

## **Jesus, the Gospel and Privilege...**

**24/6/18**

**I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.**

**Amen.**

St Pauls has always had a proud and innovative tradition and culture of being progressive and liberal in the discourse emanating from the pulpit over recent years. I have found this parish to be both receptive and willing to engage with issues that could be contentious and divisive. Certainly, over the three years that I have been part of this parish, we have covered and discussed issues like human sexuality, decolonisation, termination of pregnancy and the authority of the Bible, to name but a few.

This evening I would like to raise another possibly contentious issue. It is, however, an issue that I feel we need to address, be aware of, engage with and embrace as part of our Christian mission and ethos here at St Pauls. I fear that should we fail to engage with this issue, we would not only be failing as Christians and sensitive human beings, but we would also be failing both the Gospel and Jesus Christ.

So what am I so earnest about this evening?

White privilege.

There, I said it.

I have been vaguely aware of the term and political discourse since my research and reading around decolonisation and the role we should be playing as the Church of God. However, being in education as a profession, I keep my ear as close to the ground as possible with regards to all matters that involve education. I recently came across a speech, written in Johannesburg, by Deputy Principal, Kevin Leathem, at Jeppe High School for Boys.

<https://www.thesouthafrican.com/jeppe-boys-deputy-principal-gives-rousing-speech-on-white-privilege/>

This speech made me stop and think. After reading and reflecting, I realised that the matter of White privilege in South Africa is a matter that is ongoing and needs to be revealed, addressed and engaged with, if we as Christians, are to continue making a constructive difference in rebuilding our broken society.

Leathem was different in that he was bold enough to take the message to school boys where he felt that he would have influence and impact for positive change. Usually, political concepts like decolonisation and privilege are kept for the university campus and political arenas. Leathem was clear and direct in his message to his high school boys. He used clear metaphors that they would be able to relate to, like rugby and computer games, but he did not for one moment mince his words.

So, we need to first ask the question, "What is White privilege?"

One way to understand White privilege is to understand what it is not. White privilege is NOT necessarily wealth. There are many White South Africans who work very hard, who struggle financially but yet they still, knowingly or unknowingly, benefit from White privilege in this society.

Privilege simply refers to a right, advantage or immunity that only a particular group gets to enjoy.

In 2017 the Archdiocese of Cape Town published an official statement regarding White privilege penned by Russel Pollitt.

<http://adct.org.za/understanding-white-privilege/>

Pollitt quotes from Fr Bryan Massingale's book, "Racial Justice and the Catholic Church," that White privilege is the flipside and inescapable corollary of racial injustice. Racial injustice comes about to preserve and protect White privilege.

Pollitt continues to give examples of White privilege, like: the advantages of moving into whatever neighbourhood you like, easier access to positions of social influence and economic power, as well as greater access to quality education. White privilege is the result of social policies, institutions and procedures that have deliberately created a system to advance the well-being of White people and impeded the opportunities for people of colour.

This is an intense discussion. A discussion that needs continued engagement and intervention if this country is to be healed.

What does the Gospel say to us as Christians?

Jesus preached love. Implied in that message of love is equality and acceptance of one another, at all levels... sexually, politically, financially, culturally and personally. This is a tall order for us as Christians to live out, particularly in South Africa, a country that geared its politics for many years against the core message of the Gospel.

You may be saying to yourself this evening, "I am but one person, what difference can I make?"

A good question.

For a start, each of us, including myself, needs to accept the validity and presence of White privilege in South Africa. This is the first step. It is an imperative step, for without this step, we are unable to move forward.

Secondly, now that you are aware of the issue, be bold enough to keep the discussion going; continue to engage people, from all walks of life, on the issue. If we keep the conversations open and going, there is a less likelihood of resorting to extremes.

Thirdly, make a difference. Any difference. If your position in life, society, at work, in the church, allows you in any way whatsoever, to make a positive difference for change in this country, then do it. You owe both Jesus, yourself, as well as neighbour, this action. Make that difference. Be the change.

Theologians and archaeologists, using state of the art computer software and DNA data bases, have proven without doubt that the person Jesus Christ was NOT white skinned. He would have been an olive to a darker brown colour.

If Jesus was seated in this parish this evening, would He feel welcomed and comfortable as a visitor?

Would Jesus feel comfortable moving around our suburb, Rondebosch?

Would Jesus feel comfortable moving around our country?

Are we really doing all that we can to ensure the change that needs to happen?

May God bless you in the week ahead as you reflect upon whatever privilege you may have in your life and how you can best use that to help others.

Amen.