

HONEST CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE – KXC, June 2020

We find ourselves at a significant moment in human history. Covid-19 has enforced a wilderness experience upon us, and in the harsh terrain of the desert we discover the true state of our spiritual, mental and physical well-being. Idols are exposed, attachments are revealed and what we spent huge energy in burying pre-lockdown is now rising to the surface. The soul comes out of hiding in the stillness of the desert, which means the desert is the place where spiritual awakenings begin. We wrestle demons and doubts in the desert. We wrestle disappointment and despair. But we also wrestle with divinity. Jacob's wrestle with God in the desert was the beginning of a new story, and so in surrendering to God in the wilderness we experience a defeat that releases by grace the blessings that we had been striving for all along. The new life that flows from the desert is only ever the life that flows from God, for no other being can create out of nothing. New beginnings and spiritual awakenings therefore only begin when God takes his people into the wilderness.

The desert is where we find ourselves right now. What many of us have been experiencing at a personal level has now become a collective experience. The soul of society has come out of hiding, and we are now seeing with painful clarity the true state of our culture: the good, the bad and the ugly. From the heroics of our frontline workers combating a virus to the hideous disease of racism, we have been provided with a window into our collective well-being. The divine invite into personal formation has now become an invite into cultural formation, and how we respond to this moment as the church will dictate what lies ahead for years, decades and potentially beyond. It's impossible to overstate how critical this moment is for us.

So what is our response as a church family at KXC to racial injustice and inequality? Our vision has always been to follow the way of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, 'to serve God's purpose to make all things new'. With regard to racism, we believe that the Spirit is at work right now in our culture exposing racial injustice and inequality for the purpose of healing and renewal. We therefore want to trade any agendas that we might have to align ourselves with God's plans at this pivotal moment. These thoughts are therefore an outline of what the next few steps might look like as we take God's hand and follow.

A VISION TO CONTEND FOR

Before we look forward, let me briefly take you back a few years. Kirsty and Keziah, two of our leaders at KXC, took Bee and I to one side to graciously highlight the lack of diversity within our church family. More than that, they lovingly highlighted some of the blindspots and obstacles, which are the product of white privilege and unconscious bias, that stood in the way of us becoming a fuller and richer expression of God's kingdom. That conversation led to Kirsty and Kez forming a team to help Bee and I see more clearly and bring the kind of leadership necessary to open wide the doors to create a more diverse family that reflects the heart of King's Cross as well as the heart of God and the heart of his kingdom. The team began meeting, praying and contending for change, with the following vision statement in their hearts and minds:



We believe in the ability of our church to grow into a greater reflection of heaven where all are valued, respected and seen. We exist to hold our church family lovingly accountable as we seek to change the prevailing culture of systemic racism. Our vision is complete freedom for our church family from that. We want to reject division and seek unity, passionately and intentionally embracing ethnic minorities in the UK and calling people into

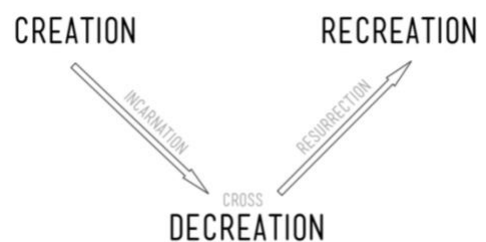
visibility by bringing out their divine potential. We want to encourage KXC's vision of 'being a place where people are safe enough to heal and dangerous enough to grow' and make sure that applies to everyone. We want KXC to be home where people can freely say they unquestionably belong.

If you've been part of KXC over the last few years, you'll know that a very significant part of our growth has been in the area of diversity within our congregations. This is clearly a work of the Spirit, and at the same time it's right that we honour the many people who have prayed, spoken the truth in love, chosen to stay and contend for change rather than leave, loving our community into healing and health. In particular, we want to honour this team that have graciously and lovingly served, and continue to serve, Bee and I. Kez, Kirsty, Dele, Lois, Lamar, Tanya and Naiha (and Dwayne Paisley-Marshall who was founding member of this group before leaving KXC), we are so grateful for your input, love, wisdom and leadership. We are grateful for the role you have played and the role you continue to play in bringing leadership in this area. We are grateful that this team has been established for such a time as this.

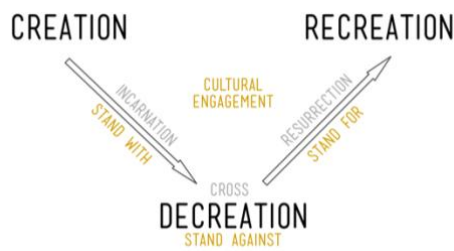
The following steps, and trajectory marked out here, are the result of conversations with this team over the last few years. Bee and I are fully aware that whilst we can celebrate all that God has done in the area of diversity within our church family, there is still a very long way to go. Systemic racism isn't simply a problem out there, it exists within our own church family, and cultural shifts begin when people in leadership acknowledge their part in the problem and match that with a deep desire to change in order to be part of the remedy. Bee and I have, and continue to, repent for the part that we have played in contributing towards or being complicit in ways of operating that have created pain within our own family. We are also resolved to be part of the change and to lead us forward as a church into greater life, greater freedom and therefore a greater foretaste of the rich diversity that will be present in heaven.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

At KXC, we have regularly offered the following framework as a summary of the narrative of Scripture, as well as a summary of the how that narrative is fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God himself takes on human flesh in the person of Jesus. He steps into the chaos of a created order that has been disrupted and distorted by sin. This sin is then loaded upon Jesus at the cross. In his death, our sins are dealt with, washed away and separated from us as far as the east is from the west. Jesus then rises to new life, the firstborn of the new creation. His resurrection is both an historical event and a future destiny, not just for those that are in Christ, but for created order itself. Creation will be reborn: healed, restored, redeemed and delivered. We are given a snapshot of this new order in Revelation 7: '[9] After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. [10] And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."'



Thomas Merton, the Catholic writer, said ‘our lives are shaped by the end we live for.’ This vision of diversity held together in unity around the person of Jesus is our destiny, and this destiny should drive our response to this cultural moment. The secular agenda also dreams of a vision of multitudes gathered from every nation, tribe, people and language. The big difference is that the secular agenda removes the lamb that was slain. It wants the kingdom but it doesn’t want the king. It wants the fruit of the Judaeo-Christian worldview, but it wants to chop down the tree that bears the fruit. But only the kingdom story brings about the kingdom ends. The church today needs to acknowledge in humility that in recent years it has often been the secular prophets leading the way in tackling systemic racism. The secular voice has become the prevailing voice because the church hasn’t always been engaged in the way it should have been. For that we need to repent. However, we also need to acknowledge with humility our belief that the secular story can’t deliver the vision of Revelation 7,



for as the multitudes declare, ‘Salvation belongs to our God.’ The lamb at the centre is what unites the multitudes, and his blood is what has purchased their freedom and joy. The deep desire for salvation from the evil of racism, present right now in society, is incredibly exciting. This cultural moment presents us with an amazing opportunity for change. However, this is a not a time for the church to unintentionally champion a secular vision of how ‘heaven on earth’ might become a reality.

We know the story of how heaven and earth, God and humanity and brothers and sisters are reconciled. We therefore have a gospel to proclaim and an example to follow. For the sake of salvation from the hideous disease of racism, the urgent need for us as followers of Jesus is to live in and live out our story.

The framework above summarises the story of Scripture and how that story is fulfilled in Jesus. However, it also provides a framework for kingdom engagement in culture right now. Following the way of Jesus, our engagement requires us to **stand with** the oppressed, **stand against** the oppression and **stand for** the kingdom of God.

STANDING WITH THE OPPRESSED

The incarnation reminds us that God’s first move in mission is to compassionately draw close to those that are lost, hurting, marginalised and oppressed. The word compassion literally means to ‘suffer with’. Racism is not simply an issue to address. Our brothers and sisters have been deeply wronged, are hurting and their pain needs to be expressed and embraced. Before rushing to remedy, we must be present to the pain. We must join the **lament**, **listen** to the stories and **learn** from the history, that many of us weren’t taught, that has led to this current moment.

Therefore at KXC we want to begin a church wide listening exercise called ‘My Story and My Dream’. If you have experienced discrimination within our family, or have felt exclusion on the grounds of race, or haven’t fully been able to be yourself for fear of rejection, we would love to hear your reflections if you would find that helpful and healing. On our website, there is a page (kxc.org.uk/mystory) where people can write up both their reflections, as well as their hopes, prayers and dreams for the church we could become. For those that would like to share these reflections in person rather than in print (albeit virtually), we as a leadership team want to create time to listen well, to hear the pain, to repent in person, and to work towards change. Our prayer is that this listening exercise will be both healing for those sharing their experiences and helpful for those listening as we seek to understand and recognise the depth of the problem. The journey that lies ahead will require us to **recognise our**

RECOGNISE

- LAMENT
- LISTEN
- LEARN

past (and the gaps in our own understanding of history), to **recognise our present** (and the extent of racism within the UK context today) and, for many of us, to **recognise our privilege**.

As well as joining the lament and listening to the stories, we want to encourage our church family into a season of learning. We will be beginning a Sunday teaching series in July entitled 'Reconciled: The Way of Jesus and the Way of the Cross.' We will also be launching in September a new series in the KXC Online Midweek Edition entitled 'Conversations on Race'. These will be a mixture of interviews, stories and reflections that can hopefully provide fuel for further conversations within our hub communities. In addition to that, we want to encourage people to take initiative for their own learning and reading. It is not the responsibility of people of colour to educate their white brothers and sisters in these matters. For suggested reading and other helpful resources, please visit kxc.org.uk/racialjustice. Perhaps just start with one book that you are going to commit to reading with an open heart and mind. Finally, we will also look to partner with other organisations that we can both serve and be served by in seeking to tackle racial inequality. This will include financial support, for as we often say at KXC, our hearts follow our money, and we want our hearts to be found where liberation, freedom and justice are to be found.

STANDING AGAINST OPPRESSION

Repentance requires us to turn towards Jesus and his kingdom, and turn our back on sin. This turning away from, or standing against, the evil present in our society has a number of dimensions. Paul says in Ephesians 6 that our battle isn't against flesh and blood but against the powers and principalities present in the spiritual realm. The evil of racism that we face isn't merely human brokenness, it's demonic, and therefore our primary engagement in this battle is **spiritual**. Paul also says, in 2 Corinthians 10:4, 'The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.' These weapons are key for the journey that lies ahead. So what are these weapons?

REPENT

- SPIRITUAL
- RELATIONAL
- STRUCTURAL / CULTURAL

Firstly, we engage in warfare through prayer. Karl Barth once said that to 'clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.' Political protests are important, but our first protest is on our knees in prayer. Secondly, we are calling people to fast. In Mark 9 we read the story of the disciples asking Jesus why they couldn't drive out a certain form of demonic oppression. Jesus responds by saying, 'This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting.' Bee and I believe this is a time to fast in the present for the sake of future feasting with our black and brown brothers and sisters, around a table where racial discrimination has no place. Therefore every Thursday we are inviting the KXC family to fast and pray. All the details are available on the website (kxc.org.uk/pray). Please note however, for any people of colour at KXC that are experiencing deep physical, mental or spiritual exhaustion in light of both recent and historic events, we as your white brothers and sisters would love to fast on your behalf.

Thirdly, we have been given the weapon of the gospel itself. In Ephesians 2 Pauls says that it is the power of the cross that has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. It is that same power that will break down the dividing walls present today. There is a shared conviction, evident on our streets and on our social media, that the walls of discrimination have to come down. However, we believe that the message of the cross, though foolishness to some, is the power of God for salvation, and therefore the only power sufficient to bring down those walls. Attempting to bring the walls down in our own strength will lead to further exhaustion and despair. Our weapon is the message of a God who has conquered death and therefore has the power to conquer any other adversary.

Finally, we warfare as we worship. Every time we proclaim in song or in word that Jesus is king, his kingdom takes ground. The walls of Jericho fell not as the people raised their swords to fight but as they raised their voices to worship. Now is the time to 'sing a little louder.'

The second dimension to our standing against oppression is **relational**. The gospel message is a message of reconciliation. It's about enemies becoming friends. Reconciliation however requires active participation from two parties. Repentance is one part of the process and forgiveness is the other. There is obviously a public and visible dimension to some of this, but it begins in the private place, with one-to-one conversations. Many of us will want to take this moment to repent to our brothers and sisters of colour for the pain we have caused. This repentance is a process as we become more and more aware of the depth of the problem, but at each stage we need to recognise our sin and repent. The other part to reconciliation is forgiveness. We do not want to underestimate how incredibly difficult it is to forgive when the pain runs so deep. It is a costly journey, a long and painful process, a choice to entrust anger and bitterness into the hands of Jesus. But as we make these daily decisions, over time, healing and grace will sink into the deepest parts of the pain. As we press into both repentance and forgiveness, the fruit of true reconciliation will become evident. This is a hard road ahead. But it is the narrow road that leads to life.

The final dimension is **structural and cultural**. We are citizens of heaven, but we are also citizens of this city and this nation. Though the battle is spiritual, it is played out in human systems and structures. These structures need to change, and part of that change means political engagement. Advocacy, peaceful protesting and voting are all means of such engagement. It also means engagement within the organisations and institutions that we work in or belong to. Speaking truth to power in love, exposing discrimination and being agents of reform within our workplaces and organisations is something we can all be a part of. Cultures experience change from the top down, but they also change from the bottom up. It needs engagement at both the institutional level and the street level. Who we open our homes to, who we chat to at the school gates, what books we read with our children and how we spend our time all have power to incrementally shift culture. We fight racism in prayer, we fight it through peaceful protesting, but we also fight racism in the smallest of acts such as inviting a neighbour over for dinner. Hospitality has always been a critical ingredient in kingdom revolutions.

STANDING FOR THE KINGDOM

It has often been said that the best way to redeem culture is to create culture, and it is the responsibility of the church to partner with the Spirit in introducing the culture of the kingdom to the city we find ourselves in. This is how we replace oppressive systems with the way of the kingdom. There are many key conversations that lie ahead for us on this journey, but three critical ones will be about how we relate to power and authority, how to relate to our neighbours and finally how we relate to ourselves.

Firstly, how should we relate to power? The secular solution centres around redistribution of power, to which the Christian response should be 'yes and amen'. Leadership bodies, staff teams and boards of directors need to be far more representative of the diversity present in our city. It has been said that 'accessibility is being able to get into the building. Diversity is getting invited to the table. Inclusion is having a voice at the table. Belonging is having your voice heard at the table.' At KXC, a quick glance of our staff page on the website reveals that we clearly have a very long way to go. Redistribution of power will be vital, but redistribution alone falls short of a biblical vision for how we handle power. Beyond the redistribution of power we need the redemption of power. Only redemption will end the cycle of oppression, and redemption looks like 'self-emptying'. Jesus models this for us in the self-emptying of the incarnation and the self emptying of the cross. The kingdom

revolution is based on this self-emptying approach to power. In the build up to the cross, the disciples are getting ready for a revolution. It's why Peter draws his sword to fight in the garden of Gethsemane. How else are they going to overcome the oppression that enslaved them? But Jesus gives them a different model for revolution. He gathers them in the upper room to celebrate the Passover, the festival in which they remember the story of God stepping in to miraculously liberate them from slavery and oppression in Egypt. Passover would have been the most obvious time for an uprising. So Jesus gathers them around the table, and rather than drawing the sword he grabs a bowl and towel and begins to wash his disciples' feet. By stooping down Jesus raises them up, and this is the kind of revolution we so desperately need right now. It's not enough to simply invite our brothers and sisters of colour to the table. Those of us with power and privilege need to get the basin and towel and wash the feet of those we invite. We need to nurse the wounds that we ourselves have created. This is a different type of revolution: it's about **foot washing** and not fighting.

REPLACE

- FOOT - WASHING
- FRIENDSHIP
- FAMILY

Secondly, how do we relate to our neighbours? The secular solution is tolerance. Tolerance is one of the idols of our age, but the kingdom solution goes far beyond tolerance to **friendship**. The great commandment invites us to love our neighbours. The goal, therefore, isn't to sit at the same table with tolerance in our hearts. The goal is to break bread and wine, embrace each other and in doing so become friends. Love trumps tolerance, for love is what brings restoration. Oppression doesn't find healing through tolerance but through repentance. Self-emptying love is the foundation for true friendships, for as Jesus said, 'greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'

Finally, how do we relate to ourselves? In other words, where do we find identity? The secular solution is to identify with the labels that have been and are imposed upon us. The kingdom solution however is to freely receive an identity that comes from God, as a gift of grace, as his beloved sons and daughters. The first task is to receive this identity for ourselves. The second task is to treat others according to it, and for too long there has been a gap between these two kingdom tasks.

In Christ, however, we are a **family** with a shared identity. Many of the other labels are of deep significance, and we as the church need to affirm and honour such identities. But there is a deeper bond of unity that holds the diversity together, and that is the identity created by the blood of Jesus. As Paul says in Galatians 3, 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' Ethnic identity, gender identity and social identities are hugely significant, but they have also been used in our brokenness to build up the walls that divide us. The blood of Jesus however breaks down the walls and forms us into family. Our unity around the lamb that was slain is what holds the diversity together. All of these conversations therefore need to take place as family, on the solid ground of all that Christ has done to purchase our redemption and enable us to be reconciled with God and with one another. This kind of community is utterly unique here on earth, and it is the only type of community that will exist for all eternity. It is the signpost and the foretaste of what is to come. It is therefore of critical importance to our witness to the world that we as the church travel this section of road well.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The long road ahead will be a difficult journey at times, but it leads to something beautiful: a church of greater diversity that more fully reflects the culture of heaven. Our next few steps are

summarised here. The road we are choosing to travel will very much be the road less travelled, for the simple reason that our story is different to the secular story. We are immersed in a city where the secular narratives and mindsets have become deeply embedded in our imaginations. Even in the church we have unknowingly embraced secular ways of thinking. At this hinge moment, we need to reflect deeply and theologically before we choose roads that promise the destination of Revelation 7 with no sign of being able to deliver. So let's own our story. Let's live in it, let's live it out and let's become the community at KXC that God has always intended us to be.

WHAT NEXT?

FRONT STAGE

- CHURCH WIDE LISTENING EXERCISE (KXC.ORG.UK/MYSTORY)
- MIDWEEK SERIES ON "CONVERSATIONS ON RACE" FOR WHOLE CHURCH
- SUNDAY SERIES ON RECONCILIATION FOR WHOLE CHURCH
- PRAYER AND FASTING
- HUB ENGAGEMENT
- PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS / FINANCIAL GIVING

BACK STAGE

- LEADERSHIP EVENINGS
- STAFF WIDE READING
- STAFF WIDE UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING
- STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN