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I will begin by saying that I am not a royalist. This is not the official position of Inclusive Church- in fact, I believe many of the trustees are supportive of the monarchy. I am a Quaker and one of our testimonies is to **equality**, which I interpret as meaning that no-one should be considered above anyone else by virtue of their birth. As a result, I have a strong personal dislike of monarchy as a system. I do not have anything against any of the royals individually, and I'm sure they have "that of God in them" just the same as the rest of the population. After all, none of them "chose" to be royals any more than I chose to be born in a wealthy country as a white middle-class person, with all the privilege that affords me.

I am not usually interested in the Royal Family's activities. However, there was something very interesting going on at the Royal Wedding this time round. I didn't watch it, but I have read about it since and I have watched the full sermon by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the US, Michael Curry.* It was a sermon which made many of the very formal, very upper-class royals squirm uncomfortably and visibly in their seats. It was a sermon which made the bride, Meghan Markle, grin widely almost the whole way through. Why did it provoke such different reactions in these different people? I think we need to talk about race and class, and how intricately connected they are.

There is a reason why many people on social media complained that the sermon was "out of place" and "out of keeping" with the rest of the wedding, and I believe it has to do with both classism and racism. In one way, these people are right: it was very out of place, which is why so many royals looked so uncomfortable. It was out of place because it's not the kind of thing that people who live in white upper-class circles are used to, and it's certainly not what they expect to make an appearance at one of *their* events! I am almost

tempted to think that Meghan, consciously or unconsciously, and possibly with the support of her husband Harry, *trolled* the Royal Family on their own ground, and maybe (let's hope!) taught them and us something in the process.**

Why was this sermon so 'out of place' then? It's not because of its content, not really. Mostly, the sermon was pretty standard Christian wedding fare that you can't really argue with- about the power of love to heal and to redeem, with quotes from 1 John and the Song of Songs. Having said that, the mention of slavery and poverty at a British Royal Wedding was pretty bold and prophetic! **I think that the content wasn't what really made people uncomfortable- what really did this was the delivery.** It was delivered by an African American preacher, in an African American style, with all the passion and emotion that entails. I felt like some responses from the congregation- like 'Amen' -would have been appropriate. Curry let himself be moved and swayed by the Spirit, just like his ancestors would have been when singing the spiritual he also mentioned: 'There is a balm in Gilead'.

It was a wonderful sermon delivered by a man who is proud of his racial heritage and his ancestors' struggles. It is that pride in his culture and race which some people couldn't stomach. They don't mind someone preaching at a Royal Wedding who has black skin in 2018. They don't even mind a 'biracial' Princess turning up. As long as these people behave like White people. It is an attitude with hints of colonialism and it is a hangover from that period which sadly persists in British culture. Some of the reason why class and race discrimination is still such a problem in this country is exactly because people 'don't want to see' them. It is not by persistently pretending to be 'colour blind'*** while simultaneously being uncomfortable with Black expressions of spirituality that we will become a less racist society. It is by facing up to the reality of our colonial and racist history (and the damage it did to many) that we will begin to repair and 'in the words of Michael Curry- 'redeem' and 'heal' our nation. We must first 'see' the reality in front of us and confront it, before we can begin to be transformed into something much more beautiful. I hope and pray for the day when we have a country in which no-one feels uncomfortable with anyone else's race or culture, and when class boundaries will be dismantled to reveal 'again, in the words of Michael Curry addressing Meghan and Harry- that everyone is our 'brother' and 'sister'. Amen.

By National Coordinator, Ruth Wilde

Notes

* As an aside, Michael Curry is also an outspoken supporter of same-sex marriage and the Episcopal Church USA has been suspended from decision-making bodies in the Anglican Communion for allowing priests to officiate at same-sex marriage.

** Maybe this was over-hopeful, as I have since learnt that it was at the Archbishop of Canterbury's suggestion that Harry and Meghan invited Bishop Michael.

*** Afua Hirsch speaks eloquently about the problem of pretending not to see race in her book 'Brit(ish)'.

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