

Today, April 22nd is the 25th anniversary of the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence not very far from where you are sitting now. This week the scandalous treatment of the Windrush children has finally inflamed the nation's indignation, though not before lives have been ruined and people deported. It's been in the news this week, but it's been going on for years. They are of course, slightly different, terrible things, but they are both outworkings of the same twisted fear of the stranger.

These terrible things happen because we allow them to happen. That's a difficult thing to hear said. But it's true. Let's be honest. It's not much help to say 'I don't do it' if enough other people *do* do it. Of course, our hands did not wield the knife that ended Stephen's life; we didn't drive the 'go home' van or deport someone who didn't have four official documents for each year they lived here. We didn't do those things, we would never do those things but they still happen and that's because in order for them to stop happening it's not enough for us not to do them: we must alter the structures in our society, institutions and culture that mean for minorities it is never a level playing field, those structures that encourage people to act out their hate.

Racism is a blasphemy. Racism is a double scandal: not only does it demean those children of God who are its target; it demeans those children of God who perpetrate it and it demeans those children of God who stand back and do nothing. If we are not a member of a minority, it's still our problem: as children of God, if they do it to one of our brothers and sisters, they do it to us. Racism must end for the sake of black and white.

How we do that, there's no easy answer. But if we're not aware that there is a problem and take responsibility for looking for the answer, we will never find the solution.

They are the tiniest of steps, I know, but as a Christian community we have our diversity film nights. We will be taking part in the Great Get Together in June. There will be events again this year for Black History Month in October. Black history is all our history, but it's the bit that usually gets left out.

Get involved, help out, come along.

Outside of church, when someone at the school gates or in the pub or the post office queue starts sounding off about immigrants; when some demagogue politician

goes hunting votes by demonising the desperate; when someone who has escaped war, oppression or grinding poverty comes to live in our neighbourhood, we can remember that we are Christians, and respond accordingly.

Let us pray.

Good and gracious God, you invite us to recognize and reverence your divine image and likeness in our neighbour. Enable us to see the reality of racism and free us to challenge and uproot it from our society, our world and ourselves. We ask this through him whose face we see in all our sisters and brothers, Jesus Christ our Lord.