

Thought for the weekend Friday 30th June 2023

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My cricket addiction started way back, in my school days, so I'm living in clover just now. I'm loving the finely poised men's 2nd Ashes Test, hard on the heels of the thrilling first Test and magnificent Women's Ashes- the Aussies again victorious, but that match lit up by Tammy Beaumont's record breaking double century.

So it was with dismay that I read this week's report of the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket describing persistent racism, sexism, classism and elitism in management and representation across England and Wales. The report acknowledges some progress on inclusion in recent years, but holds up a mirror to reflect that control at the top levels of the game is overwhelmingly white and male, not reflecting the gender or ethnicity of players at all levels. A sobering thought in the game that is a byword for fairplay and honourable behaviour- it's just not cricket.

The report also notes that unfair discrimination is still a problem in our society at large- but identifies how Cricket could lead the way in addressing abuses of power that damage our communities. It's true that most people think of themselves as 'not racist' – but it's vital to take that extra step to become anti-racist, to recognise the cultures and words that exclude; to challenge structures and situations that oppress; and to measure progress in becoming a diverse community. My quick crib is to check in, call out, count up – recognizing that our differences that make each of us a whole individual, are our collective strength.

Reading the report put me in mind of the story Jesus told of the Good Samaritan. The emphasis is usually on the Good- the merchant who stopped to help some guy who'd been mugged on a lonely road – we're told of the priests and lawyers who passed by on the other side- they had places to be, people to meet, yadayada excuses for not helping. But it's the Samaritan bit that's important here- the foreigner, not 'one of us'- but only this outsider could reach across nationality, religion, race and culture to see clearly a person who needed an outstretched hand, and treated a stranger as he would have wanted his own child, spouse or brother to be treated. Jesus simply told us to love our neighbour as ourself.

And speaking of neighbours, the Commission report completely failed to spot my pet hate- the England and Wales Cricket board always called the 'ECB'. We'll know there's been progress when they call themselves the EWCB.