



I, exist!

*Easter (a)rising
Reflections*



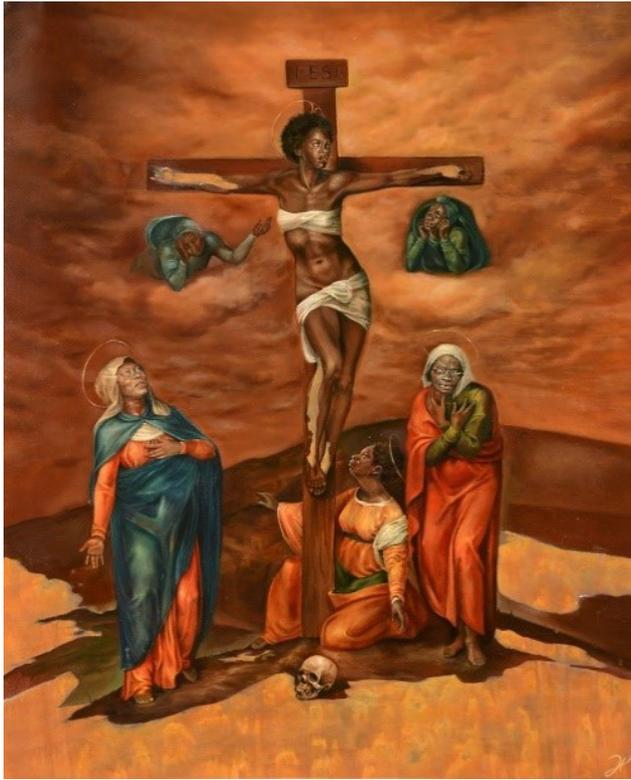
Easter Reflections 2020

I, exist!

Easter (a)rising Reflections

In 1964, French President Charles de Gaulle flying over the Caribbean Sea on a visit to 'French Caribbean Colonies' described the islands as "dust specks on the sea". His comment evokes a deep-seated and arrogant perspective of a region and its people stemming from France's history as a powerful colonizing force in the Caribbean exploiting Black bodies for their economic gain. This deep-seated arrogance is tied up with a belief, sadly reflected in the Christian faith that Black people(s) were as Caribbean writer Merle Collins puts it: "God, they told me then/made me in his own image and likeness. *Almost*." The far-reaching legacies of this arrogance are still with us and is one of the motivations behind the first book of Anthony Reddie titled: '*nobodies to somebodies*'. The rest of his oeuvres and that of many of the Black postcolonial theologians continue to do battle with this arrogance and its various ongoing manifestations.

Rising-up and (a)rising is certainly the key theme for Easter. Jesus took a trip up-stream, against the flow. It took him into public spaces where systemic evil was at play. Consider a few: the gatekeepers of organized religion angry at him for breaking their religious rules on eating habits, for keeping company with dodgy outcast characters, for threatening the temple business, and for generating a large following. The occupying authorities (empire's agents) were suspicious of anyone stirring up dissent, while keen to please the local ruling class! Taking on or rising-up against the status quo is always costly. And Jesus paid the ultimate price...with his life. The 'forces' that kill Jesus are still with us today, causing much brokenness - pain – crucifixion - death.



Artwork by Harmonia Rosales (www.harmoniarosales.com)

In these reflections we have deployed Harmonia Rosales' depiction and reinterpretation of women at the cross of Jesus and invited six Black women to share their Easter reflections through their gaze on this icon. We asked each to reflect on: how does this depiction inspire, disturb and invites us to linking anti-racist habits to a central part of the Christian story (crucifixion) and what follows?

The artist of the image above, Harmonia Rosales, is an afro-cuban-american artist, who considers art as her tool/gift to disturb indifference/inaction and to serve as a means of resistance and (a)rising up to lay claim on one's humanity. Rosales' re-framing of traditional imaging, especially (but not exclusively) in the Christian tradition, giving agency to black female bodies is powerful, opening-up alternative possibilities to expose, and strip embedded ideologies. One wonders whether Rosales is also here attempting to signify on the reality that black-bodies, especially women, continue to be crucified. Art, though, continues to be one of the platforms hosting and genuflecting to 'whiteness' and 'privilege', which like a virus infects us, both consciously and subliminally. Lent and Easter are no exception with depictions, including that of heaven, dominated by 'whiteness'.

Art's intention, though, is not to save us. At its best it bears witness to something "beyond the hills," as the psalmist declares. An artists' depiction does not show us the world as it ought to be: it shows us the world as it is, here and now, and enables us to see that our redemption is always present, available and possible. For as a holy person once observed: 'we are all thirty seconds away from salvation'. Try picturing that as you gaze upon the icon above and reflect on the insights that follow. You may also wish to consider reflecting on the same question we ask the contributors to reflect on.

How does this depiction inspire, disturb and invites us to linking anti-racist habits to a central part of the Christian story (crucifixion) and what follows?

Perhaps, Jesus' comment "...do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" [Luke 23:28] is a hint for us as reflect. We need to weep for ourselves when we hear of abused victims in Caiaphas' house, temples, police custody, and detention centres. We need to weep for ourselves when obsession with power leads us to marginalise the awkward voices in our midst. We need to weep for ourselves when we talk about justice and remain indifferent to injustices in our house. We need to weep for ourselves when we spew out challenging slogans and then cop-out when it gets tough. We need to weep for ourselves when the poor and vulnerable groan under the weight of economic policies favouring the privileged. Jesus died not for, but because of such evil and taking the side of justice rooted in love to re-claim the image of God in each one of us. Through this act we can grasp the lengths to which God will go to reclaim us. Vulnerable love broke into and through, bursting out as new life/power that the agents of death never imagined.

Rising God-who-disrupts-our-neat-boundaries:
you whose truth is larger than we are,

by your presence and through your Spirit
enlarge our minds and hearts

so that we may seek truth,
catch a glimpse of truth,
hear truth, learn truth,
tell truth, live truth

– your truth of the way of full life for all.

Jagessar 2020

I Exist

Even today in 2020, heads still turn when I am seen in my clergy-collar. I appear to represent something that is not expected especially to some people; and I wonder what is expected. What do people think is the norm? As an ethnically-minoritised woman living and working in the three nation United Kingdom (UK) context of the United Reformed Church (URC), I ask this question.

As Christians we should, by now, come to expect things in our Christian life to be almost opposite and upside down compared to what the world expects. We see it in the life and work of Christ, nowhere as dramatic as we see this depicted in, around and on the cross. The cross is one of the world's most powerful symbols, in that it represents both the worst and best of humanity. It is a symbol of torture and of hope, which is present in this depiction by Rosales entitled I-Exist.

Black women are the embodiment of torture and hope existing side-by-side and support from other Black woman is hugely important. The three women at the foot of the cross, and two foremothers who have gone before offering their different perspectives, play a critical role in keeping up their Black sister's spirits. Together, they are symbols of the past and the present meeting to confront any obstructions to future hope in the context of the cross. This points to one representation of the multi-layered complexity of God's enduring love in the midst of despair, and the promise of something better to come.

The incarnation involves all of us — by us I mean all of humankind — to include those gone before, those to come after us, and us. God entered our time and space to inhabit humanity. Jesus came as new humanity, a new earth being, from which both male and female emerged. In fact, Jesus not only represents man and woman of all ethnicities, cultures and classes, he also represents children, the differently abled, the physically and sexually different, and in aiming to demonstrate that all are entitled to full human flourishing, he commits to pushing through and breaking down the traditions and prejudices that impair and stunt God's vision and purpose for all of humankind.

Those who wielded power from a centre they constructed for themselves at the expense of others, pushed many, especially women who are ethnically-minoritised, and God, to an artificial edge. To redress this injustice, Jesus came to the edge and built his foundation.

Yet, there are still many followers who practice unhelpful and unhealthy habits which result in the continuing construction of artificial edges to where 'othered' folk are pushed. In this masculinised, Europeanised falsely constructed centre, there is a habit of retelling and depicting the central part of the Christian story — including the resurrection narrative, as a native European, patriarchal story, with a twinkle in the bluest of eyes.

Rosales corrects this error, and not only challenges its false constructs, she goes ahead and offers a boldface, potentially upsetting alternative which turns the world's kyriarchical operating system on its head. The aim being to derail and deconstruct rooted constructs and proclaim that a new and different reality must exist. In this painting, she begins to reconstruct a new narrative aiming to bring us closer to the true centre, in which daughter, sister, teacher, lover, friend embodied mother for all is different, defiant, afflicted, yet emboldened amid race, gender and class constructs.

Upon her, the sun gazes favourably.
She exists! Come, see her marked beauty.
No! Do not refuse to turn and see, when you look
you visibilise her - you visibilise me.

Listen intently to her story
it is critical to God's expansive glory.
Secrets she holds in stories of ages long dead,
untold, unwritten, unsung yet cannot be unsaid.

Scars and flaws O how they form her,
a beautiful soul — intact, unbroken, she is broker.
What she has been through, shapes her identity.
Her God talk impregnates her, she brings forth humanity.

Swelling up her body with a lifetime of gains.
A body brutalised yet powerful amidst the pains
that birthed communities and families, by nature.
Body so strong, it bore us the Saviour.

Come, see our Saviour,
pierced, crucified, subjected to the worst behaviour.
Undaunted by challenges between the cross and the call.
God kept God's promise, and God blessed us all.

Oh how amazing and life-changing.
Reborn! Resurrected! Transforming!
Down from the cross, on the third day he was raised,
Christ exists, she exists, I exist! God be praised!

“The cross is one of the world's most powerful symbols, in that it represents both the worst and best of humanity. It is a symbol of torture and of hope...”

[The Rev Tessa Henry-Robinson, March 2020]

Womanism and a God that is black and a woman!

A proposal by a womanist to turn upside down the Elmina complex of the colonial wound, into a new structure that comprises of the dungeons on top and merchants, galleries, governors' quarters and Reformed Church below could be viewed in juxtaposition to the image of God as a black woman. It can also be used as framework within which a re-reading of Luke 23:34, "Father [Mother], forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" is done.

Father [Mother], forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

A text that is inspired by this beautiful work of art by Harmonia Rosales that depicts God as not just a woman but a black woman. Black is Beautiful, our very own South African Steve Biko has made that point. Elmina symbolises the place of a black woman in perpetual, systemic impoverishment of black women culturally, anthropologically, theologically and otherwise. The experience of a black woman as embodied in the dungeons of Elmina cannot be delinked from the cross from a womanist perspective and this is what one sees from this piece of art.

God as a black woman could be seen as a response to the rigidity of sexism/racism¹ that have become so difficult to deal with, and this could be traced by womanists from the narrative that is shaped by male dominated language and symbols. In their analysis of the predominating concepts of God that were introduced to black South Africans by missionaries and western theologians Basil Moore and Sabelo Ntwasa(1973) argue that God as person has been one of the major and fundamental images. Which later came to mean God is male and also white, and today means also male and black. In a racist society the place of males, even African and black males is that of power in relation to his fellow African and black women (Maluleke and Nadar 2002). Moore and Ntwasa further expose the affinities of this racializing and gendering of God with exclusion of blacks and women from positions of authority. Mother must forgive!

"From a womanist perspective, 'Mother' is not anti -'Father' but an embodiment of humanity as a whole. To refer to God as Mother and to ask for her forgiveness is a call for the comprehensive liberation of humanity."

To the extent that human beings have been made to imagine God as a man, therefore, the mistakes that are committed by males, patriarchal violence and sexism/racism must be forgiven because God is forgiving. In having to consciously deal with the rapacious behaviour attributable to this man, intuitively that becomes blocked by a faith that was engrafted in the mindset of a human being that God is a man. That is the danger of faith that indeed Mother must forgive.

God as a black woman is indeed a bold statement against the consistent delusion of the ugliness of the dungeons for black women by the West in relation to faith. A faith that refuses to embrace the cross if it refuses to embrace the dungeons from a womanist perspective. Mother forgive them for indeed they do not know what they are doing!

¹ This permutation, 'racist/sexist', is a rendition of the transversal nature of racism with all constructs of colonisation (Kobo 2019).

From a womanist perspective, 'Mother' is not anti –'Father' but an embodiment of humanity as a whole. To refer to God as Mother and to ask for her forgiveness is a call for the comprehensive liberation of humanity. By placing the dungeons on top, and depicting God as a black woman, a womanist perspective challenges the structural injustices in institutional structures of faith and churches. What Vuyani Vellem (2015) calls "unshackling church" from being instruments of cultural domination, from its complacency with a life-killing capitalist exploitation amongst other things.

A God who is Black and woman is a response to the denial of African and Black identity, the denial of African and Black history and herstory, the denial of black women's bodies and the totalising violent logic of ontological denial of black Africans by the faith and ecclesiology that is Western and Eurocentric. To embrace the cross of Jesus is to embrace a radical restructuring and transformation that a God who is Black and woman represents. Mother forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!

[Dr Fundiswa Kobo, University of South Africa (UNISA)]

Re-claiming place and space

"I Exist"... "I Exist".... this title encapsulates so many emotions in two simple words. It presents itself as a reclamation of black Christian women and their place within Christianity. In the interpretations of biblical women's stories, they are often pictured as the martyrs, the encouragers or believers. The same can be said for women in the churches of the African diasporic communities. Fascinatingly, at first glance of the painting I do not have that sombre or gruesome feeling as I would when viewing pictures of the crucifixion of Jesus. Instead I had a feeling of hope, of strength... that I exist. There are so many instances where men are the heroes in biblical scriptures and even in the running of my church men are very much at the forefront of decision-making and pastoral care/leadership. This painting questions the place of the heroine, of how black women can and have been providing redemption in a religion that often regulates their actions and Christian journey. A black woman on the cross gives me the assurance of knowing that I too can be a radical non-conforming Christian who defies the ways in which the church limits the scope of life that Christians can live. It connects me to the ministry of Jesus in an affirming way, that non-conforming Christian women exist....I Exist.

"This painting questions the place of the heroine, of how black women can and have been providing redemption in a religion that often regulates their actions and Christian journey."

This depiction disturbs certain aspects of the Church's traditional boundaries around presence. The artwork speaks to the presence of women strategically as being a source of strength for others, bearing the pain and burdens of their families and communities, as mothers, and as women who uplift and strengthen each other.

Each woman in the painting depicts a way in which women are present in the life of their church, communities or homes. Whether as the mother or church-mother, the prayer warrior, the martyr, the healer or as a symbol of strength. This is nothing new to African diasporic communities or people, this has been engrained since and beyond slavery. However, the painting disturbs the notion of presence because it highlights that even though this may be known, it is not recognized as a blessing or gift but as normalcy, hence it is underrated and under-appreciated. Womanist theologian, Kelly Brown Douglas' many works address the transgressing of presence and incarnation in the way that black women are stereotyped in the US. These stereotypes continue to be reincarnated in African American communities. The depiction invites the church to transgress the traditional stereotypes of black women in their communities and churches and how this is constantly perpetuated. Incarnation invites me to view the depiction through a womanist lens as it pertains to women but specifically black women. A black woman as the saviour and daughter of God; embodying the essence of Jesus Christ saving the world. This transgresses traditional boundaries of the church where Jesus Christ becomes less of an emulated spiritual figure and more as a sense of hope and strength which can be embodied by persons who are pertinent to their church and community. The artwork brings forward Jesus' passion for saving and redeeming the world to a human level. Which is ironic! Reading works by Jamaican writer and philosopher Sylvia Wynter delves into the ways in which black women in the Caribbean and the US have transgressed post-slavery to be recognized as human beings and gain particular rights as they are gradually identified as human in their country's laws. The artwork reveals the duality of Jesus, his spiritual and human sides and the difficulty that the church sometimes has in understanding and recognizing the presence of both in the crucifixion story. Jesus being crucified presents him in his most vulnerable and human state, however, this depiction shows a black woman as Jesus with strength and power. Through her crucifixion she is empowered, she is "mighty to save".

The other side of the coin is revealed with this artwork, rather than the depicted European Jesus bleeding profusely as his European mother and her family and friends cry in agony at his death, the role is reversed and it is depicted with black women within the roles of the crucifixion story; where they are usually excluded from being depicted. Within the Caribbean context where racism has caused damage and birthed colourism which perpetuates prejudice and discrimination within the African diaspora; the lowliest and highest within the Caribbean communities switch roles in this depiction of the crucifixion. Even though this has been gradually changing, the colonial thread woven into the Caribbean's history still presents moments where this is the case. This artwork definitely invites anti-racist habits rooted in the core of the crucifixion story where a white European saviour saves the world from sin; which is deeply rooted and linked to the colonial period and slavery, where the Africans in the new world had to be converted and saved. Moving away from Eurocentric crucifixion narrative opens up opportunities to see Christianity as more than a European tool that was used to convert slaves. Even more so, admonishing sexist habits that not only men, lay pastors and male Ministers can lead, save and guide sinners to redemption...black women of the church can also do the same and from a leadership standpoint.

This is not to declare an equality battle within my church but rather to question why women are visible in the frontlines as Jesus was in ministry but their presence and leadership is not given recognition or regard. This painting reminds them that they exist, they are seen, they are doing work. They do not only pray, cry and encourage as the Marys of the crucifixion do, but they also lead, continue to lead, and play a vital role in the life of the church.

[Renita Barnes]

‘We are all hanging on the Cross’ - the suffering of one is the suffering of all

Turning on the TV, the news and various media platforms is wrought with how Coronavirus (COVID 2019) is ravaging human beings, globally. Whether one understands or not the language used to report, one word dominates the news-coronavirus! There are many views on how to prevent the virus and it all boils down to hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette, social distancing and so on. I think about vulnerable persons such as elderly, women, children, homeless and so on. What about places where there is no access to clean water and people cannot afford a meal and now to speak of hand sanitizers? Social distancing brings concerns on persons living in ghettos, shacks, squatter camps and homeless where there may be a family of 5 to 10 persons living in one room, how will they achieve social distancing? What about undocumented immigrants? These and many questions come to the fore as we engage with the reality that the coronavirus is daily exposing.

We are in the midst of Holy and everyone, not only Christians or non Christians are anxious, nations are either on total or partial lockdowns, how does one reflect on the Holy week in times of the coronavirus? Chammah J. Kaunda is right in stating, “coronavirus, more than any human struggle today, is teaching us to recognize our suffering faces in that of strangers and forcing us to make the most of taken for granted traces of our mutual humanity in others. Indeed, Christ has been infected (crucified) with coronavirus. And we eagerly seek for mutual resurrection which includes all creation.”

“Harmonia Rosales’ painting “I Exist” draws on women who are crucified daily by patriarchy and other injustices and “un-freedoms”² that they face daily and now by coronavirus. Rosales’ painting demonstrates how women are often sacrificed at the altar of society with all the ‘un-freedoms’ and injustices as she reinterprets women at the cross of Jesus.”

² Amartya Sen: The Nobel Prize winner for Economics in his 1999 book Development as Freedom.

Some women and children might be in hostile and volatile homes where they are not safe during these lockdowns, so for me Harmonia Rosales' painting "I Exist" draws on women who are crucified daily by patriarchy and other injustices and "un-freedoms" that they face daily and now by coronavirus. Rosales' painting demonstrates how women are often sacrificed at the altar of society with all the "un-freedoms" and injustices as she reinterprets women at the cross of Jesus. This year's reflection on the Holy week brings us face-to-face with the fact that human beings will always be vulnerable despite all technological innovations. Coronavirus has infected and affected all. It knows no race, no gender no age, no social status. Celebrities, politicians and famous people are infected just as poor, excluded and unknown people. However, vulnerability is not a weakness, rather, a weapon of struggle for protecting our humanity from death-dealing forces. Central to this is recognizing Christ's vulnerability, even to death on the cross, as fundamental human struggle for the fullness of life.

In a few months that coronavirus has ravaged humanity, we see how the human race has united and is standing together in its vulnerability. A strategic 'turning the other cheek' to the virus for its demise (Mathew 5:40). This is a most subtle form of resistance which contests agents of death, whether human or virus. Coronavirus is met with rituals of wearing the masks and regular washing of hands, recognizing the vulnerability of being in a large group. By making use of such prescribed methods, humanity is forming a language of resistance against the virus. This same language of defiance is potentially the same global language needed today to fight against other viruses such as global racism, patriarchy, homophobia, corruption and exploitation. Indeed, with this global language, we can subvert status quo which sacrifices any group of people at the altar of patriarchy, racism and so on (Genesis 22).

Racism and gender injustice are also obnoxious viruses that restricts the fullness of human life and freedom to become full human. Like the coronavirus that has restricted human life and has confined many to homes, it has restricted human agency of being truly human (*Ubuntu*) as we say in Africa. The experiences of women, Africans/black people, indigenous people, sexual minorities, the groaning creation have been merged into a single experience – coronavirus and the entire human race has experienced a glimpse that others have suffered throughout their existence. Can this mutual suffering from coronavirus make us more human to one another? *Ubuntu* is expressed in relation with others, viruses such as racism and gender injustice limits our humanity because they do not only infect but affect all of humanity who now have to socially distance from others. Human beings are relational, and *Ubuntu* can better be expressed when as human beings we know and understand how to treat ourselves and then how to treat others.

I believe the resurrection we eagerly await today would be a resurrection, not only from coronavirus, but from global injustice, from racism, gender injustice, climate injustice, homophobia and all forms of injustice and through recognizing our mutual vulnerability, we will emerge stronger than ever. Through this experience, may we never take for granted human relationships, never again will we take for granted simple activities like walking in the park or going grocery shopping, hugs and handshakes.

Coronavirus has taught us that we are truly human with others and that the very globalization that has been making life, travel and communication among other things easy can also have catastrophic consequences such as the coronavirus and we need to be each others' keepers by doing all we can to preserve each other's lives. The suffering of one is the suffering of all and Coronavirus has driven this point home effortlessly! We as human beings are vulnerable, and vulnerability takes us into introspection, and we rise strong.

[Dr Mutale Mulenga-Kaunda]

My Coronavirus Experience

Since finding out about how much the virus has spread around South Korea and the globe, many schools closed and made students do schoolwork from home. The work the teachers have been sending is not a lot per subject, although putting it all together, it may seem like quite a bit of work to be done. We have stayed at home for weeks, doing work, waiting for more work to be sent and trying to take a couple of breaks in between.

It has been challenging to adjust to this distance learning for me and my sisters (twins), I suppose for others as well. The first week was hardest as the teachers sent us too much work that was practically all due on the same day. So, we had to figure out ways to finish all the assignments, schedule our time well and submit all of them on time. We had to give feedback of that week's experience as students and thankfully, teachers heeded our responses and the workload improved over the weeks. We have been getting fewer emails and they sent a document to show us our work schedule.

Staying at home because of the coronavirus has been very boring and tiring. In order to reduce the spread of Coronavirus, Churches, schools and other activities have been closed. We have been indoors for just over a month! I, myself, have not stayed inside the house for so long. Staying inside the house has made me realize that I really like going to the school building, seeing and talking to other people, aside from my family. Yes, I can call my friends and text them from time to time, but it's not the same as being next to them and laughing along with them about the random things we tend to talk about. . I am happy being with my family, but staying inside and always having to talk to them can get tiring and even boring at times.

God-of-a-promised-hope-who-waits-and-heals:

may our hearts so often floating in a sea of choppy waves, find calm in you;

may our fevered, wounded and bruised bodies find wholeness in your love;

may the unexpected miracles we experience this day make us humbler to receive your grace;

and may the urge to bring hope, care and compassion in distressing situations find sustenance in your promise of abundant life for all.

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It's fun being around and talking to your family, but going outside, being in the sun and seeing your friends makes the experience and interactions with everyone better.

Recently, before the spread of Coronavirus was a thing, humans were being cruel to their own kind. Living in certain places and being black denies you certain privileges and you are exposed to uncomfortable situations. Usually, black people are refused certain services that most other people can have with no added questions. Black immigrants experience the things that black people in America and within African experience daily. Black people experienced the worst and unimaginable treatment during slave trade, colonialism and apartheid. Most humans aren't accepting to their own kind and are very harsh and hurtful to them. So, because of this, Jesus may have tried to teach us a lesson about life and equality, which is where the Coronavirus comes in. God created the virus, not to punish us, but to teach us a life lesson. The lesson He wants us to learn from this is that, no matter what race or what gender and age, we are in this together. We can die criticizing others, or grow from this experience and realize our mistakes. If not for ourselves, if not for our kind, then we should do it for Jesus, for our Lord God.

[Malumbo Kaunda 8th grader at Chadwick International school in Songdo, Incheon South Korea]

Where Am I?

I never thought of the Christian story in terms of colour... except, of course, I did! Even without consciously thinking about it, I knew Jesus was white. I don't think anyone actually told me so... but everything told me so.

As far as I can remember, the handouts I received from Sunday School depicted a familiar, friendly image – tall stature, handsome face, sandy-brown shoulder-length hair. And white. This understanding was bolstered by the image which hung proudly in many Caribbean homes – the benevolent white Jesus gazing down over the household.

“Thinking about it now, I realize it wasn't just Jesus who I presumed to be white, but pretty much all the major Bible characters. Certainly, the disciples – those who took on and continued Christ's legacy. But all the other players too. Good, bad or indifferent – Black people didn't really feature in this story.”

It was reinforced by images in popular artwork, stained glass windows, church icons. All declared that Jesus was white. I recall, in recent years, seeing a young man on television – kindly face, shoulder-length brown hair – and I commented that ‘He looks like Jesus!’ I don't think it would ever occur to me to make such an observation about a Black or Asian person. Whatever it means to look like Jesus, it apparently includes being white!

And, of course, the relationship between religion and colonialism seems to confirm this 'truth'. Heathen Black people needed modern-day white disciples to bring them the means of salvation. Even beyond religion, this understanding is still prevalent. Deprived Black nations need help. Advanced white nations are the potential saviours (...never mind that it is frequently their unjust historical and present practices which cause the continuing deprivation!) I understand why many Black people have rejected the Christian story, believing it to be 'white man's religion', designed to help keep Black people in their place- subservient to a white Saviour.

Holy-in-one-compassionate-Lover-of-righteousness:

Forgive us:

for failings we are unable to speak aloud; for opportunities not grasped; for compassion not given; for sorrow not shared; for joy not celebrated; for love not offered; for forgiveness not extended.

In a world full of distractions, help us to hear your voice and understand your way; make us see that there is no way around, only through – so that we may become transparent, recognising who we are.

Fill us with a vision large enough to hold more than we are inclined and accustomed to embrace.....

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And what of gender? If I didn't feature in the Christian story as a Black person, how much less so as a Black woman? Of course, there are women in the Bible. Dig a little, and you realize that some were hugely important and influential characters. Yet, the general portrayal of biblical women is of frequently unnamed characters, possession of their menfolk, or whose role was to weep from the side lines. I grew up against a backdrop understanding that women were somehow second-class citizens to our male counterparts – an understanding legitimated by biblical texts. At home, men were to be the heads of the household. In church, women were to stay silent! But why should men have this headship by default? And what if the men in your vicinity are not particularly talking sense? Do I suspend my God-given intelligence to 'simply accept' my questionable place in this popular version of the gospel story? I tried that for some time – but found that I could not 'simply believe'. I had to either reject many of the messages I was inheriting, or I had to find new ways to understand what I had been taught.

My bottom-line is this...I believe that God is love. Not 'God has the capacity to love'... but God is love!

So, could the God who created all in God's image only reach out to Black people through white people? And can the God who is love be sexist? To both questions, I hear a resounding 'No!'

So, Black people must be central to God's will and purposes. And women must have a God-given place in the story. The Cross was – and is - for us. From beginning to end, we exist. I exist.

The question is, what am I going to do with this truth?

[Karen Campbell - Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, URC]

Questions to reflect

Legacies of resurrection and the legacies of slavery meet in these reflections, That despite everything empire has done, despite all the dominant powers of the world, despite all the attempts to objectify people, nations, identities, bodies: 'I exist': 'I exist' is the embodied presence and voice of all the despised by the dominant in hope, rage and defiance to all the racist, patriarchal, imperial, colonial powers. The risen Jesus says this and the women in our reflection say this also.

How can the story and witness of those whose existence is resistance testify to the (a)rising of Easter? And to the witness of the followers of this (a)rising Lord?

With Tessa ask, 'Who do you refuse to see in the body of Christ?'

With Fundiswa ask, 'Can injustice be overturned by forgiveness?'

With Renita ask: How can I be a radical non-conforming Christian who defies the ways in which the church limits the scope of life that Christians can live?

With Mutale ask: How can the body of Christ shake off the viruses of Racial and Gender injustice which make us so life threateningly sick?

With Malumbo ask: Have we forgotten we are in this together?

With Karen ask: What are you going to do with the truths contained here?

And if you are part of the dominant groups, privileged by power and empire, ask "How do I exist?"

Lover-of-justice-and-peace,

shape our consciences and hearts according to your way of just, peaceful and loving lives.

Move us beyond fear to speak with compassionate courage and to act with both conviction and humility.

Give us ears, eyes, hearts and voices to discern, respond and embody hope through our actions, in private and in public.

Bless us with wholeness, and through your Spirit continue to sustain us in the face of powerful forces bent on denying life.

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