

The EMBRACE Annual General Meeting in 2004 Sr Brighde Vallely (then EMBRACE Vice-Chairperson) reflected how, in John's Gospel, while Peter warmed himself by a charcoal fire, in the in-group, Jesus was in the outgroup, among the demonised. After the resurrection, it was Jesus who cooked breakfast on a charcoal fire for the disciples, and Peter, following his earlier denials of Christ, had the opportunity to make his threefold response to Jesus' question: "Do you love me?"

Brighde then asked 'So what must we do?' and answered:

- Repent of sectarianism, racism and prejudice
- Wash the feet of others
- Churches and church communities should be communities of the inclusive charcoal fire
- Be informed and learn to ask the right questions, of churches, politicians and policymakers

Embracing the Stranger

God is portrayed in the scriptures as identifying with fallen and broken humanity. God revealed Himself as the God of the outsider when He intervened in the lives of the Israelites in Egypt. His liberation of His people from their oppression displayed His commitment to the marginalized and the vulnerable. And it is this concern, compassion and commitment that God holds up as a blueprint for His followers.

The Israelites themselves are portrayed as sojourners or tenants on the land that God has given them and their tenancy is linked to their obedience to God. Indeed, the way in which the stranger, together with the widow and the orphan, is treated, is an indicator of the Israelites' obedience to the law of God and it is this commitment to justice and the defence of the weak that the prophets highlight repeatedly. God doesn't want lip service; He desires obedience. He requires us to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him. (Micah 6:8) The stranger provides the opportunity for the Israelite to reciprocate the heart of God for the downtrodden and the oppressed...

Jesus takes this a step further when he tells his disciples that what they do to the stranger, they do to Him. He is in the guise of the stranger, the poor and the weak and His call is to treat all people as we would treat Him. In the incarnation Jesus comes as a stranger into this world. ... Jesus understands those who seek refuge and asylum and identifies with them. As the stranger on the road to Emmaus, He draws alongside and supports the weak. His great call is to hospitality, a central theme of scripture. Jesus epitomised hospitality in his welcome and treatment of those on the fringes of society. But it was more than a welcome. His hospitality was about reconciliation and the transformation from stranger to guest and from guest to friend.

Part of an article by EMBRACE chairperson, Richard Kerr, in *Lion & Lamb: racism and religious liberty*, Autumn 2004.

Other sources:

[\(Policy on Asylum Seekers and Refugees: a report by the Race Relations Committee to the 2003 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.pdf](#) Presbyterian Church in Ireland, p. 15.)