



This is Aurtherine Lucy Foster who died in the spring of this year at the grand age of 92. She had the most extraordinary life.

The child of Alabama sharecroppers she was a shy, reserved person. But having always been good at school she was keen to get a good education and so, in 1952, her friend Pollie Anne Myers suggested that they both apply for the University of Alabama - the state's flagship academic institution. The college was all white, they were both black

In September of 1952, to their surprise, they were both accepted but a few days later officials at the University realised their skin colour, told them they weren't welcome after all and withdrew the offer of places. A long legal battle ensued. In 1954 the supreme court ruled that segregation in public education was unconstitutional. At this point the University of Alabama were so keen that these two young women not become students that they hired private investigators who discovered that Pollie Anne Myers had been pregnant when she applied and was thus in breach of the college's moral code. So it was that Lucy had to take up her place alone. The first black student at the University of Alabama. She was not allowed to eat or live on campus, but in February 1956, she started classes. That lasted for three days. When news of her presence got around there were riots and she was pursued by a mob. She was suspended (ostensibly for her own safety), and then expelled for claiming that the University had conspired with the rioters.

After that she married future Baptist minister, Hugh Lawrence Foster. It was another seven years before any more black students were admitted; and it wasn't until 1988 (32 years later) that Lucy Foster's expulsion was cancelled. She resumed her studies and graduated in 1992, at the age of 63, at the same time as her daughter. A plaque was unveiled in her honour and this year a campus building was named after her.

I tell you this story - not only because it is a really important story to re-tell but also because it points to a really important truth. All kinds of things happened to Autherine Lucy Foster, many of them difficult, bad and completely out of her control. At many times in her life the only thing she did have control over was how she responded to the actions of others and events that were completely out of her control. The same, of course, is true for all of us. Many times things will happen to us and our families and churches that we have little or no control over. The only thing, then, that we can decide on is how we react to those events, those circumstances. The mindset that we come to those events with.

David Frost was once interviewing Archbishop Desmond Tutu and said to him - 'Archbishop - it seems to me that you are an optimist.'

'No, no' replied the Archbishop with a twinkle in his eye, 'I am not an optimist...I am a prisoner of hope.'

It is my prayer that as we work and pray and seek God together over the next few months and years that we will never lose sight of the grace and hope and peace and love that surround us and hold us every day - and live and work and act as though we know those things to be true - in the strength and love of God.