



From Bishop Nicholas...

The impact of COVID-19 is changing us. In many ways, people have stepped up to look after each other. Churches have been part of this but it's been a much broader movement of neighbourly care. We have applauded the NHS and care workers and we have redefined who are the key workers. The desire to look after each other is strong.

Every organisation has had to change rapidly. Churches have adapted locally extraordinarily fast. Thank you for all you have done to help. None of us knows if this is the new normal but at the end of summer it looks as though the winter could be long and difficult. This virus is not yet finished with us.

We are being tested. The virus is not limited by national boundaries. It is a global pandemic. There have been some key moments and our responses have been revealing. The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis set off an international movement that Black Lives Matter. Who are the people we want to celebrate and why? We have been too slow re-evaluating the statues populating our public space and frustration boiled over. People want to be dealt with justly and we need to rework our history so that it helps us tell a better story in our own day.

For example, there are lessons for us with regard to slavery. Church was part of the problem and became part of the solution. We were among those who profited from slavery and claimed it was part of God's given order. We were also among those who campaigned for its abolition. In this respect my predecessor Bishop Burgess (1825-37) was courageous in the late eighteenth century in articulating his opposition to slavery. Nowadays no-one is in favour of slavery and the Church is among those challenging modern-day slavery. The question for us is why there was a re-evaluation of the way we understood scripture that changed our values and the way we acted.

One of my favourite Bible stories is from Matthew 22.15-22 when the religious leaders tried to trap Jesus with a political question. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor? Smelling

hypocrisy, Jesus asked whose image is on a coin? They answered the emperor's. "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's."

It's a clever and enigmatic response. Whatever it means about God and Caesar, paying taxes, and the Christian engagement with political life and power, a Jew at the time of Jesus would have heard an unspoken second question: 'And you, whose image are you made in?' We are called to live as people made in God's image.

That at the heart of who we are and we need to take care to live up to it. A time of crisis is both a judgement and an opportunity.

*+Nicholas Sarum*