyramid of power.



Jesus often pointed to the foreigner or the poor as revealing the way of the kingdom. In what way do our lives reflect or obscure the kingdom? Do our choices, our shopping habits and our lives contribute to human trafficking?

### Prayer

Divine Lover, your grace abounds, your love never ends. Show us where human trafficking occurs in our villages, towns and cities. Help us overcome the systems of oppression that enable human trafficking to flourish. May your kingdom come to liberate and bless all life, particularly those most affected by modern slavery. In the name of Jesus who sets us free. Amen.

### Further Resources

- [Human Trafficking](#) [Stop the Traffic webpage]
- [Housing Justice](#) [On Homelessness]
- [Prison Week Resources](#)
- [Ending Slavery](#) [Freedom Sunday Resources]
- [Selling out to Slavery](#) [Conference in Scotland]
- [Joint Public Issues Team](#) [Webpage will have related resources]
- [Council for World Mission](#) [Related web resources]



## WEEK 3

October 19<sup>th</sup> Week of Prayer for World Peace (<http://weekofprayerforworldpeace.com/>)

### Lectionary

Jeremiah 31:27-34

Psalms 119:97-104

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

2 Tim 3

“.... having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Lk 18

A widow who kept coming to the unjust judge saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’

(With thanks to Sue and Wes Howard Brook)

<https://radicaldiscipleship.net/2016/10/13/never-give-up-faith-as-tenacious-agitation/>

In Luke’s account of the persistent widow, the male judge portrayed in the worst possible light. His opponent was a solitary widow. Her social status was especially vulnerable in that patriarchal society.



The judge’s character traits (he “neither feared God nor had respect for people”) represents exactly the *opposite* of what scripture demanded from a judge, which, said Isaiah, was to “rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow” (Is 1:17). The author in this parable thoroughly lampoons her/his society’s conspicuous inequality and blatant oppression. The widow must struggle against all the odds, is to “exact justice (Gk *ekdikēsōn*)’ from her adversary.

This scenario will be all too familiar for BAME people today. Think of the descendants of the Windrush Generation, or police profiling of black or Muslim youths, or Syrian refugees displaced trying to cross from Calais into Dover. Their cries for justice are ignored by the “system” that has little or no inclination to offer real justice.

Which brings us to the heart of the story: it is *only because* of the widow’s tenacity that anything changes. She “keeps bothering me,” he laments (the phrase might best be translated as, “she’s being a pain in the backside”. The tipping point is his admission that she is “wearing me out.” The Greek *upōpiazō* means literally “to strike under the eye” (hence the term “browbeat”; see 1 Cor 9:27). Jesus’ “moral to the story” says Howard Brook, is to exhort listeners to persist in pressing for what is needed and right. “walking the Way of Jesus” is here identified with determined advocacy for justice. And *this* sort of faith is all too scarce in our communities—so much so that Jesus wonders aloud, “when the Human One comes, will he encounter faith on earth?” (18:8b)

This messy, shrill yet remarkable story offers an exhortation to *militant* nonviolent engagement with the Principalities and the Powers. We dare not remain still in the face of the enormous threats and

challenges to world peace – indeed to the very survival on higher life forms on the planet. This text also offers a challenge to those who benefit from the status quo: those ordinary members of our churches who do not realise the true extent of their privilege as white, British subjects. Jesus’ parable of the Rich Man makes it clear that lack of awareness of one’s privilege will not be tolerated as an excuse in heaven!



Read more about Lindsay Airey’s [reflections](#) on how this text illumines and is illuminated by the witness of the uncompromising women of the Detroit water struggle today. The other is this recording of a youth choir singing the venerable South Africa freedom song “[Bambelela](#)” (“Never Give Up”). May our churches recover *this* sort of prayer-as-agitating-faith!

### Prayer

God who desires peace, we confess that we have not struggled like the widow to demand and then extract justice from an uncaring world. Give us strength for the struggle, faith that the system has already been overcome by Jesus on the cross. Amen.

### Further Resources

- [Week of Prayer for World Peace](#) [webpage with resources]
- [Fellowship of Reconciliation](#) [Non-Violence in Action]
- [Promoting Peace](#) [Quakers in Britain]
- [Countering War and Hate](#) [World Parliament of Religions]
- [International Day for Non-Violence](#) [United Nations]
- [Joint Public Issues Team](#) [Webpage will have related resources]
- [Council for World Mission](#) [Related web resources]

## WEEK 4

October 27<sup>th</sup> United Nations Day ([www.un.org/en/events/unday](http://www.un.org/en/events/unday))

Joel 2:23-32

Psalm 65

2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18

Luke 18:9-14

Ps 65 “Those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of springs”

Lk 18 “I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

At least half of the world’s population do not have access to the essential health services they need. More than 800 million people spend at least 10% of their household income to pay for health care.



Out-of- pocket health expenses pushing almost 100 million into extreme poverty each year. Climate shocks and environmental risk factors, such as air pollution, have drastic effects on the health of populations, and different groups of countries, such as small island developing states, face unique health challenges of their own.

The UN has declared health a human right. Everyone, everywhere, should have access to quality and affordable health services. Leaders are urged to legislate, invest and collaborate with all of society to make universal health coverage (UHC) a reality. Universal health coverage (UHC) is primarily the responsibility of governments, ensuring people’s health as a social contract, and leaving no one behind. Because affordable, accessible, quality health services unlock people’s potential, universal health coverage is a smart investment for countries, making a strong case for sustained financing.

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all countries have committed to trying to achieve UHC by 2030, which requires a people-centered approach, and includes financial risk protection, high-quality health care services, and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

Global efforts to provide universal access to affordable and quality health care services are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s). The achievement of UHC is dependent on the success of broader SDG outcomes, including sustainable financing and accelerated action toward climate change.



Most vulnerable people are people of colour. By working towards UHC, we are ensuring justice for all, particularly the poorest in the world. By ensuring that large corporations and the richest families pay a progressive rate of tax and are banned from off-shore banking to dodge their obligations, a UHC becomes possible in a way that cannot be achieved within the current, financial and political climate. Of course, the wealthy will insist that their wealth is legally obtained. But when the system



itself is designed to shift wealth from the poor to the rich, then any wealth gain must be seen as immoral, no matter how deeply we are caught up in and convinced by the relentless propaganda of the rich.

### Prayer

Gracious and attentive God, may the UN Sustainable Development Goals become a reality sooner than we can ever imagine. May no person in the world go without medical care. Redistribute the wealth of the rich for the benefit of all people, especially the poor. Save our earth from the relentless machinery of death designed by an uncaring elite that is unwittingly supported by us. Bring equity, justice and peace as you usher in your 'kin-dom' of unbounded grace and love. Amen.



### Further Resources

- Eradication of Poverty
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism
  - Day for Remembering of the Slave Trade and its Abolition
  - Decade for people of African Descent
- [[United Nations Webpage](#) for all of the above and more]

### Other Resources Events and Books

**A night of readings and resistance hosted by Wasafiri exploring literature's power to create 'home' in hostile environments for people on the margins.**

- 15 October 2019, Free word centre, London
- Tickets £7-£10 (£2 unwaged tickets available)
- 7pm – 9pm

More Information here: <https://freeword.org/event/writing-our-way-home/>

Akala, *Natives: Race & Class in the Ruins of Empire* (2018)

Véronique Olmi, *Bakhita: A Novel of the Saint of Sudan* (2019)

Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing* (2016)

[Artist Frank Bowling Exhibition](#) [Link to Tate though exhibition has now moved]

[More on Black British Art](#)

**Note:** All photo images are from Pixabay: re-use is allowed.



Global and Intercultural Ministries (GiM), United Reformed Church  
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