As pupils began to filter in to school,  there was a different atmosphere to the usual chatter and bustle in the corridors. People were in groups, talking in hushed tones about something that had happened the night before. A fatal stabbing had occurred and someone said the victim was a pupil from our school.  As more sixth formers arrived, more names were eliminated and eventually it was down to three possible names and one of them walked into school, leaving people with no doubt of the names of the boys who were missing from the pupil roll call. It was either Stephen Lawrence or his friend Dwayne Brooks! I can't remember how the news filtered through that it was Stephen who had lost his life

There was shock, disbelief, many tears and a lot of anger over the days. Our excellent pastoral care system began the process of counselling those pupils who knew Stephen well and we drew strength from assemblies, where prayers were offered for Stephen and the family.

Over the days and weeks, more information was made public about the events that had occurred.  I remember taking my young daughter on a walk from the school to where the attack had happened, for a vigil.There were hundreds of us.  I put flowers at the bus stop, which were soon just one of many tributes left, with many messages of shock and words of comfort for Stephen to rest in peace.

And for many years there was no justice- a lot of incompetence and a failure by the police to gather evidence and bring the perpetrators to trial.

As I am writing this, it is nearly the 30th anniversary of his brutal murder. His death has had, and still continues to have, an impact on our society and sadly his death is not the only racially motivated loss of life, but it certainly a very high profile one, thanks to the unwavering efforts of Doreen Lawrence and her family.

Racial Justice Sunday is an opportunity for those who attend church to reflect, prayerfully on the injustices that have happened and to offer support to those who have been affected by racially motivated crimes.  After all , if we remain silent, we may be seen as complicit in events. We must use this opportunity to express how abhorrent it is for someone to be a victim of crime because of the colour of their skin. We must remind people that they should try to be the best version of themselves.  As Stephen’s brother, Stuart, said in his book “Silence is not an option.”

Let’s use this Sunday to reflect, love and have the desire to continue to effect change in a positive way. We will never forget Stephen and the man he could have become, but I am proud to have known him.

Rosemary Coleman