

## Thought for the Day, 11 June 2020: The Black Body of Christ

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Readings: Deuteronomy 8: 2-16 and 1 Corinthians 10: 1-17



Eight minutes and forty-six seconds. That's how long it took for the police officer to let life flow away from George Floyd's body. The images of these long minutes sparked protests against racial injustice and violence for over two weeks now, in countries across the world. And so did of course his last words, 'I can't breathe'.

Floyd's body, deprived of breath, has become a symbol. Black people across the world recognised themselves in it. This could have happened to them, too. In fact, similar things do happen to them, far too often.

Ten years ago, the African American theologian James H. Cone published the book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Here, he argues that the Body of Christ was crucified, again, in the thousands of black men and women who were hanged on lynching trees, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in America.

If Cone would be revising his book today, he'd make a connection to the murder of George Floyd, and of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner and many others who were recently killed by racist forces. In the face of systematic racism, the Body of Christ colours black, as it merges with the bodies of those whose black lives did and do not matter.

Writing about the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul says: 'Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.' (1 Corinthians 10: 16-17)

Whenever the followers of Christ share bread and wine, they participate symbolically in the Body of Christ – a Body that, in the face of racism, colours black. The Body of Christ is a space of radical solidarity, which today means: racial solidarity. It connects us with other bodies, of people whom we may not know, but with whom we are united. As Paul writes two chapters later, ‘If one part [of the Body of Christ] suffers, every part suffers with it.’

Today, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, is down on the church calendar as the Feast of *Corpus Christi* (Body of Christ), also known as the Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion. We are invited to reflect what it means for us, today, to commune with the Body of Christ. How do we participate in that symbolic space of embodied solidarity?

With Jesus on the cross, and with Floyd in his last minutes, we say: ‘We cannot breathe.’ For in the Body of Christ, we share the same breath. And we will not rest until all members of Christ’s body, first and foremost our black brothers and sisters, can breathe again.