

Rev Tim Perkins
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“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” Colossians 3: 11 - 12

Dear Friends,

If we did not know it before this week, surely, we have come to recognise that there is something rotten and stinking in our world today – the lust for and abuse of power. It is, of course, nothing new to human society, for its seed resides within the heart of every human being. We all have the capacity to seek to raise ourselves up and, in the process, put others down. It is what leads to the great scourge of our time, inequality, and exclusion.

Some of that power is held by what Walter Wink calls ‘The Domination System.’ *“The Powers That Be”* is an excellent book that summarises Wink’s critique of what has come to be known as ‘redemptive violence.’ I highly recommend it for reading and study. The domination system is a way of expressing what happens when institutions, media, business, political systems and even churches lose their moral compass and lose sight of their central goal of serving society.

Many of our systems are broken to such a degree that those who are excluded can find no way back in. There is no one who will speak up for them, no one to give them a voice. Discrimination is commonplace. It is why we hear phrases such as ‘institutional racism.’

The domination system thrives when human society is comfortable, or at least when it can close its eyes to what is going on under the surface. It is why we are now fully aware that the Covid pandemic, whilst having the ability to infect everyone, is having a disproportionate impact upon the BAME community and other minority groups. Just today I heard on the news that the death rate amongst people with learning difficulties or Down Syndrome is up by over 130% during the period of our pandemic, compared to before it. Nobody has deliberately made it so but not enough of us have done enough to prevent it from being so.

However, power is also held by individual leaders, not just systems. It is perfectly clear that in many parts of the world, political leaders are acting in ways that are designed only to maintain their grip on power and not to challenge the root causes of inequality and oppression.

In many places across the world, political leaders are showing a complete disregard for moral and ethical integrity. Whether it is: declaring that they have done nothing wrong in disregarding their own guidance to the public; the shameless use of language designed to divide, discriminate and put down; declaring that their country has not got a problem with the Covid pandemic when mass graves are being dug on the outskirts of their capital city; or saying that you are on the side of the peaceful while your security guards are firing tear gas and rubber bullets into a peaceful protest just so that you can walk unhindered across a park to stand outside a church with a Bible in your hand for a photo opportunity with a blatant disregard for the actual teachings written within the very book you hold, there are countless means at the disposal of powerful people to manipulate others in order to strengthen their grip on power.

Two things strike me about what I have just written. First, in each of the cases I have alluded to, those political leaders are all white, privileged men. It seems to me that moral authority in

leadership now resides largely with women, even teenage girls. They are a threat to the Domination System.

Second, taking a knee is becoming an act of humble defiance. In its contemporary setting it was started by the American football quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, during the playing of the American National Anthem at the start of games in protest at police brutality and racial inequality. Kaepernick has been unemployed since. He is a threat to the Domination System.

The latest incarnation of taking a knee came at Anfield this week when the entire Liverpool FC squad enacted it in solidarity with all those suffering from racial oppression. I never thought I would see a day where professional sportspeople are offering moral leadership to our world!

Of course, the original context for taking a knee can be found in the Gospel of John, where Jesus of Nazareth – God incarnate – ultimate power – knelt in humility to wash the dirty feet of those who should have washed his, and thereby enacting ultimate love and sacrifice as the antidote to the Domination System.

That is our great example of moral leadership and integrity. And the Church has led the world when it has led with compassion and humility. It has failed the world when it has cosied up to political might and power.

Even in our own communities, even during this time of great restrictions, each and every one of us who calls our self 'Christian', are called by God to show compassion and humility, to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, to kneel before the Powers That Be in peaceful protest in order to disarm them and to stand alongside and shout out on behalf of all those who are oppressed and excluded to lift them up. How are you going to do that?

Maybe you can start by following this link and being inspired again by the compassion of Jesus and the difference that His people can make to this broken world. It is well worth listening to: <https://globalleadershipnetwork.org.uk/lesson/a-leader-of-unimaginable-influence-john-ortberg/>

I want to finish with the words of one of our modern songs, found in Singing the Faith, written by John Bell and Graham Maule. I encourage you to meditate upon the words and see how God speaks to you through them:

Heaven shall not wait for the poor to lose their patience, the scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend: Jesus is Lord; he has championed the unwanted; in him injustice confronts its timely end.

Heaven shall not wait for the rich to share their fortunes, the proud to fall, the elite to tend the least: Jesus is Lord; he has shown the master's privilege – to kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast.

Heaven shall not wait for the dawn of great ideas, thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain: Jesus is Lord; he has married word and action; his cross and company make his purpose plain.

Heaven shall not wait for triumphant Hallelujahs, when earth has passed and we reach another shore: Jesus is Lord in our present imperfection; his power and love are for now, and then for evermore.

With every blessing,

Rev Tim Perkins