Racial Justice and Reconciliation

America, Why Can't You Stop Killing Us

Stephanie Spellers

The day after George Floyd was murdered by four Minnesota police officers, I posted this question on Facebook: "America: why can't you stop killing us?" I thought it was rhetorical. It was not. Two days later, America reached the tragic summit of 100,000 dead due to the COVID-19 pandemic – disproportionately black, brown and native people who lack access to adequate health care, information or protective equipment, made more vulnerable because their largely invisible, overwhelmingly underpaid work has been deemed "essential." Again, I had to wonder: "America, why can't you stop killing us?"

That weekend I put on my facemask and clergy collar, and took to the streets with protesters here in New York. We called their names: George Floyd, Breonna Taylor (killed by Louisville police in March), Ahmaud Arbery (killed by white vigilantes in February in Georgia), and too many more. We chanted "I can't breathe" and "No justice, no peace" till our throats were raw. Within my soul, a different by now familiar chant rose: "America, America. Why can't you stop killing us?"

The accumulated evidence suggests America is nearly incapable of allowing people of color as a group to thrive. Our nation is sick, addicted to the diminishment, elimination and control of Black, Latino, Native and Asian lives … whatever is necessary to ensure the flourishing of White people and culture. Our bodies and lives are the fuel that keeps the white machine humming. While much has evolved in American life, this – what Jim Wallis calls "America's original sin" – has not.

The path to beloved community begins with truth-telling

I pray these words do not plunge anyone into shame or despair. We cannot afford that luxury. For me, truth-telling like this is a step on the path to liberation and faithful action for those who love and follow Jesus.

That is the path we've committed to as an Episcopal Church: the long-term work of racial healing and repair that we know as Becoming Beloved Community. What does that mean? The Church's Becoming Beloved Community (BBC) vision and action document says it this way:

> We dream of communities where all people may experience dignity and abundant life and see themselves and others as beloved children of God. We pray for communities that labor so that the flourishing of every person (and all creation) is seen as the hope of each

> person….. It's a vision of a world where oppressed people are liberated from oppression, and oppressors are liberated from their need to oppress (p. 15).

We will not see that vision realized in our lifetime, but we can commit to the life-giving journey. Along the way, we work through four areas of action (or "quadrants"). We gather with neighbors and partner institutions to cast a shared vision of the community we long to become *and* commit together to make it real (what the BBC vision outlines as "Proclaim the Dream of Beloved Community"). We learn, pray and share stories in order to grow as healers and reconcilers (that is, "Practice Jesus's Way of Love"). We take up the work of transforming and repairing systems that most harm people of color (that is, "Repairing the Breach").

Systemic Racism is not an accident

But the journey usually starts with quadrant 1: "Telling the Truth" about our churches and about our society. This truth is apparent across every sector of American life. People of color suffer police brutality and mass incarceration, economic deprivation, chronic unemployment, discrimination in hiring and promotion, inadequate education, crumbling public housing, discriminatory banking policies, defunded public health systems, environmental devastation in our backyards, systematic destruction of our thriving neighborhoods, second-class citizenship in many churches and dioceses and so much more.

The above system is too comprehensive to be an accident or even the result of "disadvantage" or "underprivilege." It is diabolically systematic and has Christian fingerprints all over it. Starting in 1452, with a set of papal decrees known as the Doctrine of Discovery, the Church sanctioned and unleashed terror on non-European lands and peoples, who were conveniently not deemed fully human.

Since colonists arrived on these shores, laws and customs have ensured European-descended men of a certain class receive the first fruits. The rest slowly trickles down like a poorly terraced slope of farmland. This system continues today as originally designed, still creating an undernourished group at the bottom whose underpaid (or unpaid) labor and disproportionate suffering make life possible for the rest.

This means contemporary racism is not some aberrant relic on the margin of American society. The American way of life has always depended on the deprivation, elimination and/or control of entire groups of people, and race has consistently been the most important factor in selecting these groups. Once chosen, your group only matters insofar as you are useful to the ultimate project: a thriving white nation. If you are no longer useful to that project, or you threaten it in any way, your group must be imprisoned, deported, relocated, eliminated or otherwise diminished.

Truths that pierce the heart

I have known this for decades, but the truth pierced me at a deeper level during two recent trips. In October 2019, I accompanied the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church for its meeting in Montgomery, Alabama. We made pilgrimage to the Equal Justice Initiative and its national memorial to victims of racial terror lynching.

Standing outside, you look downhill at 800 ceiling-mounted monuments, each inscribed with the names of people who died in racial terror incidents. The boxes could be coffins. They could also be bodies suspended in the air.

Indeed, the museum curators intentionally position you on this hill so you feel like a spectator at a lynching. Guides will tell you about how – less than 100 years ago – church bulletins published the time and place of the day's lynching, so members could take a picnic basket after worship, watch the event, and make a day of it. Far from a horror, lynching was a popular pastime for good, white Christians.

Within three weeks of that visit, I was on a plane bound for Liverpool, England. The city is known as the Capital of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which makes it the perfect home for the International Slavery Museum. A quote on one wall at the museum told me everything I needed to know:

> Local labour was scarce because millions of indigenous peoples had died after the colonization of their lands by Europeans. Many were killed in battle and others were worked to death, especially in the mines. European diseases wiped out huge numbers more. So European colonists looked to the continent of Africa for a new supply of labour.
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> "Africans are the ideal people for the work here, in contrast to the natives, who are so feeble." – Alonzo Zuazo, Spanish judge, 1518

A nation and identity built on racial hierarchy

The implications of those words nearly brought me to my knees. Zuazo might as well have said: "We Europeans need tools to work this land. The natives are too feeble and die too quickly. How inconvenient! Those sturdy African animals are better suited to this task. Bring a steady supply now."

Why can't America stop killing us? The white national project needs us to serve as the disposable tools and fuel that make it work. The system breaks down if people of color step into our full humanity and citizenship. State-sanctioned racial terror – lynching, but also as native slaughter and relocation, chattel slavery, Japanese internment camps, Jim Crow laws, mass incarceration, the War on Drugs, post 9/11 Islamophobia, immigrant detention and deportation – is inevitable, if you have to maintain the racial hierarchy on which the nation and white identity are built.

America has economically and politically thrived thanks to this system. So has the Episcopal Church, the Christian community built to serve and sanctify a white empire.

I am in tears even as I write these words. But I know it is good – good that the nation and church gird ourselves with God's grace and tell these deeper truths. Good that we lament and repent, even if it dismantles much of what we have understood about ourselves. A house built on sand cannot stand forever. A nation and church built on racial supremacy cannot and should not, either.

A day when God's people lead the way and speak the truth

I dream of the day – and it may be coming – when the people of God lead the way and speak truth about who we have been and who we are, *and* prayerfully discern together who we want to become … as a nation and as a church.

If we are to become a Beloved Community, it will not be enough to be good individuals or even warm and welcoming churches. It will not be enough to speak of white privilege or to cheer at the presence of leaders of color in our midst. We will need to individually and corporately live into the pledge we've made as the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement: *repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done and the evil done on our behalf.*

We will need to understand the white supremacy project at the core of our institutional identity, and actively dismantle and subvert it. Otherwise it will only reinvent and reassert itself, as it has for the entirety of American history. We will need to dedicate our hands, hearts and money to stopping America's insatiable consumption of the bodies and lives of Black, Latinx, Native and Asian people. We will have to cast our lot with God's dream of Beloved Community, and learn to selflessly commit to each other's good.

How will we seek justice and flourishing with all God's people, especially the ones whose suffering and diminishment made our national and ecclesial prosperity possible? There is no single answer. A good starting place is "Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are" (a resource for individuals, congregations and communities) or "Learn, Pray, Act: Resources for Responding to Racist Violence" – both on www.episcopalchurch.org. You will discover many more possibilities in this issue of Vital Practices.

However you walk, please stay close to Jesus and deeply committed to sharing in his Way of Love. Turn and confess regularly to God, and learn Jesus's unselfish ways from scripture. Pray and worship with your whole heart, and be zealous in blessing others and giving yourself away for love. Go across borders to join God's restoration and healing project. And rest, trusting that God's power, not our own, will bring the dream of Beloved Community to full flower.

In Jesus, God has told us and shown us what is good. It is never, ever too late to speak what is true, turn from systems of death and pursue the path of love.

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Resources:

- Becoming Beloved Community … Where You Are adapted by Heidi J. Kim, Charles "Chuck" Wynder, Jr., and Stephanie Spellers, The Episcopal Church
- A Brave Space with Dr. Meeks: Reimagining Policing Pt. 1, a podcast with Dr. Catherine Meeks, The Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing, June 15, 2020
- Lynching in America, a report by the Equal Justice Initiative, 2017
- The State of Racism, Thought Leadership Series, The Episcopal Church, November 15, 2013

Do We Want To Be White, or Do We Want To Be Church?

Kelly Brown Douglas

"I Am Trayvon." "Say Her Name." "Hands Up Don't Shoot." "I Can't Breathe." "Black Lives Matter." These 21st century mantras filled my mind as I ran 2.23 miles to honor and demand justice for Ahmaud Aubrey, who was gunned down by two white men while jogging in Brunswick, Georgia. By the time I completed the run I was breathless, but not because my legs were tired or my lungs were winded. I was breathless because my heart was heavy and my spirit was troubled. Ahmaud was the latest in a long list of young black lives lost to the hate of white-racist violence. Even though I knew who and what killed these young black persons, there was another question that left me in tears as I closed in on the 2.23 miles: Why have these murders of young black people become so commonplace that, without black protests, they go virtually unnoticed and too often have provided impunity for the killers. In the words of James Baldwin, "what is really happening here?"

The answer to this question is about more than the systemic, structural and cultural realities of white supremacy endemic to the fabric of this country. Rather, it is about the collective soul of America.

Whiteness and the soul of America

The soul connects human beings to our higher, aspirational selves. It animates and propels people to do better and to be better. It pushes humans toward the fullest potential of what it means to be "good." It reflects the essence of our humanity. The soul of who we are as divine creatures, therefore, is not defined by the mercurial and compromising protestations of human beings, nor is it accountable to the politics and biases of human history. Rather, it is inextricably bound to the "transcendent arc of the universe, that bends toward justice" – that perfect goodness that is the loving justice of God. It is our soul that connects us to the Beloved Community, which God promises us all. This is a community where all persons are treated as the sacred creations that they are. This begs the question: What has alienated America from its very souls, thereby virtually normalizing violence against black lives? Answer: Whiteness itself.

Whiteness is not a benign social-racial construct. It is both the foundation and capital of white supremacy. It is that which white supremacy protects and privileges. Whiteness, therefore, is an inherently oppositional and violent construct – for its very existence depends upon the marginalization, subjugation, if not elimination, of people of color. As Baldwin rightly observes,

"white people's sense of self for far too long has depended upon the lie that black people are inferior to them; and tragically, what white people have not realized is that in 'this debasement and definition they have debased and defined themselves.'" It is for this reason that the very soul and, hence, humanity of the nation – especially white America – is at stake. Inasmuch as this is the case, the lives of people of color will always be at risk.

And so, it is a matter of life and death that America be reconciled with its very soul – and hence, its humanity. The nation, however, is without the political and civic leadership that would lead America to discover and become reconciled to its very soul. And this brings us to the role of the church as a community of faith.

Inasmuch as faith is about partnering with God to mend an unjust earth, and thus to move us toward a more just future, then faith communities by definition are accountable to that future. Simply put, they are to be driven by the urgings of their souls. It is left to communities of faith to live into who they claim to be and thus lead the nation back to its very soul.

What then might that look like for a faith community such as the Episcopal church? There are two fundamental aspects: Repentant truth-telling and Restorative letting-go.

Repentant truth-telling

The church must model what it means to tell the truth in order to be set free from the legacy of white supremacy, so to live into a new reality. Repentant truth-telling is not about self-serving admissions of guilt so to be exonerated from an inhumane past. Rather, it is about taking responsibility for that past. This means naming the ways the church has been shaped by **and** continues to benefit from the complex realities of white supremacy – and then most importantly doing that which is necessary systemically, culturally and even theologically to free the church from it.

To engage in repentant truth-telling means, for instance, that the Episcopal church must honestly confront how its past racial attitudes and apathetic responses to racial injustice (like slavery) have contributed to the kind of structures and policies that continue to shape the demographics of the church today.

For example, in what ways is the legacy of being a church of powerful slaveholders embedded in the very cultural, systemic and theological fabric of the church, thereby rendering it over 90 percent white with a persistent reputation of being the church of the powerful elite? After telling the truth about the ways in which the legacy of white supremacy lives on in the church, locally and denominationally, intentional work must be done to free the church from this sinful legacy. It is only in speaking the truth about the white supremacist legacy that is ours as a church, that the church will be able to truly repent – that is, to turn around and do something different. In the words of Ta-Nehisi Coates, "What is needed [in our churches] is an airing of family secrets, a settling with old ghosts," lest those old ghosts continue to haunt us.

Restorative letting-go

For the church to lead the nation back to its soul involves restorative letting-go. In order for white America in particular to be restored to its very sacred humanity, it must let go of the very privileges of whiteness. As pointed out above, the only way white people can be who they are is by claiming a privilege that belittles the humanity and lives of others, whether white people recognize it or not. In this regard, it is not about being racist; rather, it is about benefitting from white supremacist realities. One does not have to be overtly racist to do that. To make the choice to be white, even when it is simply a passive refusal to confront what it means to be a beneficiary of white supremacy and its legacy, is an inhumane choice. For it is the choice to see oneself as better than another, and thus, it is the choice to betray the truth of our common sacred humanity.

Therefore, the church has a responsibility to show the way back toward sacred humanity by "letting-go" of its own white privileges. Put bluntly, the Episcopal church has to decide whether it is going to be white or church. For one cannot be at once white and church inasmuch as a crucified savior is at the center of Christian faith. For the fact that Jesus was crucified reveals that he let go of anything which set him apart from his sacred humanity and most importantly from crucified classes of people – the victims of the deadly cultural, political and religious privilege of his day.

Simply put, Jesus' letting go of the privileges of Jewishness, maleness and even divinity, made abundantly clear that the way to God's just future salvation comes through solidarity with the Ahmauds of the world, those whose lives are most endangered by the crucifying realities of white supremacy. Why? Because it is only when the least of these are able to live freely into the fullness of their sacred humanity, that God's promised justice is made real and the sacred humanity of all is restored.

In the end, if churches are to be more than simply social institutions and be truly faith communities, then they must be engaged in the work to dismantle white supremacy and thereby reconciling the nation America with its collective soul, indeed its very humanity. And so, as long as there are Trayvons, Sandras, Michaels, Ericks, Tamirs or Ahmauds, the church must do the work of repentant truth-telling and restorative letting go. This is the work that our souls have.

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Prior to Union, Dean Douglas served as Professor of Religion at Goucher College where she held the Susan D. Morgan Professorship of Religion and is now Professor Emeritus. Before Goucher, she was Associate Professor of Theology at Howard University School of Divinity (1987-2001) and Assistant Professor of Religion at Edward Waters College (1986-1987).

Ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1983, Dean Douglas holds a master's degree in theology and a Ph.D. in systematic theology from Union. She is the author of many articles and five books, including Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective *and* Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God. *Her academic work has focused on womanist theology, sexuality and the black church.*

Resources:

- The Case for Reparations by Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Atlantic, June 2014
- The Bubble Bursts in Baltimore by Tim Schenck, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 1, 2015
- Inequity and Justice by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 5, 2020
- Lift Every Voice by Sandra Montes, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 23, 2015

Do You Really Want To Talk About Reparations?

Catherine Meeks

It is 2:00AM on May 15th, and I am sitting at my computer writing this piece on reparations in the midst of the Covid-19 era while thoughts of the murders of Ahmaud Abery and Breonna Taylor are swirling in my mind. And along with these are thoughts on several other reports of police misconduct and white supremacist bullying of African Americans who were simply trying to do their jobs, which led them into predominately white neighborhoods where they became crime suspects. And the thought that serious conversations about reparations must acknowledge this climate and the systemic foundation that gave birth to it.

Over the years I have vacated many discussions about reparations which generally began with a question about how white folks could figure out how to give all of the descendants of slaves some type of monetary compensation for the freedom and dignity taken away from their ancestors. Conversations that begin in this way seem much more about trying to find the easiest way to assuage the white guilt that is associated with being the beneficiary of the fruit that comes from the establishment of white supremacy rule in this land. And these are conversations that have no productive path to follow, because they are not focused upon finding viable solutions.

Money alone cannot repair the breach caused by slavery

In the first place, there are many questions to be asked and answered regarding how to work to repair the breach caused by slavery. The first and most important one is how do you calculate what the loss of freedom and dignity are worth in terms of dollars and cents to the one losing them? So what is the amount of money that all of us are going to receive because our ancestors were stolen from their homeland and subjected to chattel slavery? What is the payment going to be attempting to cover? How can anyone be repaid for the loss of their chance to be who God put them on the earth to be? Clearly, I believe this trend of thinking about money alone being able to fix the country's equity problems to be woefully inadequate. We need whites in the United States to step up to the plate and address the deeper issues about what is needed to repair the breach created by the white supremacist attitude that supported slavery and all of the oppressive structures that emerged from that way of thinking and continue to thrive now in the 21st century.

It is wearying to watch so many efforts to address the need to acknowledge the wrongs that were done to Africans, who were stolen from their land and brought to the United States and forced to help build it into what it is today, degenerate into a discussion about a few million dollars being allocated by Congress to try to figure out a slave's descendants compensation plan. But no such plan is ever going to

amount to anything more than a handful of semi-progressive white people being able to feel a little less guilty in the short run while all of the structures that continue to oppress the descendants of our enslaved ancestors march happily along, maintaining the white supremacy-mandated status quo.

Deep systemic change is needed

A genuine conversation about repairing the breach or reparations, as we have come to speak about it, demands a willingness to entertain that there has to be deep systemic changes in the way that all our systems are structured. White people who think that they are ready to engage in this conversation with the hope of moving on to actually doing the work required to make changes, need to be willing to see the world in a new way. We cannot tidy up the current oppressive systems and allocate a few dollars to build some structure of tribute to an African American or offer a few scholarships to a handful of enslaved persons' descendants as a part of the tidying-up effort. While these efforts can be a sign of good intentions, if paired with genuine actions to make the needed systemic changes in the country, generally they are not paired in that way, thus becoming more like clanging symbols making false sounds about repairing the breach while they are left as stand-alone actions.

Genuine and sustainable reparations work will call upon white people who have begun to awake to the world that was created for them by stolen labor, to begin to destabilize all of the systems in this land that prevent everyone, and especially people of African descent, from having equal access to everything that they are enjoying. This country needs a new way to be. The Covid-19 pandemic is making that crystal clear to anyone who did not see it before. There is so much verification of the health, education and economic inequalities – and the most astounding one is in the discrepancy in the death rates between whites, African Americans and other people of color.

On the other hand, it has become quite clear to most of us that one of the reasons there is such a cavalier attitude about rebooting the country and asserting that another 50 or 60 thousand deaths is just the price that we have to pay for the sake of the economy, actually lies in the fact that a large percentage of those who die will be people of color and the elderly. These two groups are expendable. Thus progressive whites who wish to come to terms with what a society that is honest about doing reparations has to do, must be willing to understand that such a society will have no persons who are deemed expendable. What do we have to do in the United States to change our understanding of having expendable people? This is a question to be deeply pondered by all of us and especially progressive white people in our faith communities.

True reparations must ask the hard questions about our systems and work for change

These days, I find that I am most interested in speaking to people who profess to have faith and an interest in practicing that faith with integrity, because I believe that the honest work of reparations begins with a willingness to take the bold step of accepting that the way of life that we have created in the United States is not going to support honest reparations work. That work requires one to find the courage to ask very hard questions about all facets of our systems while moving into the place of being willing to see them changed.

The conversation on reparations will not be genuine until it begins with expressions of concern for people of African descent, about the ways the United States is going to assure affordable health care, equitable education, affordable housing, living wages, access to transportation, safe neighborhoods which are free from state supported violence against our black bodies. And they must have all of the

other necessities needed to live fully into God's intention for them. Until we begin this conversation with the intent to build a new world, where justice and love prevail, we are playing a strange and tiring game. Hopefully, folks who have faith are not really interested in living a lie and would like to do this work for real. It remains to be seen.

But until we make a world where the descendants of the enslaved persons stolen from their African homes can live as free people in the United States, with clearly stated systems that affirm their personhood and do not deem any of them expendable, no work toward reparations will be adequate. Everything short of a new way to see and to act, grounded in justice and love, is simply a small step toward trying to find the right path. A path that will bring rejoicing to the heart of God when we find it and truly embark upon it.

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Resources:

- A Sound Like a Mighty Wind: A Statement from the Diocesan Commission on Truth, Justice, and Racial Reconciliation by The Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, June 8, 2020
- The Case for Reparations by Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Atlantic, June 2014
- Authoritarian State or Inclusive Democracy? 21 Things We Can Do Right Now by Eric K. Ward, Southern Poverty Law Center, June 1, 2020

Act of Protest, Act of Faith

Philip Vinod Peacock

Theology is not neutral. All theology either legitimizes or subverts the real politics and the ideology of dominant and dominating systems. There is therefore the theology of the slave owners, who used the Bible and their belief system to support slavery, and the theology of the slaves, who read the Bible and theologically reflected from the perspective of liberation and freedom.

In South Africa, Apartheid was created first and foremost as a theological system, and it used Bible and theology to justify both segregation as well as the oppression of people based on a rigid hierarchy of 'races.' And not only was it a theological system, it also emerged from and was firmly embedded in the Reformed Theological tradition.

At the same time we find that the resistance to Apartheid and the resistance to racism in South Africa, but also around the world, drew from Reformed theology. One of the pioneers of this was the theologian Allan Boesak, who wrote *Black and Reformed,* in which he theologically exposed the evil that is racism.

Resistance grows, grounded in Reformed theology

Out of the struggle against racism in South Africa also rose the Belhar Confession. The Belhar confession was drafted in 1982 by what was then the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, and it was formally adopted by the whole church in 1986. The Belhar confession, likened to the other great confessions of the Church, was a document that calls the churches to confess the sin of racism and confess to the unity of the church. The document raises three important issues for how the churches should deal with the question of racism, these are the question of unity of all people in the church and in the world, reconciliation and justice. The Belhar confession was a significant moment in Reformed Church history in calling people towards racial justice.

Simultaneous to the Belhar Confession's adoption as a document that spoke out against racism, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) took significant steps to address the question of apartheid and racism on a global level, pushed by its member churches in South Africa.

At their General Assembly in Ottawa in Canada in 1982, Allan Boesak was invited to give the Bible Studies for that entire week as well as to prepare a study paper on the question of racism. As part of this study paper was a proposal from the Alliance of Black Reformed Churches of Southern Africa to ask the WARC to take a theological and political stand against Apartheid. The study guide also pointed out that very little had been done by the WARC in its stand against apartheid and that it should take a stand in favor of the Black people and Black churches in South Africa.

At the meeting in Ottawa were also representatives from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa – Nederduitsch Hermvormde Kerk van Afrika (NHK) – churches which supported apartheid. At the opening worship, as a sign of protest Allan Boesak and nine other delegates refused to take part in the Lord's Supper, stating that there were no possibilities to participate in a joint communion back in South Africa and so they refused to participate in one in Ottawa. Interestingly this was not only seen as an act of protest, but also as an act of faith. For after all, the Lord's Supper is a communal meal and there can be no communion unless there is racial justice.

Standing against racism

This action by Boesak and others created a profound moment within the Alliance and it led to the WARC adopting a statement against racism. The statement included the words,
The Gospel of Jesus Christ demands a community of believers which transcends all barriers of race – a communion in which the love for Christ and for one another has overcome the division of race and color. The gospel confronts racism, which is in its very essence a form of idolatry.

This statement led the WARC to declare that apartheid and racism is a sin and a heresy! And that there could be no place for it within the church. Moreover the WARC declared this

a *status confessionis*, a matter in which the very question of faith is at stake, and that racism in the church and in society puts the very credibility of the gospel at peril. This incredibly radical theological position led to the suspension of the DRC and the NHK from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches until they had renounced the sin of apartheid and stopped legitimizing it theologically.

The churches in Africa continued to lead the WARC to take prophetic stands. From their own experience they realized that the resistance against racism also meant the resistance against patriarchy and the resistance against poverty. This led to WARC formulating the Accra Confession, which called for dismantling systems of economic oppression.

In the year 2010, the WARC united with the Reformed Ecumenical Communion (REC) to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). In part this seemed to be the logical and organic thing to do, since many members of the WARC were also members of the REC. However, the two member churches who were suspended from the WARC were members of the REC. At a meeting in Johannesburg in 2008, in the build up to the formal unity of both the organizations, many members from churches in South Africa spoke up about their pain at the union, which would mean admitting the two churches who had not yet taken a faith stand against Apartheid. The resolution was then passed that any members who were suspended from one of the two bodies uniting would continue to be suspended from the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Later the two churches were initiated into a process of reconciliation that is still ongoing. The Reformed tradition bears the weight of birthing the idea of Apartheid and giving it biblical and theological justification. But this also shows us that it was able to draw from this same Reformed tradition to be able to take radical and prophetic action against it.

Which side are we on?

What can we learn from this? The Bible tells us that the God of life is revealed to us in scripture, in the form of a story, and specifically of a God who takes the side of the powerless in the story. This is the unique character of God as shown to us in the Bible - the God of the Bible chooses the Hebrew slaves over Pharaoh, God chooses to appear to Moses in a lowly bush and not in mighty cedar, God chooses David, a small boy, over Goliath as well as over Saul and the other mighty men of Israel - including David's own brothers for that matter.

A Jewish midrash tells us of how when Miriam was dancing because the horse and the rider were thrown into the sea, the angels descended from heaven and danced with her. And while they were dancing they wondered what God was doing, and the angles went up again and visited God and found God sitting sullenly. And the angels asked God why God was not dancing? And God answers saying, how can I dance when my people are drowning? The God we believe in is always on the side of the suffering ones.

Liberation theology has often used the language of the preferential option for the poor. Perhaps this is mistaken - God is *always* on the side of the poor. The question we have to answer is which side are we on?

And therefore the theology we do, the liturgy we perform, is never a neutral observation of what is happening around us, but a call for us to take sides with those whose lives are being destroyed. It is a call to resist the forces of death, to join in the struggle to transform the world. It is not just a way of looking, but a way of participating. Nivedita Menon, the Indian feminist, tells us that a feminist gaze is an intentional position from the margins which seeks to dismantle all hierarchies. It is no wonder then that Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza spoke of it in terms of the dismantling of kyriarchy, the radical disruption of all lordship.

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Resources:

- Episcopal Surprise by Sandra Montes, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 14, 2015
- Telling the Truth, Proclaiming the Dream, Diane D'Souza and Donna Bivens, Fall 2018
- Becoming Beloved Community … Where You Are adapted by Heidi J. Kim, Charles "Chuck" Wynder, Jr., and Stephanie Spellers, The Episcopal Church
- Responding to Injustice, by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 23, 2017

Christ Beyond the Pale

Jemonde Taylor

The failure of racial reconciliation is a failure of theology. Racism and white supremacy have their genesis in the Christian Church. True racial reconciliation means critically examining our Christology by posing the question, "Reconciled to what form of Christ?" Are we formed as property or formed by grace?

The Rev. Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one of the most celebrated 20th century Christians. His plot to overthrow German fascism during World War II led to his imprisonment and execution. The Episcopal Church commemorates him on April 9. In a lecture to Episcopal clergy entitled "Bonhoeffer's Post Racial Blues," theologian J. Kameron Carter highlighted the German Lutheran pastor and theologian's Christology presented in the essay, "Ethics as Formation." [i] In it, Bonhoeffer wrote, "'Formation' means therefore in the first place Jesus Christ taking form in Christ's church." [ii] The essay continued, "So we, as historical people, therefore stand already in the midst of Christ taking form in a segment of human history that Christ has chosen. In this sense we understand the domain for which we wish to speak and must speak to be the West, the peoples of Europe and America, who until this time have been unified by the form of Christ. A more narrowly drawn frame, for instance, limited to Germany, would nullify the fact that the form of Christ is the unity of the Western peoples, and that therefore none of these peoples can exist by itself or even be thought to so exist. A wider frame, on the other hand, would allow us to overlook the mysterious fact of the distinctive character of the Western world. The following text will not develop a program for the formation of the Western world. But it will speak of how the form of Christ takes form in this Western world."[iii]

To Bonhoeffer, it is the people of European ancestry, white people collectively, who bear the form of Jesus Christ to the entire world.

Western Christology and racism

Christology is God's action in reconciling the world to God. "That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us." (II Corinthians 5:19) The question becomes, "To what Christ are we reconciled: Bonhoeffer's Christ or the Bible's Christ?" Much of the work concerning racial reconciliation is the attempt to mold non-white people to the image of Christ championed by Bonhoeffer. The challenge is to take reconciliation out of that Western framework, moving it into a more biblical and authentically Christian space. Doing so opens up another possibility of what it means to be Christian.

The Christology of the West, whether high or low, has been about possession and ownership. Therefore, to be reconciled means being bound to Western people and culture. True racial reconciliation means having a more faithful Christology that is not bound to the West. The beginning of white supremacy and racism is in two fifteenth-century papal bulls: the taking of land in the name of Christ and the taking of people (enslavement). If racial reconciliation means being reconciled to the West or to whiteness, then there will never be true reconciliation. There is hope if racial reconciliation means being reconciled to Jesus Christ.

Reconciled to Jesus Christ is not about ownership, it is about grace. To be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ is to open up the imagination for new possibilities. Look to the Christian margins to people with a historically negative relationship to property: First Nations/Indigenous People and Africans. Westerners stole and possessed these individuals' lands and stole and possessed their bodies as property. The Indigenous and African people's forced relationship to property opens up another horizon of imagination for what it means to be Christian.

Language and imagery

The ECF Vital Practices article, "Icons: One Thousand Painted Prayers,"[iv] gives an example of opening up new possibilities of being Christian. It is miraculous that an eight-year-old African American boy, showing a visitor to his church, also eight and African American, an Ethiopian icon of Jesus Christ crucified, tells him, "Jesus looks just like you." The vast majority of language, imagery and material present Jesus as a Western European man with pale skin.

Worship is at the heart of Christianity. Worship practices can continue to bind us to a Western Christ. I witnessed an African American seminary professor state that the first time she saw herself in the breaking of the Communion bread was when the celebrant used a baked host with many shades of brown and black. Most churches use bleached white Communion bread, communicating a theology of racial whiteness as purity. The English language continues to be a vehicle for racism within the biblical context mapping light to white (European) and dark to black (African).

Rarely do Western Christians hear sermons elevating positive images of darkness and God as in Moses receiving the Law in Exodus 20:21. The Revised Common Lectionary only has one example of a positive image of darkness in a three-year cycle (Psalm 139:10, 11). Singing "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light," with the refrain, "In him there is no darkness at all" is insensitive, since the unintended consequence is having the refrain play into the language of biblical imagery of light and dark mapping to white and black for race.

Toward a more faithful Christology and true racial reconciliation

Are institutions examining the legacy of white supremacy? The Episcopal Diocese of Texas announced a "Commitment of $13 Million to Fund Racial Justice Projects to Repair and Commence Racial Healing."[v] The diocese "presented a Missionary Vision for a Racial Justice initiative that aims to repair and commence racial healing for individuals and communities who were directly injured by slavery in the diocese." These are examples of creating new imaginations and possibilities of what it means to be formed to Jesus Christ.

Racial reconciliation means being formed by grace, not possessed as property. Racial reconciliation as it exists currently is a weaponized process within the framework of the Western Christian context.[vi] The reason we are not seeing a deeper impact of racial reconciliation is that we are not addressing the theological roots of white supremacy and racism. It is up to the Church to grapple with our history and legacy to develop a more truthful and faithful Christology. Only then will we see true racial reconciliation. There is no reconciliation without a more faithful Christology.

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Resources:

- Icons: One Thousand Painted Prayers, Jemonde Taylor, Vestry Papers, May 2020
- What's Faith Got to Do with It?: Black Bodies/Christian Souls, Kelly Brown Douglas, Paperback – October 1, 2005
- Wrapped in Whiteousness: Worship, Liturgy and Race, a presentation by Jemonde Taylor at the Rooted in Jesus conference in Atlanta, GA January 24, 2020
- Change the Metaphor by Lisa G. Fischbeck, ECF Vital Practices blog, December 13, 2019

[i] Carter, J. Kameron. "Bonhoeffer's Post Racial Blues." The Gathering of Leaders, Camp Allen, Texas, November 13, 2018.
[ii] Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "Ethics as Formation." Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Self: Christology, Ethics, and Formation Clark J. Elliston. Fortress Press, 2016. page 96
[iii] Ibid. page 101

[iv] Taylor, Robert Jemonde. "Icons: One Thousand Prayers." ECF Vital Practices. Accessed May 2020.
[v] Lanier, Tammy. "The Episcopal Diocese of Texas Announces Commitment of $13 Million to Fund Racial Justice Projects to Repair and Commence Racial Healing." Episcopal Diocese of Texas. Accessed May 2020.
[vi] Robert Jemonde Taylor, interview with Dr. J. Kameron Carter, May 10, 2020

Breaking Down Walls

David Romanik

On Sunday, June 30, 2013, the congregation of the Church of the Heavenly Rest in Abilene, Texas became bilingual. That was the day two Swahili-speaking families from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) arrived with their confirmation certificates in hand and announced, "We would like to join your church." I was serving as the associate rector at the time, and I remember the specific date because the rector was preparing to leave on a month-long vacation the next day. "I guess this is what I am doing in July," I thought to myself.

Over the coming weeks, I got to know these and other members of a small but growing East African refugee community in our West Texas city. Fleeing war, famine and genocide, many of these people had lived in refugee camps for years before being resettled in a place where they would be free from the violence that had ravaged their countries of origin. While the local chapter of International Rescue Committee (an organization that provides emergency aid to refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the world) provided some assistance, the needs of these new Texans remained considerable.

Seeking more than practical assistance

Initially, Heavenly Rest's response to this new constituency was to meet their immediate physical needs. We sponsored trips to the grocery store, collected and distributed furniture and connected people with job opportunities. Within just a few weeks, more refugees from places other than the DRC (and traditions other than Anglicanism) began attending worship and participating in the life of the parish, at least in part because they had heard they could find a welcome at Heavenly Rest. Though we had not been prepared to welcome a refugee community into our midst, I was impressed with how the congregation met the challenge. Indeed, after a few weeks, I could even say that I was proud of what we had been able to provide for the most vulnerable members of our community.

Meanwhile, however, Heavenly Rest was neglecting the spiritual needs of our new parishioners. Most members of the community did not speak English, meaning that their ability to participate in the worship life of the congregation was limited. My initial approach to this dilemma was almost comic. Knowing that Bikole Mulanda, one of the family patriarchs, had been a French teacher, I provided him with a *Book of Common Prayer* in French. After a few Sundays, Bikole graciously thanked me for this liturgical resource, but intimated that it wasn't particularly useful to anyone but

him. He repeated a refrain that I had already heard multiple times, “We would like to worship in Swahili.”

I responded by telling him that we would get to that, but in the meantime, there were other physical needs that needed to be addressed in his community. Bikole’s gentle response revealed how profoundly I misunderstood the needs of these new parishioners: “We joined this church to worship God.” They did not come to Heavenly Rest for the social services the parish could provide; they came to our church to nurture their relationship with the God who created and redeemed them.

Two languages, two services, two congregations

After some Internet sleuthing, I was able to locate liturgical resources in Swahili. Within a few weeks, Heavenly Rest had added a worship service in Swahili at one o’clock on Sunday afternoon. Before long, Bikole asked if it would be possible for us to have a service of Holy Eucharist in Swahili, and Heavenly Rest’s clergy staff set about learning how to celebrate the Eucharist in Swahili. The presence of this new community started to transform the worship life of the parish and the vocations of the clergy who served at Heavenly Rest.

About a year after the arrival of the refugee community, I was called to serve a parish in Pennsylvania. Before I departed, a member of the vestry assured me, “Don’t worry about the refugees: we’ll keep taking care of them.” This was heartening, an affirmation of how this community had impacted the parish, as well as an acknowledgement of an important dimension of my ministry at Heavenly Rest.

After I left Abilene, the Swahili-speaking congregation continued to grow, and before long the congregation had to move from the chapel to the nave. In the meantime, the leadership at Heavenly Rest made efforts to increase contact between the morning and afternoon congregations. Members of the one o’clock congregation were frequently invited to make musical offerings at one of the morning services, and attempts were made to create opportunities for cross-cultural fellowship.

At the same time, there were struggles in the relationship between the two congregations. Members of the morning congregation were concerned about the way the space was being used by the younger members of the afternoon congregation. Meanwhile, some members of the Swahili-speaking congregation felt as though they had not been fully incorporated into the life and leadership of the parish. Some of these tensions were attributable to cultural differences, but I suspect that the main issue was that the relationship between the morning and afternoon congregations was stuck, and that no one had a clear sense of how to move forward.

A new question points the way forward

In 2019, I was called back to Abilene to serve as Heavenly Rest’s rector. I knew that one of the first questions I would have to address was the relationship between the morning and afternoon congregations. After consulting with leaders from both groups, I realized that Heavenly Rest was still in a very reactive place when it came to this relationship. We were still responding to the

presence of the refugee community in the same way as when they first arrived, asking, “What are we supposed to do about this?”

This was a natural and necessary question, and it shaped Heavenly Rest’s initial response to the refugee members of the community. Members of the parish had donated furniture, provided groceries and helped the newcomers find employment. Asking ourselves “what are we supposed to do?” allowed us to think of the relationship between morning and afternoon congregations in terms of a series of tasks to accomplish.

Once these tasks were accomplished, however, it was not clear what was supposed to happen next. As a result, the relationship between the congregations stagnated. In order for the relationship to move forward, we needed to transition to a more proactive place. After a while, with the help of leaders from both congregations and ECF’s Congregational Leadership Initiative, I realized that we needed to ask ourselves a new, and arguably more challenging, question: “Why has God brought these two groups of people together?”

Discerning God’s purpose together

Framing the relationship between these communities in terms of God’s action has created a new dynamic. Instead of focusing on what one congregation can do for the other, we have begun a process of mutual discernment – exploring how God is at work in this unexpected and wonderful relationship. On a practical level, we have instituted regular combined worship services that include songs and readings in both Swahili and English. Bikole Mulanda, the pastor of the Swahili-speaking congregation, now attends weekly staff meetings and provides updates about the work and ministry of those who attend the afternoon service.

On a deeper level, we have begun taking steps to better understand one another. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders from both congregations began to design an intentional process of mutual discernment, one in which participants could engage in cross-cultural conversation and explore the varieties of Anglicanism represented at our church. We are hoping to be able to return to this process in the coming months.

As the relationship between the Swahili-speaking and English-speaking congregations has grown over the last seven years, Heavenly Rest has been reminded of what it means to be the Church. Despite our call to care for the poor and the vulnerable, the Church is not a social service agency. Our primary purpose is to bear witness to what God has done in raising Jesus Christ from the dead, an event that, in the words of the letter to the Ephesians, broke down the walls that separate us. As we have discerned the nature of the relationship between our communities, we have been reminded of our responsibility to see everyone as a person created in the image of God. I do not know what the future relationship between the worshiping groups at Heavenly Rest will look like, but I do know that we are committed to discerning God’s purpose for our community.

*The **Reverend David Romanik** has served as the rector of the Church of the Heavenly Rest in Abilene, Texas since May of 2019. He is married to Sarah Beth, and has three young children.*

Resources:

- Friendship Beyond Language by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 31, 2014
- Understanding and Celebrating Differences by William M. Kondrath, Vestry Papers, January 2011
- Mission of Union and Integration by Daniel Vélez-Rivera, Vestry Papers, May 2011
- Walking the Road of Relationship by Sarabeth Goodwin, Vestry Papers, November 2015

América, ¿por qué no puedes dejar de matarnos?

Stephanie Spellers

El día después de que cuatro oficiales de policía de Minnesota asesinaron a George Floyd, puse esta pregunta en Facebook: "América: ¿por qué no puedes dejar de matarnos?". Pensé que era retórica, pero no lo era.

Dos días después, América alcanzó la trágica cumbre de 100,000 muertos a causa de la pandemia de la COVID-19, desproporcionadamente de gente negra, latina y nativa o indígena que no tiene acceso a atención de la salud, información o equipamiento protector adecuados y que es todavía más vulnerable porque su trabajo, mayormente invisible y mal pagado, había sido considerado "esencial". Nuevamente tuve que preguntarme: "América: ¿por qué no puedes dejar de matarnos?".

Ese fin de semana me puse mi mascarilla y cuello de sacerdote y salí a la calle con los manifestantes aquí en Nueva York. Dijimos sus nombres en voz alta: George Floyd, Breonna Taylor (matada por la policía de Louisville en marzo), Ahmaud Arbery (matado por vigilantes en febrero, en Georgia) y demasiados más. Salmodiamos "No puedo respirar" y "Si no hay justicia, no hay paz" hasta que nos ardió la garganta. En mi alma surgió un salmodio ahora familiar: "América, ¿por qué no puedes dejar de matarnos?".

La evidencia acumulada sugiere que América es prácticamente incapaz de permitir que la gente de color* como grupo prospere. Nuestro país está enfermo, adicto a disminuir, eliminar y controlar las vidas de los Negros, Latinos, Nativos y Asiáticos… en todos los casos es que es necesario hacerlo para asegurar el florecimiento de los blancos y su cultura. Nuestros cuerpos y vidas son el combustible que mantiene su maquinaria en funcionamiento. Si bien mucho evolucionó en la vida en EE UU, esto – lo que Jim Wallis llama el "pecado original de América" – sigue igual.

La vía hacia una amada comunidad empieza por decir la verdad

Pido a Dios que estas palabras no suman a nadie en la vergüenza o la desesperación. No podemos darnos ese lujo. Para mí, decir la verdad es un paso hacia la liberación y la acción de los que aman y siguen a Jesús.

Es la vía con la que estamos comprometidos como una Iglesia Episcopal: el trabajo a largo plazo de curación y reparación racial que conocemos como Convertirnos en una Amada Comunidad. ¿Qué

quiere decir eso? El documento de visión y acción de la Iglesia de Convertirse en una Amada Comunidad lo expresa así:

> Soñamos con comunidades donde todas las personas puedan experimentar dignidad y vida abundante, y nos vemos a nosotros mismos y a los demás como amados hijos de Dios. Oramos por comunidades que laboren para que el florecimiento de todas las personas (y de toda la creación) se vea como la esperanza de cada persona… Es una visión en la que los oprimidos están liberados de la opresión y en la que los opresores están liberados de su necesidad de oprimir.

No veremos esta visión hecha realidad en nuestras vidas, pero podemos comprometernos a ser parte de la jornada. A lo largo del camino, trabajamos en cuatro áreas de acción (o "cuadrantes"). Nos reunimos con nuestros vecinos e instituciones asociadas para generar una visión compartida de la comunidad que anhelamos que sea *y* nos comprometemos juntos a hacerla realidad (lo que la visión expresa como (Proclamar el Sueño de una Amada Comunidad)". Aprendemos, oramos y compartimos historias para mejorarnos como líderes y reconciliadores (es decir, practicar "El Camino del Amor de Jesús)". Adoptamos el trabajo de transformar y reparar los sistemas que más daño causan a la gente de color (es decir, "Reparar la Brecha)".

El racismo sistémico no ocurre accidentalmente

Pero la jornada por lo general empieza por el cuadrante 1: "Decir la verdad" sobre nuestras iglesias y nuestra sociedad. Esta verdad es aparente en todos los sectores de la vida de EE UU. La gente de color sufre brutalidad policial y encarcelamiento masivo, privación económica, discriminación en el empleo y en los ascensos, educación inadecuada, viviendas públicas deterioradas, normas bancarias discriminatorias, sistemas de salud pública carentes de fondos, devastación ambiental en nuestros vecindarios, destrucción sistemática de nuestros barrios florecientes, ciudadanía de segunda categoría en muchas iglesias y diócesis, y tantísimo más.

El sistema que antecede está demasiado generalizado como para ser accidental o el resultado de "ser desaventajados" o "subprivilegiados". Es diabólicamente sistemático y tiene huellas dactilares cristianas por todas partes. Comenzando en 1492 con un conjunto de bulas papales conocidas como la Doctrina del Descubrimiento, la Iglesia autorizó y desató terror en las tierras y los pueblos no europeos, a los que convenientemente consideró como no plenamente humanos.

Desde que los colonizadores llegaron a estas playas, las leyes y las costumbres aseguraron que los hombres de ascendencia europea de una cierta clase social recibieran los primeros frutos. El resto se filtraba lentamente a terrenos de cultivo en pendientes y con bancales precarios. Este sistema perdura en la actualidad tal como fue diseñado originalmente: sigue creando un grupo subalimentado en el fondo cuyo trabajo mal o no remunerado y sufrimiento desproporcionado posibilitan la vida del resto.

Esto significa que el racismo contemporáneo no es una reliquia aberrante en el margen de la sociedad de EE UU. El estilo de vida de EE UU siempre dependió de la privación, eliminación y/o el control de grupos de gente, y la raza siempre fue el factor más importante en la selección de esos grupos. Una vez elegido, el grupo de uno solo importa si es útil para el proyecto final: un país blanco

floreciente. Si usted deja de ser útil para ese proyecto o si lo amenaza de alguna manera, su grupo debe ser encarcelado, deportado, reubicado, eliminado o disminuido de alguna otra forma.

Verdades que perforan el corazón

Hace décadas que sé todo esto, pero la verdad me perforó a un nivel más profundo durante dos viajes recientes. En octubre de 2019, acompañé al Consejo Ejecutivo de la Iglesia Episcopal a su reunión en Montgomery, Alabama. Hicimos un peregrinaje a la Iniciativa de Justicia Equitativa y a su monumento nacional a las víctimas de linchamientos aterrorizantes.

Si uno se para afuera, ve cuesta abajo 800 monumentos montados en el techo, cada uno de ellos con los nombres de los que murieron en incidentes de terrorismo racial. Las cajas podrían ser ataúdes y también cuerpos suspendidos en el aire.

En efecto, los curadores del museo lo ponen a uno intencionalmente en esa colina para que se sienta como un espectador de un linchamiento. Los guías explican cómo – hace menos de 100 años – boletines eclesiásticos publicaban la hora y el lugar del linchamiento del día, para que los feligreses pudieran llevar un cesto de pícnic para ver el evento después del culto y pasar así el día. Lejos de ser algo horripilante, los linchamientos eran un pasatiempo popular para los buenos cristianos blancos.

Dentro de las tres semanas de esa visita, estaba en un avión rumbo a Liverpool, Inglaterra. La ciudad es famosa por haber sido la Capital del Comercio Transatlántico de Esclavos, lo que hace que sea el lugar perfecto para el Museo Internacional de la Esclavitud. Una cita en una pared del museo me dijo todo lo que necesitaba saber:

> La mano de obra local era escasa porque millones de indígenas habían muerto después de que los europeos colonizaran sus tierras. Muchos murieron en batallas y otros murieron por exceso de trabajo, especialmente en las minas. Enfermedades europeas cobraron enormes números de víctimas. Así que los colonizadores europeos se fijaron en el continente africano para obtener un nuevo suministro de mano de obra.
>
> "Los africanos son la gente ideal para el trabajo de aquí, en lugar de los nativos, que son tan débiles". Alonzo Zuazo, juez español, 1518

Un país y una identidad forjados en una jerarquía racial

Las implicaciones de esas palabras casi me hicieron caer de rodillas. Zuazo bien podría haber dicho: "Nosotros los europeos necesitamos herramientas para trabajar estas tierras. Los nativos son demasiado débiles y mueren demasiado rápido ¡Qué fastidio! Esos animales africanos fornidos son mucho más aptos para la tarea. Traigan ya mismo un suministro constante".

¿Por qué América no puede dejar de matarnos? El proyecto nacional blanco necesita que sirvamos como las herramientas desechables y el combustible que lo hacen funcionar. El sistema se derrumba si la gente de color pasamos a ser plenamente humana y ciudadana. El terrorismo racial habilitado por el estado – linchamientos, pero también asesinatos y reubicación de nativos, campos

de concentración de japoneses, leyes Jim Crow, encarcelamiento masivo, la Guerra Contra las Drogas, la islamofobia posterior al 9-/11, la detención y deportación de inmigrantes – es inevitable si uno quiere mantener la jerarquía racial en la que se forjaron el país y la identidad blanca.

América prosperó económica y políticamente gracias a este sistema, como lo hizo la Iglesia Episcopal, la comunidad cristiana creada para servir y santificar un imperio blanco.

Se me saltan las lágrimas cuando escribo estas palabras. Pero sé que es bueno, bueno para el país y la iglesia sumirnos en la gracia de Dios y decir estas verdades más profundas. Es bueno que lamentemos y nos arrepentamos, incluso si hacerlo desmantela mucho de lo que entendimos sobre nosotros. Una casa construida en arena tarde o temprano se derrumba. Un país y una iglesia construidos en supremacía racial tampoco pueden – y no deben -- subsistir.

Un día en que el pueblo de Dios abre el camino y dice la verdad

Sueño con el día –y puede estar llegando – en que el pueblo de Dios lidere el camino y diga la verdad sobre los que fuimos y somos *y* que asistidos por la oración discernamos juntos lo que queremos ser… como país y como iglesia.

Si nos vamos a convertir en una Amada Comunidad, no será suficiente que seamos buenos individuos o incluso iglesias cálidas y acogedoras. No será suficiente hablar sobre el privilegio blanco o vitorear la presencia de líderes de color en nuestro medio. Necesitaremos vivir individual y conjuntamente la promesa que le hicimos a la rama episcopal del Movimiento de Jesús: arrepentirnos del mal que nos esclaviza, del mal que cometimos y del mal que se hizo en nuestro nombre.

Necesitaremos entender la supremacía blanca en el centro de nuestra identidad institucional y desmantelarla y subvertirla activamente. De lo contrario solo se reinventará y afirmará, como lo hizo durante toda la historia de Estados Unidos. Necesitaremos dedicar nuestras manos, corazones y dinero a parar el insaciable consumo de Estados Unidos de cuerpos y vidas de latinos, negros, nativos y asiáticos. Necesitaremos adherirnos al sueño de Dios de una Amada Comunidad y aprender a dedicarnos desinteresadamente al bien común.

¿Cómo buscaremos justicia y florecimiento de todos los pueblos de Dios, especialmente de aquellos cuyo sufrimiento y disminución posibilitaron nuestra prosperidad eclesiástica? No hay una respuesta única. Un buen lugar para empezar es “Convertirse en la Amada Comunidad” (un recurso para individuos, feligresías y comunidades) o “Aprender, Orar, Actuar: Recursos para Responder a la Violencia Racial”, ambos en www.episcopalchurch.org. Descubrirán muchas más posibilidades en este número de Prácticas Vitales.

Independientemente de cómo caminen, por favor permanezcan cerca de Jesús y profundamente comprometidos a compartir su Camino del Amor. Acudan y confiésense regularmente a Dios y aprendan de las Escrituras las maneras desinteresadas de Jesús. Oren y adoren con todo su corazón y sean fervientes en bendecir y en darse a sí mismos por amor. Crucen fronteras para unirse a la restauración de Dios y a su proyecto curativo. Y descansen, confiando en que el poder de Dios, no el de ustedes, hará que el sueño de la Amada Comunidad florezca plenamente.

En Jesús, Dios nos dijo y demostró lo que es bueno. Jamás es demasiado tarde para decir la verdad, apartarse de los sistemas de muerte y seguir el camino del amor.

*En estados unidos y en inglés “people of color” o “gente de color” significa la gente latina, negra, indígena, asiática. Nativo/a son personas indígenas de estados unidos – Nativos Americanos.

*La **reverenda canóniga Stephanie Spellers** preside Evangelismo, Reconciliación y Creación en la Oficina del Obispo Primado, que ayuda a los episcopales a seguir el Camino del Amor de Jesús y a cultivar relaciones de amor, vivificantes y liberadoras con Dios, el prójimo y la tierra. Stephanie, la autora de Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other and the Spirit of Transformation, así como* The Episcopal Way y Companions on the Episcopal *Way (con Eric Law), dirigió trabajo de misión y evangelismo en el Seminario Teológico General y fue canóniga en la diócesis de Long Island, fundó The Crossing, una iglesia pionera dentro de la Catedral St. Paul’s de Boston, y encabezó numerosos esfuerzos de renovación en toda la iglesia. Es nativa de Frankfort, Kentucky, y graduada de la Escuela de Teología Episcopal y de la Escuela de Teología de Harvard. En la actualidad reside en el barrio neoyorquino de Harlem.*

Recursos:

- Preparándose para convertirse en la Amada Comunidad adaptado por la oficina de la Justicia Social de la Iglesia Episcopal
- El largo historial de linchamientos en Estados Unidos Por Russell Contreras, Associated Press
- Reconciliación racial recursos creados y adaptados por la oficina de la Justicia Social de la Iglesia Episcopal

¿Vamos a ser blancos o vamos a ser Iglesia?

Kelly Brown Douglas

“Soy Trayvon.” “Di el nombre de ella”. “¡Manos arriba, no disparen”. “Me ahogo”. Tenía todas estas mantras del siglo XXI en mente cuando corría mis 2.23 millas en honor a Ahmaud Aubrey y para exigir justicia para él, que fue matado a tiros por dos hombres blancos cuando corría en Brunswick, Georgia.

Cuando terminé de correr estaba jadeante, pero no porque tenía cansadas las piernas ni porque me faltaba el aire. Me faltaba el aire porque tenía un gran peso en el corazón y me sentía angustiada. Ahmaud era el último de una larga lista de vidas de negros jóvenes que habían perdido la vida a causa del odio y la violencia racista blanca. A pesar de que yo sabía quiénes habían matado a esos jóvenes negros, otro interrogante me dejó con los ojos llenos de lágrimas cuando estaba por terminar mis 2.23 millas: ¿Por qué estos asesinatos de jóvenes negros han pasado a ser algo tan común que si no fuera por las protestas de los negros pasarían prácticamente desapercibidos y con excesiva frecuencia los asesinos quedarían impunes? En las palabras de James Baldwin, “¿qué está pasando realmente aquí?”.

La respuesta a esta pregunta es más que las realidades sistémicas, estructurales y culturales de la supremacía blanca endémica que son parte indivisible de la trama de este país. En lugar de ello, es el alma colectiva de Estados Unidos.

La blancura y el alma de Estados Unidos

El alma nos conecta a los seres humanos con nuestros aspectos y aspiraciones más elevados. Anima e impulsa a la gente a obrar y ser mejor. Empuja a los seres humanos hacia el pleno potencial de lo que significa ser "bueno". Refleja la esencia de nuestra humanidad. El alma es quienes somos como criaturas divinas, por lo tanto no está definida por las declaraciones apasionadas de los seres humanos ni tampoco es responsable de las políticas y sesgos de la historia humana. En lugar de ello, está inseparablemente unida "al arco trascendental del universo, que se dobla hacia la justicia", la perfecta bondad que es la justicia llena del amor de Dios. Nuestra alma nos conecta con la Amada Comunidad que Dios nos promete a todos. Es una comunidad en la que se nos trata a todos como las creaciones sagradas que somos.

Esto nos incita a preguntar: ¿Qué alienó a Estados Unidos de sus almas, con la consiguiente normalización de la violencia contra las vidas de los negros? Respuesta: la blancura.

La blancura no es un constructo social-racista benigno. Es a la vez los cimientos y el capital de la supremacía blanca. Es lo que la supremacía blanca protege y privilegia. La blancura, por lo tanto, es un constructo inherentemente opositor y violento, porque su propia existencia depende de la marginación, subyugación -- por no decir eliminación -- de la gente de color*. Como Baldwin observa correctamente, "por demasiado largo tiempo, el sentido de ser de los blancos ha dependido de la mentira de que los negros son inferiores a ellos. Trágicamente, los blancos no se han dado cuenta de que 'esta degradación y definición que tienen los degrada y define a ellos'". Es por este motivo que el alma y por lo tanto la humanidad del país - específicamente del Estados Unidos blanco - está en juego. En la medida en que este sea el caso, las vidas de la gente de color siempre estarán en peligro.

Por lo tanto, es una cuestión de vida o muerte que Estados Unidos se reconcilie con su propia alma y, por ende, con su humanidad. Sin embargo, en este momento el país no cuenta con el liderazgo político y cívico que llevaría a Estados Unidos a descubrir su propia alma y reconciliarse con ella. Eso nos trae al rol de la Iglesia como comunidad de fe.

Ante el hecho de que la fe es asociarse con Dios para reparar una tierra injusta y por lo tanto encaminarnos hacia un futuro más justo, por definición las comunidades de fe son responsables por ese futuro. En concreto, deben estar impulsadas por las exhortaciones de sus almas. Está en manos de las comunidades de fe vivir como quienes profesan ser y liderar al país de vuelta a su propia alma.

Entonces, ¿cómo podría ser eso para una comunidad de fe como la Iglesia Episcopal? Hay dos aspectos fundamentales: decir la verdad con arrepentimiento y renunciar restaurativamente.

Decir la verdad con arrepentimiento

La Iglesia debe servir de modelo de lo que significa decir la verdad para liberarse del legado de la supremacía blanca y por lo tanto vivir en una nueva realidad. Decir la verdad con arrepentimiento no se limita a una admisión interesada de culpabilidad para exonerarse de un pasado inhumano. En lugar de ello, es asumir responsabilidad por ese pasado. Esto significa nombrar las maneras en que la Iglesia ha sido moldeada **y** se sigue beneficiando de las complejas realidades de la supremacía blanca y, más importante aún, hacer lo que es necesario sistemática, cultural y hasta teológicamente para liberar a la Iglesia de ello.

Participar en decir la verdad con arrepentimiento significa, por ejemplo, que la Iglesia Episcopal debe enfrentar honestamente la manera en que sus actitudes raciales pasadas y sus respuestas apáticas a la injusticia racial (como la esclavitud) contribuyeron al tipo de estructuras y políticas que siguen moldeando la demografía de la Iglesia contemporánea.

Por ejemplo, ¿de qué maneras el legado de ser la iglesia de poderosos dueños de esclavos está entretejido en la trama cultural, sistémica y teológica de la iglesia, impartiéndole, por lo tanto, una fama de ser 90 por ciento blanca y una reputación de ser la iglesia de una élite poderosa? Después de decir la verdad sobre las maneras en que el legado de la supremacía blanca vive en la iglesia, tanto en lo local como en la denominación, es necesario trabajar intencionalmente para liberar a la iglesia de este legado pecaminoso. Solo diciendo la verdad sobre el legado de supremacía blanca que tenemos como iglesia podremos arrepentirnos realmente, es decir hacer algo diferente. En las palabras de Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Lo que se necesita [en nuestras iglesias] es sacar a la luz los secretos de familia y enfrentar viejos fantasmas", de lo contario esos viejos fantasmas nos seguirán rondando.

Renunciamiento restaurativo

Hacer que la iglesia lidere al país de vuelta a su alma requiere un renunciamiento restaurativo. Para restituir al Estados Unidos blanco en particular a su humanidad sagrada, debe renunciar a sus privilegios de blancura. Como lo señalé anteriormente, la única manera en que los blancos pueden ser lo que son es reclamando un privilegio que disminuye la humanidad y las vidas de otros, lo reconozcan o no los blancos.

En este aspecto, no se trata solo de ser racista, sino de beneficiarse de las realidades de la supremacía blanca. Uno no tiene que ser abiertamente racista para hacerlo. Optar por ser blanco, incluso cuando eso signifique rechazar pasivamente confrontar lo que significa ser beneficiario de la supremacía blanca y de su legado, es una opción inhumana. Porque es la opción de verse a uno mismo como mejor que otro y, por lo tanto, es la opción de traicionar la verdad de la humanidad sagrada que todos tenemos en común.

Es por eso que la iglesia tiene la responsabilidad de mostrar el camino de vuelta hacia la humanidad sagrada renunciando a sus propios privilegios blancos. Para decirlo sin rodeos, la Iglesia Episcopal tiene que decidir si va a ser blanca o va a ser iglesia. Porque no se puede ser a la vez blanco e iglesia, puesto que un salvador crucificado está en el centro de nuestra fe cristiana. Porque el hecho de que Jesús fue crucificado revela que renunció a todo lo que lo separaba de su humanidad sagrada, y más importantemente aún, de las clases de gente crucificada, las víctimas del mortífero privilegio cultural, político y religioso de esa época.

Dicho sencillamente, la renuncia de Jesús a los privilegios de ser judío, de ser hombre y hasta de su divinidad, dejó abundantemente claro que el camino hacia la salvación futura de Dios es la solidaridad con los Ahmauds del mundo, cuyas vidas peligran por las realidades crucificantes de la supremacía blanca. ¿Por qué? Porque solo cuando el más humilde de ellos pueda vivir libremente en la plenitud de su humanidad sagrada, la promesa de Dios de justicia se hace realidad y la humanidad sagrada de todos se restaura.

Finalmente, si las iglesias van a ser más que simplemente instituciones sociales, deben participar en el trabajo de desmantelar la supremacía blanca y por ende reconciliar a Estados Unidos con su alma colectiva y su propia humanidad. Y mientras que haya Trayvons, Sandras, Michaels, Erics, Tamirs o Ahmauds, la iglesia debe realizar el trabajo de decir la verdad con arrepentimiento y de renunciar restaurativamente. Este es el trabajo que tienen nuestras almas.

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La reverendísima Dra. Kelly Brown Douglas *fue nombrada deana de la Escuela Episcopal de Teología del Seminario Teológico Union y profesora de teología en Union en septiembre de 2017. Fue nombrada titular de la cátedra Bill and Judith Moyers en Teología en noviembre de 2019. También es canónica teológica de la Catedral Nacional de Washington y teóloga en residencia en Trinity Church Wall Street.*

Antes de Union, la deana Douglas fue profesora de religión en Goucher College, donde fue titular del Profesorado de Religión Susan D. Morgan y ahora es profesora emérita. Antes de Goucher, fue profesora adjunta de teología en la Escuela de Teología de Howard University (1987-2001) y profesora adjunta de religión en Edward Waters College (1986-1987).

La deana Douglas, que fue ordenada sacerdote episcopal en 1983, tiene una maestría en teología y un doctorado en teología sistemática de Union. Es autora de muchos artículos y de cinco libros, entre ellos Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective *y* Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Su trabajo académico se concentra en teología feminista, sexualidad y la iglesia negra.*

Recursos:

- Alcemos cada voz por Sandra Montes
- Punto de vista: por qué es importante saber que Jesús no era blanco por Robyn J. Whitaker, The Conversation, BBC News Mundo
- También en América Latina Black Lives Matter Por Bruno Carvalho, New York Times, Opinión

¿De verdad quieren hablar sobre reparaciones?

Catherine Meeks

Son las 2 de la mañana del 15 de mayo y estoy sentada ante mi computadora escribiendo este artículo sobre reparaciones en el medio de la era de la COVID-19 a la vez que los pensamientos de los asesinatos de Ahmaud Abery y de Breonna Taylor me circulan por la mente. Y junto con ellos pienso en varios otros informes de mala conducta policial y de la intimidación supremacista blanca de afroamericanos que simplemente estaban tratando de hacer su trabajo, que los condujo a barrios predominantemente blancos en los que pasaron a ser sospechosos de delitos. Y el pensamiento de que las conversaciones serias sobre las reparaciones tienen que admitir este clima y los fundamentos sistémicos que lo originaron.

A lo largo de los años me aparté de muchas conversaciones sobre reparaciones que por lo general empezaban con una pregunta sobre la manera en que los blancos podrían determinar la cantidad de dinero que se debería dar a todos los descendientes de esclavos para compensarlos por la libertad y la dignidad que les robaron a sus antepasados. Las conversaciones que empiezan de este modo parecen ser la búsqueda de encontrar la manera más fácil de mitigar la culpabilidad de los blancos vinculada a ser los beneficiarios de los frutos provenientes del establecimiento de la regla de supremacía blanca en este país. Estas conversaciones no tienen un camino productivo para seguir, porque no están centradas en encontrar soluciones viables.

El dinero por sí solo no puede reparar la brecha causada por la esclavitud

En primer lugar, hay muchas preguntas que se deben hacer y contestar sobre la manera en que se debe trabajar para reparar la brecha causada por la esclavitud. La primera y la más importante es cómo se calcula en dólares y céntimos el valor de la pérdida de la libertad y la dignidad. Entonces, ¿cuál es la cantidad de dinero que todos nosotros vamos a recibir porque nuestros antepasados fueron robados de su suelo natal y esclavizados? ¿Qué va a tratar de cubrir ese pago? ¿Cómo se le puede pagar a alguien por la pérdida de su oportunidad de ser lo que Dios lo puso en la tierra para que fuera? Claramente, creo que esta tendencia de pensar que el dinero por sí solo puede arreglar los problemas de igualdad del país es totalmente inadecuada. Necesitamos que los blancos de Estados Unidos se dirijan a los asuntos más profundos que se requieren para reparar la brecha creada por la actitud de supremacía de los blancos que apoyó la esclavitud y todas las estructuras opresivas que emergieron de esa manera de pensar y que siguen florecientes ahora en el siglo XXI.

Es agotador observar los numerosos esfuerzos para admitir los daños que se causaron a los africanos -- que fueron robados de su suelo natal, traídos a Estados Unidos y forzados a construir lo que es hoy en día -- degenerar en una discusión sobre unos pocos millones de dólares adjudicados por el Congreso para tratar de determinar un plan de compensación de los descendientes de esclavos. Pero un plan de esa índole solo va a resultar en que un puñado de blancos semiprogresistas se puedan sentir un poco menos culpables a corto plazo mientras que todas las estructuras que siguen oprimiendo a los descendientes de nuestros antepasados esclavizados sigan alegremente iguales y mantengan el statu quo exigido por la supremacía blanca.

Se requiere un cambio sistémico profundo

Una conversación genuina sobre reparar la brecha o sobre reparaciones, como se lo llama hoy en día, requiere una disposición a considerar que tiene que haber cambios sistémicos profundos en todas las maneras en que están estructurados nuestros sistemas. Los blancos que piensan que

están listos para participar en esta conversación esperando realmente hacer el trabajo requerido para efectuar cambios, tienen que estar dispuestos a ver el mundo de una manera nueva. No podemos reformar los sistemas opresivos actuales y adjudicar un puñado de dólares a construir una estructura de tributo a un afroamericano u ofrecer unas pocas becas a un puñado de descendientes de esclavizados como parte del esfuerzo de limpieza. Si bien estos esfuerzos pueden ser señal de buenas intenciones si están unidos a acciones genuinas para efectuar los cambios sistémicos necesarios en el país, por lo general no lo están y, por lo tanto se convierten más en ruidosos símbolos falsos sobre reparar la brecha mientras que se dejan como actos individuales.

El trabajo de reparaciones genuino y sustentable llamará a los blancos que ya empezaron a despertar al mundo que fue creado para ellos por una mano de obra robada, a que empiecen a desestabilizar todos los sistemas en este país que previenen que todos, especialmente los de ascendencia africana, tengan igual acceso a todo lo que ellos están disfrutando. Este país necesita una nueva manera de ser. La pandemia de la COVID-19 está dejando eso perfectamente claro a los que no lo vieron anteriormente. Hay muchísima verificación de las desigualdades de salud, educación y económicas, y lo más impactante es la discrepancia entre los índices de muerte entre blancos, afroamericanos y otras gentes de color*.

Por el otro lado, ha quedado bastante claro para la mayoría de nosotros que una de las razones de esa actitud displicente sobre reiniciar el país y aseverar que otras 50 o 60 mil muertes es el precio que tenemos que pagar para el bien de la economía, en realidad yace en el hecho de que un gran porcentaje de los que moramos estará compuesto por gente de color y ancianos. Estos dos grupos son desechables.

Por lo tanto, los blancos progresistas que deseen aceptar lo que una sociedad honesta debe hacer sobre las reparaciones, tienen que estar dispuestos a entender que en una sociedad de esa índole nadie debe considerarse desechable. ¿Qué tenemos que hacer en Estados Unidos para cambiar nuestra comprensión de tener gente desechable? Este es un interrogante que todos nosotros debemos ponderar profundamente, especialmente los blancos progresistas en nuestras comunidades fe.

Las reparaciones verdaderas deben hacer preguntas difíciles sobre nuestros sistemas y trabajar para el cambio

Estos días hallo que estoy más interesada en hablar con gente que profesa tener fe y está interesada en practicar esa fe con integridad, porque creo que el trabajo de reparaciones honesto empieza por la disposición a aceptar con convicción que el estilo de vida que hemos creado en Estados Unidos no va a apoyar un trabajo de reparaciones honesto. Ese trabajo requiere encontrar el valor de hacer preguntas muy difíciles sobre todas las facetas de nuestros sistemas en el proceso de entrar al espacio de estar dispuestos a verlos cambiados.

La conversación sobre reparaciones no será genuina hasta que empiece con expresiones de preocupación por la gente de ascendencia africana, sobre las maneras en que Estados Unidos va a asegurar que cuenten con atención de la salud asequible, educación equitativa, viviendas asequibles, salarios vitales y barrios seguros libres de violencia respaldada por el estado contra nuestros cuerpos negros. Y deben contar con todas las demás necesidades de vivir plenamente lo

que Dios tuvo la intención para ellos. Hasta que comencemos esta conversación con la intención de construir un mundo nuevo, en el que la justicia y el amor prevalezcan, estaremos jugando a un juego extraño y cansador. Tenemos la esperanza de que los que tienen fe no estén realmente interesados en vivir una mentira y de verdad deseen hacer este trabajo. Eso está por verse.

Pero hasta que hagamos un mundo en el que los descendientes de personas esclavizadas robadas de sus hogares africanos puedan vivir como gente libre en Estados Unidos, con sistemas claramente definidos que afirmen su calidad de personas y que no consideren que ninguno de ellos sea desechable, ningún trabajo dirigido a las reparaciones será adecuado. Todo lo que no sea una nueva manera de ver y actuar, enraizada en la justicia y el amor, no es más que un pasito hacia tratar de encontrar el camino correcto. Un camino que llenará de dicha el corazón de Dios cuando lo encontremos y realmente nos adentremos en él.

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***Catherine Meeks**, PhD, es la directora ejecutiva fundadora del Centro Absalom Jones para la Curación Racial, así como la profesora distinguida jubilada Clara Carter de Estudios Socioculturales y Sociología de Wesleyan College. Publicó siete libros, entre ellos Passionate for Justice, Ida B. Wells – A Prophet for Our Times (septiembre de 2019), del que fue coautora, y Living Into God's Dream: Dismantling Racism in America* (2016), que editó y se concentra en la curación y la reconciliación racial. Catherine contribuye regularmente a *Hospitality,* que la Comunidad Puerta Abierta publica mensualmente. Catherine trabaja en prisiones y visita fielmente a una persona que estuvo bajo pena de muerte. Está trabajado asiduamente para la abolición de la pena de muerte, escribiendo y ayudando a crear espacios en los que la transformación y el renacer puedan ocurrir.

Recursos:

- De la Obispa Jennifer: una reflexión de una experiencia personal, de esperanza y un desafío para la Iglesia sobre el desmantelar de la supremacía y el racismo de los blancos por la Rvdma. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows
- ¿Debería pagar el gobierno de Estados Unidos una compensación a los descendientes de esclavos? (Y cómo es la situación en América Latina) por BBC News Mundo
- 5 Maneras de Participar en Favor de la Justicia Racial por Nastia Voynovskaya en KQED

In This Moment

Heidi J. Kim

It feels odd to be writing about racism in this moment, because I read, think and write about racism all the time. Many people have made sophisticated arguments about resisting the twin pandemics of COVID-19 along with systemic racism and police violence. So what can I add? In this moment, I want to invite people to consider moving from a public performance of outrage to real, sustained engagement with systemic racism. And I want to describe my personal commitment to the Black Lives Matter movement.

When the COVID crisis started to shut things down on a larger scale in the United States, I was visiting my daughter in Hawai'i for spring break. We stayed in our hotel room, practiced social distancing when we were in public and watched as Hawai'ian protestors drove through the streets holding signs and telling tourists to go home and take the virus with them. As one of those mainland tourists, I got it. They were right. I flew home and began sheltering in place.

COVID-19 and racism

On the plane to fly home, I was in a window seat with an empty middle seat and a white woman on the aisle. I offered her an antibacterial wipe when she sat down, and she jumped up into the aisle and said "I don't think so." As the flight went on, I felt her antipathy rising. Every time I cleared my throat, she would jump into the aisle, whisper to her travel companion and give me dirty looks. At that point, I was thinking to myself, "if you don't like Asian people, why the hell did you go to Hawai'i?" I came home to articles about Asian people being beaten and blamed for coronavirus, including a story about someone knifing a father and two young children, and someone throwing acid on an Asian woman as she was returning home.

Asian Americans were writing about anti-Asian racism and violence, including previously reserved celebrities, who urged us to abandon the model minority myth and stand up for our full personhood. I saw public discussion of the "perpetual foreigner" racialization of Asian and Latinx folks that results in additional screenings by TSA and comments like "your English is real good." I struggled with the fact that to wear a mask marked me as a "disease bearer" and not wearing a mask marked me as an "irresponsible disease bearer." I remembered the comedian Margaret Cho describing SARS as Severe Asian Racism Syndrome, and I laughed even as I worried every time I went out to buy groceries. At the same time, I was hesitant to make myself or other Asian people a central focus because of the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others. I was getting dirty looks. Black people were dying.

George Floyd's killing and justice

And then on May 26th I woke up to footage of a white police officer killing George Floyd.
As a new Minnesotan, I did not join the protests, because I did not have ties in the community and because my asthma puts me at greater risk for complications from COVID. I participated in online prayer services, researched which community organizations had been engaged in improving police/neighborhood relations and donated to a variety of community organizations and GoFundMe campaigns. I had seen what had happened in other places like Ferguson, Missouri, after the death of Michael Brown and the Standing Rock reservation with the No DAPL (Dakota Access Pipeline) movement, and I did not want to be one of those outsiders coming in, failing to listen and telling everybody else what to do.

I had the strong feeling that the Twin Cities would be gearing up for at least two years of protests and community action that would happen in waves. Would the police officers be arrested? They were. Would they be charged appropriately? That may still be in process. Would the trial be moved to a more rural location if the officers' attorneys could argue that they couldn't get a fair trial in the Twin Cities? We don't know yet. And finally, would the officers be acquitted? Because that's how

systemic racism in policing usually works – officers make a claim that they feared for their lives and so deadly force was necessary. Ask the families of way too many Black and Brown people who have been murdered by law enforcement whether the criminal justice system works for them.

I hope that justice prevails for George Floyd, but I am not optimistic. One white progressive on social media called me out for anticipating a "not-guilty" verdict, saying that I was a distraction and that I was not allowing for hope and empowerment. (In other words, now that she is on board, justice WILL be done.) Another white church member who proclaimed that she had been doing racial justice work "for almost two years now" flamed me on social media for not being angry at white people and telling them to be anti-racist, as she had been doing. (How's that working for you so far?) Other people were engaging in a kind of performance of their identity as "not racist" by saying things like "I am so sorry for what you're going through" (are you kidding me? I'm still alive) and taking selfies of themselves at Black Lives Matter rallies (because it's all about white protestors) to show me how much they supported "the cause." Others even sent me a reading list (because I've been doing this work my whole life but I need some white folks who read three books to give me the one magical book that will just make racism go away).

Listening and learning from Black Lives Matter

Do you know where I've landed with all of this? Firmly in a humble, listening and learning space with the Black Lives Matter movement. I am part of a racial justice group online where the leaders have told anyone who isn't Black to shut up, sit down, listen and learn and let Black women lead. I'm good with that. And I have watched as white progressives who identify as perfectly woke allies (because they can talk about white fragility) re-center themselves in those places because "it's really important for white people to speak to white people." To my amusement, those folks usually get kicked out of the group. But their message, framed in good intentions and their performance of wokeness, has the embedded assumption that white people don't have to listen to people of color, so you know, move aside people of color and let the white folks save us. Because that's working so well.

In for the long haul

Black Lives Matter. And the work that we need to do in the United States needs to focus on that right now, because until Black Lives Matter, Asian lives won't matter, Latinx lives won't matter, Indigenous lives won't matter, LGBTQ+ lives won't matter, and yes, even white lives won't matter. A people that can quietly and repeatedly allow the murder of Black people by white vigilantes and law enforcement will find it natural to allow immigrant children to be imprisoned and separated from their parents and think nothing of someone stabbing a toddler for bringing coronavirus to the United States. So yes, I want to listen and learn from Black Lives Matter leaders, because the movement has already helped me to gain clarity about the moral imperatives of our time.

Yes, I feel it very strongly when Asian people are attacked, because I know that I could be next. AND I also felt it strongly when George Floyd was killed, and when Iyanna Dior, a Black trans woman, was beaten by a group of 30 cis men (who identify with their birth gender) during the protests in Minneapolis. As a person of faith, I have prayed for the families of the law enforcement officers that have received death threats, because I don't want them to die by violence either. And I feel

incredible frustration when people who claim to care about disrupting systemic racism and white supremacy spend more time and energy shaming other people for "not doing it right" than actually building the relationships and capacities they will need to stay in this work for the long haul.
In this moment, I invite all of my siblings in Christ to pray and deeply discern how they will sustainably work to disrupt systemic racism and white supremacy. Those pandemics won't disappear if the officer who killed George Floyd is convicted and sent to prison. I fear that many of the folks who are publicly performing their "outrage" will.

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Resources:

- Do We Want To Be White, or Do We Want To Be Church? By Kelly Brown Douglas, Vestry Papers, July 2020
- The Bubble Bursts in Baltimore by Tim Schenck, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 1, 2015
- Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.
- Code Switch –Episode: A Decade of Watching Black People Die- NPR Code Switch is a podcast about race hosted by journalists of color. In this episode, they grapple with the recent George Floyd killing and reckoning with a decade of watching black people die.

The Messy Business of Being White

Anna Olson

COVID-19 had already turned the world on its head when I agreed to contribute from a white person's perspective to this issue of ECF Vestry Papers, but things seemed to be moving at about the usual pace in terms of the long-term struggle to challenge racism and undermine white supremacy. Then George Floyd was killed on May 25, and now June 2020 is happening. It feels like quite a moment to try to say something helpful about race. There are lots of voices talking about this moment, and I'm not sure that I have much to add.

So I'm going to try to say more or less what I planned to say way back in early May. I'm going to start by telling a few bits of my own story through the lens of race, something that white people are often not encouraged to do. Then I'm going to talk about the long haul, about practices that have

nourished me in the lifelong work of repenting for and standing against racism and white supremacy, in the messy business of being white in diverse community and trying to be responsible and faithful in my relationships.

Way back in the 1900s (as my teenagers are fond of saying)

When I was in second grade in 1977, the Seattle public schools embarked on a large-scale busing program to head off a federal desegregation order. Overnight, my primarily white and Asian American K-5 elementary school became a K-2 school where half the kids were bussed from a nearly all Black school across town. Many things changed at my school that year – including my getting a bonus year to be one of the "big kids" – but one of the most noticeable was a confusing shift in tone.

Familiar adults who had always seemed to be firmly in charge were suddenly anxious and focused on punishment and control. Getting sent to the office the year before would have gotten you a talking to. Now there was a wooden paddle in the office, and my previously cheery music teacher was talking about how thick it was and how much it would hurt to be hit with it. Even then, I sort of knew that she wasn't talking to me or the other neighborhood kids. The grown-ups were afraid of the new kids. The Black kids who came on the bus. The oldest of whom were second-graders.

One thing that happened that year was that in the evenings, my classmates who rode the bus started calling my house and asking to speak with me. I wasn't all that socially competent, plus I was seven, so I was mostly impressed by the confidence and sophistication of these little girls who picked up the buzz book and made their own phone calls. I talked with whoever called, but I didn't call people back. I didn't invite anyone to my house to play. I just took the phone call situation as one of the many mysteries in that year of change.

I look back and imagine Black moms and dads encouraging their kids to reach out and make friends at their new school. I look back and imagine the courage of those girls who asked my parents to pass the phone to me when most of the white adults in their lives were the people at school who kept threatening to beat them. I look back and imagine those little girls wondering why friendliness didn't seem to work on white people.

Another thing happened later in the year: in a moment of bravado with a classmate who was getting on my nerves, I said, "I'm going to kick your butt at recess." That Black second grade boy looked at me, surprised at first, then shook his head like a tired man many years my senior. "No you aren't. Stop talking about that." Given how little I knew about butt-kicking, I knew even then he wasn't afraid of getting beat. I didn't understand that he already knew about a power I didn't yet know I had. He knew that Black boys who fight white girls always lose.

After second grade, my family moved away from Seattle. Most of my school years were spent in schools where a majority of students were Black. I learned about white flight by watching classmates from my all white neighborhood peel off into the private school system when our majority white elementary school fed into schools that reflected the wider demographics of our mostly Black district. I learned many different coded ways to talk about race in terms of cultural and socioeconomic differences. I learned about tracking; in a high school that was about 85% Black,

there was not a single Black student in my AP English class. I learned that even when whites are a minority – heck, even when I was the only white person in the room – the whole system bent over backwards to look out for my comfort and well-being.

Whether I wanted it or not, I had the backing of a world of adults who were louder, wealthier and better connected to power than my Black peers' parents or my Black teachers. Most of the time, just the unspoken threat of their intervention was enough to keep things going my way.

Practices I find helpful

These are spiritual practices, not necessarily in the traditional sense of the term, but in the sense that evil is a powerful spiritual force and resisting it is real spiritual work.

• **Resist segregation.** My childhood bounced in and out of segregated spaces. Adulthood has offered continuous opportunities to retreat into white spaces, temporarily or forever. I try really hard just not to do it. I don't live in overwhelmingly white neighborhoods. I don't send my kids to majority white schools. I don't work in or join overwhelmingly white churches or organizations. I don't sit at all white tables.

• **Talk about race.** White people are known in the U.S. for being uncomfortable talking about race and uncomfortable listening to other people talk about race. I talk about race because it's interesting and relevant and sometimes even good for a laugh among friends and colleagues. I talk about race because I suspect that Jesus finds coded language offensive and unhelpful in the way that sin always is.

I also talk about race because it can give other people permission to talk about race with me. I know that my presence inevitably changes any conversation among people of color, who in my experience are pretty likely to talk openly about race with one another. I don't want people to shut up the minute I walk into the room lest I become uncomfortable, nor do I want there to be a huge no-go zone in the middle of my relationships. I talk about my own experience and observations about race because I want people with whom I share work and living space and organizational space and friendship to feel fully human and able to share the experiences and observations of their lives when they are with me.

• **Try to learn another language.** Learning to speak Spanish well has opened the door to relationships, work opportunities, a lot of extra fun and love and some hopefully helpful contributions to people's lives and struggles. But I don't name this as a practice because it is rewarding. It's worth pointing out that learning other languages in the U.S. is rarely very well-rewarded for anyone who isn't white and a native speaker of English. My language learning failures (oh, Korean…) may have taught me more than my one big success.

Being a language learner is humbling. We stumble and struggle to communicate when communication is vital to dominance and power. Trying to learn another language reveals that languages are hard to learn, a fact that many people in the U.S. have stunning difficulty comprehending. Learning a more internally consistent language reveals what a difficult language English is to learn and the vast injustice of it becoming the power language of our world. And as

someone who has only learned language while white, I find plenty to reflect on in the difference between people's generosity with my attempts at language and the cruelty I see inflicted on anyone whose English is not perfectly white and "standard" in its accent or grammar.

• **Make room at the table.** I have a seat at the table. I'm a white woman with an elite college degree, a fancy vocabulary and twenty years of ordination in a small but well-connected church. I have a strong if somewhat non-traditional resumé and a reputation for speaking my mind and holding my ground. I am almost fifty, so I'm solidly in the phase of life where I have the opportunity to invite others to the table and help them get settled. I pay attention to inviting people who are underrepresented at the table and try to balance supporting their presence and getting out of their way.

It's not a sacrificial practice. I invite smart, interesting people who are fun to have a meal with. One of the ways I support them is by naming aggressions against their presence that I observe. I don't see everything by a long shot, but I see enough to open the conversation, and in some situations that has made it possible to be an ally.

Aside on the terminology here: I just listened to a panel of Black speakers where nearly every person was brought to tears recounting what they identified as "microagressions," leaving me unsure about whether there is anything micro about what still makes you cry decades later, and entirely sure that I will not be the one to label someone else's aggressions micro. Many things that don't kill us don't make us stronger. They hurt and keep hurting.

• **Make room for grown-ups to do grown-up work.** I learned many things from growing up with diverse peers. But kids learn an awful lot about how to be the adults they will be for most of their lives from...adults. Kids need adults who will both tell them the truth and do their best to keep them safe while they learn hard things. They need teachers and coaches and mentors who look like them and not like them, who can speak to them from many angles and be trusted to prepare them to live in this broken world. They need adults who have enough breathing room in their own lives and jobs to allow them to tell the truth without being punished for it, even when the truth is surprising or uncomfortable. Kids need to know that adults from their own communities and identities have authority and integrity and that so do adults from other communities and identities. We owe that to all our kids. Kids can do amazing things, but they can't raise each other because that is an adult job. Even more important than my own role in raising my kids and the kids of my communities, I pay attention to making space for other adults to fill out the picture.

• **Shut up and step back.** I've put this at the end because it's not necessarily a practice I can claim, but one that I am beginning to explore more seriously. It's mostly in the form of questions. Can I let something go unsaid even when I'm convinced it is a brilliant contribution to the conversation? Can I let go of leadership paths that may be open to me, because there is only so much room at that table and taking a chair might mean someone else doesn't get one? Can I do more behind-the-scenes work so that my colleagues of color have the resources they need to shape the agenda? Ask me how it's going in five years.

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Washington, D.C., and works as Director of External Relations for Cristosal, a human rights organization based in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. She is the author of Claiming Resurrection in the Dying Church (Westminster John Knox Press, 2016).

Resources:

- Investing in a Multiracial Vision of Church by Kenji Kuramitsu, Vestry Papers, November 2017
- "I Can't Breathe" - Mapping Systemic Racism by Ken Howard, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 2, 2020
- Inequity and Justice by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 5, 2020
- Showing Up For Racial Justice, "SURJ is a national network of groups and individuals working to undermine white supremacy and to work for racial justice. Through community organizing, mobilizing, and education, SURJ moves white people to act as part of a multi-racial majority for justice with passion and accountability."

Unprecedented Times

Isaiah "Shaneequa" Brokenleg

"These are unprecedented times." I read that in the emails I get from stores explaining their new hours and policy changes. I hear that from the schools that are cancelling classes this summer and possibly not seeing students in person this fall. I hear that from the politicians explaining why this or that is happening or hasn't happened, or is changing or isn't changing.

These are unprecedented times. These are challenging and uncertain times. These are times with lots of moving targets, times where people are making the plane as it's taking off. For so many of us, the disruption in our lives is difficult. We keep asking ourselves, when will things come back to normal? What *is* normal? What *was* normal? We might want to return to normal because it's something we know, something we are familiar with, something we know how to navigate. Even when normal wasn't working for everyone.

When a return to normal is a return to dysfunction

It's like our society is one big, dysfunctional family. If you take someone out of their dysfunction, it is foreign and uncomfortable at first even if the new place is a healthier environment. I'm not saying our current situation is healthy. I'm saying our current situation is foreign and new and uncomfortable. And yet so many of us want to return to that old system instead of finding something new or better that is healthier for all. Why can't we find a system, a space, a way of relating to one another that respects the dignity of every human being?

We long to return to normal, but returning to how things were would be like returning to that dysfunction. This pandemic is bringing to light how fragile our food delivery systems are, how unjust our society is to its most vulnerable, how badly we treat people of color and immigrants, as well as

other oppressed folks, and just how much our society runs on the backs of those same oppressed people. This pandemic is also bringing to light just how willing some of us are to sacrifice the free speech, health and lives of others in the name of returning to normal or fixing the economy.

Let me ask you a question: When the disparities between the haves and the have-nots are greater than they have ever been anytime in recorded history, would a "return to normal" really be "fixing" the economy? To me, fixing the economy means that someone making minimum wage shouldn't have to work two full-time jobs to get by. To me, fixing the economy means that a loss of a job shouldn't mean a loss of healthcare. For some of us, there is an answer to how much a human life is worth, especially if that life doesn't *look* like us, *love* like us, *live near* us, or *have money* like us. And the answer about how much that human life is worth to those folks…well, it isn't worth much.

These are unprecedented times all right. And it is in times like these that I am so thankful that we have the gospel to turn to, and we have a Jesus who led by example and prepared us for a time such as this. The disciples were in unprecedented times, and yet Jesus still told them to follow his commandments if they loved him. Do you know which commandments he is talking about? They are to love God with everything you have, your heart, soul and mind, and to love one another as Jesus loves us.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to follow those same commandments: Love God and love each other. And by that *love*, people will know we are his disciples. I want to point something out. Jesus didn't say, *by having the biggest church* people will know you are my disciples, or *by that great liturgy* people will know you are my disciples, or *by telling others how sinful they are,* or *by enacting laws that oppress followers of other faiths*. Jesus said, *by…your…love…*everyone will know. Do our individual and collective actions show love to others? Do they respect the dignity of every human being? Those are the questions we need to answer.

Systemic racism and our responsibility as Christians

My relatives, the answers to those questions tell me that we have a lot of work to do. Jesus said that we can tell a good tree from a bad tree by the fruit it bears. The fruit that we are bearing leaves our Black and Brown siblings with less income, less education, higher unemployment, poor health outcomes, harsher sentences at trial and countless other disparities. The fruit we are bearing is poisonous to our Black and Brown siblings. I am sure you've heard of the deaths of Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks. Some names you might not have heard are Jason Pero, Zachary Bearheels, Paul Castaway, Corey Kanosh, Raymond Gassman, Loreal Tsingine and Benjamin Whiteshield. They are Native Americans who were also killed by police.

There are some who believe that if we just remove the bad apples or write new policies, things will change. Those things are important and will help, but they are not the main source of the problem. The sin of racism is systemic. Many of us, as Western thinkers, believe that racism is only an individual thing, as in someone is, or isn't, a racist. Our entire system is racist. That is why we see the disparities and killings throughout our system. What do you expect when our country was built on land we took from indigenous people, built using the slave labor from people we forcibly took

from their homeland, and so much of our system is dependent on the labor of undocumented immigrants and others who we treat as disposable.

Racism is occurring throughout our entire socio-ecological system. By that, I mean it can be found in individuals, families, larger social networks like church and school, states, nations and globally. While we might not think of ourselves as overtly racist as white people (or those with skin privilege) in a racist society, unless we are actively working to change the system, we are a part of the problem. We are a part of the problem in that we are active participants in an unjust system. At the very least, we are receiving privileges we did not earn. What is our responsibility in that as Christians, as congregations, as dioceses and as the wider Church?

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to love God and love each other. We are called to create God's kingdom here on earth. We do that by spreading Christ's message of compassion, love, forgiveness and reconciliation. We do that by building genuine relationships with our Black and Brown siblings. We do that not only by welcoming them fully into our spaces, but also by stepping out of our comfort zones and meeting folks where they are.

Love is an action word

As westerners, when we talk about love we tend to think of it as a feeling, but love is a verb, an *action* word. Loving others is something that should call us to action. I remember my grandma giving some advice to a relative who was struggling in an abusive relationship. She said, "whether or not someone says they love you isn't what matters. What matters is that they show you that they love you through their actions." She said, "if someone loves you, you shouldn't just hear it but you should experience it." Her advice reminds me that if "they will know we are Christians by our love" then they, whoever they are*,* must be able to experience that love…because love is an action word.

In Lakota there is almost no direct translation for "I love you." Instead, many say, "techihila." "Thehi" means to suffer or endure. "Chi" means me to you. Adding "la" to the end makes it endearing. So techihila means, "I'll suffer, or endure, for you." Anytime we say the phrase for "I love you," we are reminded of the *action* we are called to because of it. Jesus is a perfect example of that love. He loved us so much that he was willing to suffer and die for all of us. I imagine he might have been afraid and he might have felt alone, alone enough to cry out "my God why have you forsaken me." Well, that is a fear none of us have to have.

We are not alone

Even when we suffer, even when we die, we never have to fear being alone. We are never alone. Jesus says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." On top of that we have the Holy Spirit with us, beside us, walking with us and sometimes, yes, even carrying us. In these unprecedented times, with COVID and restrictions on visitation, a lot of people have concerns because they can't be with their loved ones in the hospital rooms. I know that is very hard. As a Lakota person, I can't imagine it, because we are the ones that have, like, twenty people in the room with people all the time. There are a lot of people dying, but I know they are not alone. Our God of love would not allow for that. As a former hospital chaplain, I have been with many people as they die and begin their spirit journey. Every single time, they had relatives or loved ones, gone

before, who came back to greet them and help them on their journey. Sometimes they would talk to them and other times they would point and smile. They were never alone.

I remember once I came with my grandpa to the hospital to visit an elder who was dying. We said prayers and he did his priestly thing. When we finished, he asked her if there was a song she wanted us to sing. The Lakota hymn number she asked for wasn't familiar to us, and we didn't know it. Grandpa asked if there was another song we could sing instead. She interrupted while he was talking and said, "it's okay Father, the angels are singing it for me now." She died about ten minutes later. She was not alone. Aside from us, she also had angels and relatives to help her on her journey. Death isn't something to fear. After my grandparents died I no longer feared death, because I knew they would come to help me on my journey. As a Lakota person, we see death as a natural part of life, so traditionally it was never something to be feared or a taboo topic to talk about.

Just as Jesus reassured his disciples then, Jesus reassures us today. He says, "because I live, you also will live." We know that eternal life is waiting for us after our temporary stay here on earth. We don't have to wait until then to be with all our relatives, however. When we have communion we believe that Christ is present; and not only Christ but all the saints. In our belief system we have something called "the communion of saints." Anytime you have communion, even if it is a spiritual communion, know that you are taking communion with all the members of this Church, all your relatives and all your ancestors that have gone before. Part of the reason it is called *commun*-ion is because we are a *commun*-ity and we maintain a relationship through this sacred meal. That relationship doesn't end just because our loved ones aren't physically here; they are always with us in some way. I think Lakota people have always known this. That's why there is no word for goodbye in our language, only "see you later." Because we know that no matter what, we will see all our relatives again.

Called to be Christ's hands and feet in a challenging, uncomfortable time

Our church buildings are shut. We have to navigate a constantly changing landscape. We cannot see our friends and relatives in person. Our Black and Brown siblings are not allowed to thrive in this system that is poison to them. Our leaders are teargassing our Church for photo opportunities. With all that is going on, these unprecedented times may seem apocalyptic. If we are to grow, change, heal and move out of our dysfunction, things will be uncomfortable. We will be challenged and it will be hard. But know that it is to this unprecedented time that we are called.

Remember, it was during an unprecedented time that God liberated the Israelites from bondage and brought them to a place of promise. It was an unprecedented experience that brought Ruth, a foreigner in a strange land, into the family of Israel and put her in the lineage of King David and Jesus. It was during an unprecedented time that Jesus was brought into this world to transform it, helping us to get acquainted with a God of love rather than a God of fury.

It is to this unprecedented time now that we have been called, brought into the world, to be the hands and feet of Christ, transforming this world, healing this world and reconciling this world – this world that is sick, this world that is hungry for justice, hungry for compassion and hungry to meet a

tangible God who is made present every time we show love to one another. *Mitakuye Oyasin* (we are all related).

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Resources:

- Ministry in a Global Pandemic, an ECF webinar presented by Joshua Rodriguez-Hobbs June 11, 2020
- A Time for Everything by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 17, 2020
- Responding to Injustice by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 23, 2017
- 97 Things White People Can Do for Racial Justice, by Corinne Shutack A practical list of action-items for white people who don't know how to affect real change in dismantling racism

More Than a Black Thing

Kim L. Coleman

Few of us would want to admit it, but there are some things in life that we categorize according to race. Take your typical wedding reception. Play the Hokey Pokey, the Chicken Dance and Do Si Do. We are more likely to say, "It's a White thing." Play the Cupid Shuffle, The Wobble and the Electric Slide. More often than not, we are going to think, "Now, that's a Black thing." It should not shock anyone to learn such categorizations do not stop with wedding reception dances. What can surprise us are some of the places where these seemingly innocuous categorizations show up, impeding our ability to answer the call of God and fueling the perpetuation of the racism now inhibiting, if not disabling, us as Church and as a nation.

It was not until I became an Episcopalian, some years after graduating from college and relocating to the Northern Virginia area, that I became aware of racial categorizations applied to religion. When friends from the predominantly white rural town in Central Pennsylvania where I grew up heard I was going to be an Episcopal priest, they asked "Why?" I could have told them all about being called and prayer and vocational discernment. As a matter of fact, I tried. What they really wanted to know is why would a Black person become ordained in a white church.

Black leaders and the long path toward full inclusion

What those friends did not know, and what still surprises many, is the full, rich, and vibrant history African Americans have had in the Episcopal Church. Beginning with the establishment of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas by Absalom Jones in 1792 in the city of Philadelphia, through the appointment and election of over 48 Black Bishops, there has always been a strong corps of Black leaders in the Episcopal Church. People like James Holly, Henry Delaney, Alexander Crummell, Mattie Hopkins, John Walker, Tollie Caution, Charles Lawrence, Deborah Harmon Hines, Barbara C. Harris and notably, the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, the first African-American Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, have paved the way for the full inclusion of Black people in the life of the Episcopal Church at every level.

But inclusion has not meant ready acceptance or celebration. It took 50 years after the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas affiliated with the Episcopal Church before the first diocese, Connecticut, granted Black parishes and their rectors voice and vote at diocesan conventions. Periods of Black congregational and institutional expansion were typically met with resistance and retraction. Fearing large numbers of Blacks would seek membership in white parishes and that newly established Black churches would request full status in diocesan conventions, some dioceses enacted canonical regulations to effectively disenfranchise Black Episcopalians. Even though the first two Black bishops to serve in the United States were chosen in 1918 (Edward T. Demby, Diocese of Arkansas, and Henry B. Delaney, Diocese of North Carolina - St. Augustine's College), it would be another 44 years before another Black bishop was consecrated in the Episcopal Church. [1]

The Union of Black Episcopalians and the struggle for racial equality in the Episcopal Church

Historically, The Episcopal Church has been a racially diverse body where Blacks have struggled to find welcome, seat, voice and vote. From my own journey of 19 years in ordained ministry, I can recall the time a white colleague cautioned me because she interpreted the passion I exhibited when talking with my hands as anger, the times my penchant for raising pointed questions resulted in being disregarded like a third grader whom the teacher refuses to call upon, and serving dutifully in my congregation and in elected positions, but diocesan appointments were few and far between. The message the Church has been giving me and people who look like me is we are better off when seen and not heard. Were it not for a number of Black organizations advocating for racial equality within the Church, including the Union of Black Clergy and Laity (1968) that later became the Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE), the diversity and Black leadership for which the Episcopal Church has prayed and by which it has been blessed would not have progressed as it has.

Today, the Union of Black Episcopalians remains the only independent advocacy and justice organization associated with the Episcopal Church, uniting the diverse cultures, concerns and gifts of Black Episcopalians. Through a network of over 40 local and diocesan chapters, organizational sponsors representing over 10,000 people, partnerships with predominantly white groups and associate members who share UBE's vision for justice and inclusion, and alliances with Black Episcopal and Anglican Liberian, Haitian, Caribbean and Canadian communities, UBE continues promoting the inclusion of Blacks at every level of Church governance and fighting to eliminate racism in the Church. Most importantly, we are here to support our white brothers and sisters as they grapple with the racial dynamics that plague our nation, beginning with the reality that in

many instances we have gotten wrong what some seemingly innocuous categorizations along racial lines suggest.

> Anti-racism training. Not a Black thing.
> Racial reconciliation. Not a Black thing.
> Beloved Community. Not a Black thing.
> Justice for all. Not a Black thing.
> Racism itself. Not a Black thing.

For 52 years UBE has been telling the Church that racism exists within our institution. The time has come for all Episcopalians not only to believe this truth but also to commit to repenting from it and ridding ourselves of its vestiges. Racism was not overcome when Barack Obama became this nation's first Black president nor when Michael Curry became the Episcopal Church's first Black presiding bishop. Nor was racial equality achieved when Episcopal parishes began accepting Brown and Black bodies into our pews. We have much more work to do before God's Revelation 7:9 vision of a kingdom comprised of every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, can come into being. That does not mean we should stop striving.

What white people can do

I imagine I am not alone in being inundated with calls from my white colleagues and friends who are mystified and/or frightened by the social unrest that dominates our national scene and who genuinely want to know what to do. For many, seeing the incomprehensible killing of George Floyd has ignited a great awakening. That is a very good thing! My encouragement is that white Episcopalians begin by becoming educated on what Black people are talking about.

Read books like *Waking Up White, White Fragility* and *The Color of Compromise*. Enroll in *Sacred Ground*, a ten-part series that is part of *Becoming Beloved Community*, the Episcopal Church's long-term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation and justice. This curriculum is not the anti-racism training of old. It is designed specifically for white people to talk to white people, using documentary films and readings that focus on Indigenous, Black, Latino and Asian/Pacific American histories as they intersect with European American histories.

Then Google "What can I do to fight racism today?" You will find a plethora of articles with ideas on specific actions white America can take to begin dismantling the systemic racism that diminishes us. Finally, open your mouths and speak. If police violence, economic disparities, disproportionate deaths from COVID-19 and racist rhetoric make you angry, or at least uncomfortable, say something. Demand to know why there are no people of color at the table. And grow some thick skin. Not everyone is going to receive your anti-racist disposition and actions with enthusiasm. Some of your best efforts will be rebuffed and even criticized. Just remember that people of color have been fighting these battles for over 400 years, and with God's help, all things are possible. Why would a Black person become ordained in a white church? Because God saw this day coming long before we could imagine it. Because the Episcopal Church is not a White thing. Because we are headed to a day when every nation, all tribes and peoples and languages, have seat, voice and vote around God's throne and I, for one, want to be part of that kingdom.

*The **Very Rev. Kim L. Coleman** is National President of the Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE). She has served as rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Arlington, Virginia, since November 2002. An Episcopalian since 1993, Kim graduated cum laude from Virginia Theological Seminary in May 2001 and was ordained to the priesthood in December 2001. In addition to a Master of Divinity degree, she holds Bachelor of Arts degrees (1980) in Political Science and Economics from the Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania. A Delegate to General Convention, she has served on the Diocesan Standing and Executive Committees and as an Adjunct Professor for VTS.*

Resources:

- Becoming Beloved Community – The Episcopal Church This is the vision document for Becoming Beloved Community, where all people may experience dignity and abundant life and see themselves and others as beloved children of God.
- White Awake - White Awake combats white supremacy by focusing on educational resources and spiritual practices designed to engage people who've been socially categorized as "white" in the creation of a just and sustainable society.
- Do We Want To Be White, or Do We Want To Be Church? by Kelly Brown Douglas, Vestry Papers, July 2020
- The Union of Black Episcopalians "The Union of Black Episcopalians is a confederation of more than 55 chapters and interest groups throughout the continental United States and the Caribbean with over 200 years of black leadership in the Episcopal Church. The Union empowers its members and local chapters to be agents of justice and transformation."

[1] Abstracted from *A Faithful Journey: Black Leadership in the Episcopal Church*, by Forward Movement and *The Church Awakens, African Americans and the Struggle for Justice* (https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/exhibits/show/divergence/ccwacp).

Triple Threat

Adialyn Milien

The Milien love for the church began in a small rural city in Haiti, where, in 1909, my great grandfather started the first Episcopal church in the Jeanjean area. This not only sparked the passion for my dad to go into ministry, but later inspired him to take the gospel across the island to the Dominican Republic where he met my mother.

Growing up as a cradle Episcopalian has been a beautiful thing. Going to church on early Sunday mornings, watching my dad preach from the pews and wishing I was there with him, was my first introduction to loving the church. It never crossed my mind that one day we would move to the United States of America, that my mother would be ordained as a priest and that my siblings and I would grow to have a passion for lay leadership.

Not as welcoming as we claim

I have always considered myself a privileged person for being born in the love and welcoming community that is the Episcopal Church. The phrase "The Episcopal Church welcomes you" and the inclusivity that it brings on loving everyone, no matter their sex, race or sexual identity, has marked my religious journey. When I was a child, I believed that phrase. However, growing up in Miami, Florida, I started to see that it wasn't completely true. When I participated in my first diocesan convention at the age of 16, I saw that those who had a say didn't look like me, that people in charge of the youth were retired and older people, people of color were considered ethnic ministries (charity cases) and that saying "Amen!" out loud got stares. That was the first time in my life that I realized the church I loved did not love me back.

We are great at saying we welcome everyone, but do we really? When we look at our congregations, clergy, diocesan offices and the Episcopal Church Center, we do not see diversity. We tend to accept just a few people of color, put some spots of color so that we can claim diversity when we really just want to stay the same in order to avoid going against the status quo. The reality is that our doors are open, but people do not feel welcome. We need to move beyond welcome and start including people without judgment for them to feel the freedom to be who they are in a space that is already foreign to them.

Weapon for love and change or threat?

As a young adult leader in the church, I consider myself a triple threat: young, Black and a woman. I see that as a weapon for love and change, but others see it as a threat to the organized structure of what church needs to "look like." Some phrases I hear in conventions that always make smile are: *we need more young people; "where are the millennials?; we need to revitalize the church.* We love saying those words, but we do nothing, or we get in the way of those powerful phrases becoming a reality. Truly, we want the church to stay the same and still claim diversity. We are afraid of stirring the waters; we are scared that people who feel uncomfortable with the change will leave; and we are fearful to be seen as controversial. This fear is the liar that keeps pushing us away from the people we say we want to love, but are really afraid to love.

As a religious community, we have made strides and taken steps that other religious organizations are just starting to talk about. However, we have just begun. We need to stop seeing youth, race and gender as threats, but as powerful traits to help evangelize and revive our church. The work to provoke change needs to start today. The Episcopal Church is full of great voices that still need to be heard, songs that are yet to be sung and dances that are waiting to revive our souls. We are a church full of potential, but we need to take our blinders off to see the possibility of greatness in people that do not look like us.

Efforts to bring change grounded in love

I L-O-V-E the Episcopal church, and I choose to spell out the word because I want us all to stop saying the word just to say it, but to actually mean it. I am proud to be part of this organization that is based on love, evangelism, reconciliation and creation care. I have seen improvement and redemption happening. We are speaking out more, we are putting women and people of color in

places of power (our last two presiding bishops are a perfect example), and younger people are opening doors to make their voices heard. My siblings and I are working alongside other young adults, not only in our dioceses but in the wider church, to get into committees and places where voices of color can have a say in the decision-making. Who would have thought that three young Afro Latinos, great-grandkids of a Haitian Christian man, would be creating change in the church?

Every day I am inspired by clergy and lay people in our communities who are using the church platform to openly speak about justice, love and denouncing injustice. Following their example, I have also decided to not only follow Jesus, but to follow his steps as an active member of society, who seeks not only to provoke change but to act on it so that change happens. This church has the potential to stir the world into a more loving place, where we all work together, preach the gospel of Jesus and become the glorious world he wants us to be. Let us make a pledge today to start seeing other people "threats" as welcoming weapons for change. "Today is the day to provoke change." "Hoy es el día para provocar cambios." "Aujourd'hui est le jour de provoquer des changements."

***Adialyn Milien**, is a cradle Episcopalian originally from the Dominican Republic and Haiti. She currently lives in Miami, Florida, where she serves as the co-coordinator of the Young Adult Ministry of the Diocese of Southeast Florida. Adialyn led the communications team in their most recent Virtual Nuevo Amanecer. One of her current projects is "Social Evangelism: Reaching Souls for God through Social Media." With this project, she helps both of her congregations, St. Paul Et-Les-Martyr-D'Haiti (Haitian) and Iglesia Santísma Trinidad (Latino/Hispanic), reach individuals on social media outlets with the resources at hand. Adialyn has a Bachelor of Arts in Communications, a Master's in Business Administration and a faith-driven passion for working with the people of God.*

Resources:

- Our Call to Leadership by Lelanda Lee, Vestry Papers, May 2012
- Mission of Union and Integration by Daniel Vélez-Rivera, Vestry Papers, May 2011
- Navajo Millennial by Gerlene Gordy, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 20, 2019
- Reshaping the Table by Maria Bautista Vargas, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 29, 2019

Antiracism as a Developmental Effort

Alissa Newton and Arienne Davison

The purifying fire and transformation of the day of Pentecost turn so quickly to ordinary time. The day the Holy Spirit made us the church was followed by days full of tumult and the clash of new and old, East and West, North and South. From the beginning, our church has been a container for the human struggle to contain, understand, enforce and celebrate similarity and difference in human culture, value systems and ways of worshipping God and loving each other. Two thousand years later, we call the season after Pentecost "ordinary." But what happened after the day of Pentecost was far from ordinary. Peter was transformed from an ashamed denier to a forgiven gospeller. People were not only changed on the inside; they changed the way they lived. Those changes were

both a sign of devotion to Jesus and a renewed commitment to practice being the people Jesus Christ had called forth.

The Church calls this discipline of practicing Jesus' way of life and love, discipleship. And the work of the Church in the Diocese of the Olympia includes equipping disciples with the tools they will need to do their work.

A tool for developing intercultural skills

We have been using the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) as a way of helping ministers learn how their experiences are shaping the ways they understand and respond to people who are from different cultural groups – racial, ethnic, sexual identities, genders, class, abilities and other identity groups. The IDC is an adult development model for understanding how human beings respond to difference and similarity in other human beings, and especially, in groups of people to whom they do not belong. The IDC assesses this development on a continuum. Everyone starts in a place of denial, or very little knowledge or recognition of the differences in values and perspectives of cultures other than one's own, and progresses from that into more developed understandings of how to recognize difference, relate to it and eventually build bridges of understanding between cultures and the humans shaped by them.

The IDC is not an explicit anti-racism program. It is a developmental frame for understanding how people come to understand the existence of culture and begin to relate to cultures outside their own. As we (Alissa and Arienne) examined the effect of our anti-racism efforts in our Diocese on the people we were most hoping to motivate – white people – we noticed that many of our white folk simply didn't have the tools they needed to enter the conversation. When we said "Black Lives Matter," they responded with "All Lives Matter," and no amount of explaining with words illuminated the issue for them. When we said "cultural appropriation," they responded with confusion and resentment. After all, as white people "we have no culture," and it was unfair to tell them they couldn't enjoy a little from the folks who had a culture of their own. Weren't their dreamcatcher earrings a way of showing support for Indigeneous culture?

Were these very typical responses from white people racist and full of bias? Yes, of course. But telling them that was extremely ineffective in changing their behaviors and stances. There is an additional dynamic at play – development. Before the deeper conversations about racism, bias and privilege could happen in meaningful ways, many of the human beings we served needed to develop their experiences of and tools for working with similarity and difference in human cultures. And we needed to do that work in a space where white folks felt comfortable enough making mistakes, that those mistakes could be identified and self-corrected.

In addition to using the IDC to teach people a general framework for self-diagnosis, we use its accompanying assessment tool, the Intercultural Development Inventory, to give people important information about how others experience their intercultural behavior. Our discussion and reflection on those results creates an opportunity to:

- discern what capacity a person has to respond to Jesus's call to bear the Gospel to all ethnicities, and

- discern how they will respond to this new information by adopting a spiritual practice of discipleship.

Anti-Racist work begins with honesty

If we aren't honest about our capacity to do anti-racist work, we hurt people. White Christians can say and believe that they are committed to racial and social justice, but if they make choices to live in all-white neighborhoods and send their kids to all-white schools, the impact of their behavior has the opposite effect. When you say, "I love you," while attacking someone, they are not likely to believe you. The antidote to this problem is not to stop trying to do justice. The antidote is being more honest with other people, admitting that you have made choices that hurt them and are willing to accept the consequences and move forward in new directions to realize Jesus' reign on earth.

When the first Christians heard the Good News from Peter, they profoundly reoriented their lives. They changed how they spent money. They gave things away. They developed relationships with people that they had no earthly reason to know or love. Committing to Anti-Racism and Intercultural Development isn't the end of a racist's journey. Committing to this work is the beginning of a pilgrim's journey.

We know that our approach doesn't fix the problem of racism. We don't expect it to save the world. No program can do what two thousand years of Jesus' teaching haven't already done. But we do think we can help people be more self-aware of their own culture and it's blind spots. And we think we can help people be a little clearer about what it would take to have a kind and productive conversation with people of their races and cultures. And we think that will help the church and the world be better at the work of racial justice.

Anyone can find out more information about the Intercultural Development Continuum and the tools that accompany it at idiinventory.com. For more information about how our diocese is using this as a tool for building anti-racism skills, feel free to contact either of us!

*The **Rev. Canon Arienne SiuLing Davison** attended Virginia Theological Seminary ('07), and served at several Episcopal churches in the Diocese of Olympia before being appointed the Canon to the Ordinary in the Diocese of Olympia. She is a Qualified Administrator of the Intercultural Development Inventory and works within the diocese and in the wider Episcopal Church to teach tools for increasing the Intercultural Competency of our ministers and ministries.*

*The **Rev. Canon Alissa Newton** is vicar at St. Columba's Episcopal Church in Kent, Washington. She also serves the Diocese of Olympia as Congregational Development and Leadership Formation, and is the Director of the College for Congregational Development in the Diocese of Olympia. Alissa has worked with congregations inside and outside of Olympia as a development consultant since 2008. For more information about the College for Congregational Development, visit cdcollege.org.*

Resources:

- Whatever you do now will prepare you for what you can do in the future by Audra Abt, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 20, 2020

- Multilingual Leadership and Multicultural Churches by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, July 2015
- Facing Differences by William M. Kondrath, Vestry Papers, March 2013
- Misa Magdalena is the answer to prayer by Sarah Lamming, Vestry Papers, January 2018

En este momento

Heidi Kim

Me siento rara escribiendo sobre el racismo en este momento, porque todo el tiempo leo, pienso y escribo sobre el racismo. Mucha gente se pronunció con argumentos sofisticados sobre resistir las dobles pandemias de la COVID-19, el racismo sistémico y la política de violencia. Entonces, ¿qué puedo añadir? En este momento, deseo invitar a la gente a que considere pasar de una actuación pública de indignación a una participación real y sostenida en la lucha contra el racismo sistémico. Y deseo describir mi dedicación personal al movimiento Las Vidas Negras Importan (Black Lives Matter).

Cuando la crisis de la COVID-19 empezó a cerrar cosas a gran escala en Estados Unidos, estaba visitando a mi hija en Hawái en el descanso de primavera. Permanecimos en nuestra habitación de hotel, practicamos el distanciamiento social cuando estábamos en público y vimos a los manifestantes hawaianos manejar por las calles con letreros y diciéndoles a los turistas que se fueran a su casa y que se llevaran el virus con ellos. Como uno de esos turistas de la parte continental de Estados Unidos, les entendí. Tenían razón. Volé de vuelta a mi casa y no salí de ella.

La COVID-19 y el racism

En el avión de vuelta a casa, tenía un asiento de ventanilla con el asiento del medio libre y una mujer blanca en el del pasillo. Le ofrecí un paño antibacteriano cuando nos sentamos, ella se paró repentinamente en el pasillo y dijo “Ni lo piense”. A medida que transcurrió el vuelo, sentí que su antipatía aumentaba. Todas las veces que aclaré la garganta, saltó al pasillo, susurró algo a su acompañante de viaje y me miró feo. En ese punto yo pensaba, “si no le gustan los asiáticos, ¿por qué diablos fue a Hawái”? Cuando regresé a mi casa vi artículos sobre asiáticos siendo golpeados y culpados por el coronavirus, incluyendo una historia sobre alguien que acuchilló a un padre y a dos niños pequeños y otra sobre alguien que tiró ácido a una mujer asiática que estaba regresando a su hogar.

Los estadounidenses de origen asiático estaban escribiendo sobre la violencia y el racismo antiasiático, incluyendo celebridades anteriormente reservadas, que nos instaban a abandonar el modelo del mito minoritario y a que defendiéramos nuestra condición de personas plenas. Presencié conversaciones públicas sobre la racialización de los asiáticos y latinx como el “extranjero perpetuo”, que resulta en exámenes adicionales de la TSA y comentarios como “hablas muy bien en inglés”. Luché con el hecho de que usar una mascarilla me rotulaba como una “portadora de enfermedad” y de que no usar una mascarilla me clasificaba como una “portadora irresponsable de enfermedad”. Recordé a la comediante Margaret Cho describir el SARS como Severe Asian Racism

Syndrome (Síndrome Grave de Racismo Asiático) y me reí, incluso aunque tenía resquemores siempre que iba al supermercado y a la vez vacilaba en hacer que yo u otros asiáticos seamos una concentración central debido a las muertes de Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor y de innumerables otros. La gente me miraba mal. Los negros estaban muriendo.

El asesinato de George Floyd y la justiciar

Y después, el 26 de mayo, desperté con noticias de que un policía había asesinado a George Floyd. Como nueva residente de Minnesota, no me uní a las protestas, porque no tenía vínculos en la comunidad y porque por ser asmática estaba en mayor riesgo de tener complicaciones de la enfermedad COVID19. Participé en servicios religiosos de oración, investigué cuáles organizaciones comunitarias habían participado en mejorar las relaciones entre la policía y la gente del barrio, y doné a una variedad de organizaciones comunitarias y campañas GoFundMe. Había visto lo que ocurrió en otros lugares como Ferguson, Missouri, después de la muerte de Michael Brown, así como en la reserva Standing Rock con el movimiento No al DAPL (Acceso en Dakota al Oleoducto) y no quería ser uno de esos extraños que venían, no escuchaban y les decían a todos los demás lo que debían hacer.

Tenía la fuerte sensación de que las Ciudades Gemelas se estarían preparando para al menos de dos años de protestas y acción comunitaria que ocurrirían en ondas. ¿Iban a arrestar a agentes de policía? Sí los arrestaron. ¿Se les debía imponer los cargos que merecían? Eso todavía está por verse. ¿Se trasladaría el juicio a un lugar más rural si los abogados de los policías pudieran argumentar que no obtendrían un juicio justo en las Ciudades Gemelas? Eso todavía no se sabe. Y, finalmente, ¿declararían inocentes a los policías? Porque por lo general, el racismo sistémico de la policía funciona así: los policías dicen que temían por sus vidas y que por lo tanto fue necesario aplicar fuerza mortal. Pregúntenles a las familias de demasiadas personas negras y cafés asesinadas por agentes de la ley si el sistema de justicia penal funciona para ellos.

Espero que la justicia prevalezca para George Floyd, pero no me siento optimista. Una persona blanca progresista me criticó en los medios sociales por haber anticipado un veredicto de “no culpable”, con el argumento de que yo era una distracción y que estaba impidiendo que la gente sintiera esperanzas y empoderamiento. (En otras palabras, ahora que ella sabe de esto, SE HARÁ justicia). Otra miembro de una iglesia blanca que decía haber estado trabajando por la justicia racial “por casi dos años” causó que los medios sociales me criticaran agriamente por no estar enojada con los blancos y omitir decirles que sean antirracistas, como ella lo estaba haciendo. (¿Cómo le va con eso hasta ahora?). Otras personas estaban participando en una especie de representación de su identidad de “no racistas” diciendo cosas como “lamento lo que están pasando” (¿me están tomando el pelo? Todavía estoy viva) y sacándose fotos de sí mismas en las manifestaciones de las Vidas Negras Importan (porque es todo sobre los manifestantes blancos) para demostrarme cuánto apoyan ellos “la causa”. Otros me mandaron una lista de materiales de lectura (porque he estado haciendo este trabajo toda mi vida pero necesitaba que algunos blancos que leen tres libros me dieran un libro mágico que haría que el racismo desapareciera).

Aprender de las Vidas Negras Importan y prestarle atención

¿Saben en qué terminé con todo esto? Firmemente en un espacio humilde, escuchando y aprendiendo con el movimiento las Vidas Negras Importan. Soy parte de un grupo en línea de justicia social en el que los líderes dijeron a todos los que no son negros que cierren la boca, se sienten, escuchen y aprendan y dejen que mujeres negras lideren. Yo me siento bien con eso. Y observé cómo blancos progresistas que se identifican como aliados perfectamente conscientes de lo que ocurre (porque pueden hablar sobre la fragilidad blanca) volverse a centrar en esos lugares porque "es realmente importante que los blancos hablen a los blancos". Para mi esparcimiento, por lo general a ese tipo de personas se las echa del grupo. Pero su mensaje, enmarcado en buenas intenciones y en su toma de conciencia, porta la suposición incorporada de que los blancos no tienen que prestar atención a la gente de color así que, como lo saben, lo que se debe hacer es apartarse de la gente de color y dejar que los bancos nos salven. Porque eso está funcionando tan bien.

Presentes para el largo plazo

Las Vidas Negras Importan/Black Lives Matter. El trabajo que necesitamos realizar en Estados Unidos debe estar centrado en el ahora mismo, porque hasta que las vidas de los negros importen, las vidas de los asiáticos no contarán, las vidas de la gente latina no contará, las vidas de los indígenas no contarán, las vidas de los LGBTQ+ no contarán y sí, incluso las vidas de los blancos no contarán. La gente que sin decir nada y repetidamente permitió el asesinato de negros a manos de vigilantes y agentes de la ley blancos hallará que es natural permitir que niños inmigrantes estén encarcelados y separados de sus padres y no le perturbará que alguien acuchille a un niño pequeño por haber traído el coronavirus a Estados Unidos. Así que sí, quiero escuchar y aprender de los líderes de Las Vidas Negras Importan/Black Lives Matter, porque el movimiento ya me ayudó a obtener claridad sobre los imperativos morales de nuestro tiempo.

Sí, siento profundamente cuando se ataca a los asiáticos, porque sé que puedo ser la próxima. Y también sentí profundamente cuando mataron a George Floyd y cuando un grupo de 30 hombres golpearon a Iyanna Dior, una mujer negra transgénero, durante las protestas en Minneapolis. Como persona de fe, oré por las familias de los policías que recibieron amenazas de muerte, porque tampoco deseo que ellos mueran de maneras violentas. Y siento una frustración increíble cuando gente que dice que le importa interrumpir el racismo sistémico y la supremacía blanca dedica tiempo y energía a avergonzar a otras personas por "no hacer las cosas bien", en vez de forjar las relaciones y crear las capacidades necesarias para que este trabajo perdure a largo plazo.

En este momento, invito a todos mis hermanos en Cristo a que oren y disciernan profundamente cómo van a trabajar sustentablemente para perturbar el racismo sistémico y la supremacía blanca. Esas pandemias no desaparecerán si el policía que mató a George Floyd es condenado y encarcelado. Me temo que los que desaparecerán serán los muchos que están expresando públicamente su "indignación".

Heidi J. Kim *es una educadora y episcopal residente en Minneapolis, MN. En la actualidad se desempeña como directora del Centro Familiar Melrose Para el Liderazgo de Servicio en la Escuela Breck. Anteriormente fue oficial de reconciliación de la Iglesia Episcopal, un cargo en el que tuvo la oportunidad de escuchar a episcopales y anglicanos de toda la Iglesia y aprender de ellos. La experiencia de Heidi en el ministerio de toda la Iglesia, así como en la educación terciaria y*

secundaria, se concentró en las historias de supervivientes y perturbadores de la opresión y la marginalización, así como en las luchas de personas bienintencionadas que se pronuncian sobre asuntos volátiles sin poner en riesgo las relaciones con parientes, amigos y la comunidad. Está profundamente comprometida a trabajar con personas de fe con curiosidad, diligencia y pasión por apoyar a comunidades más fuertes y fieles.

Recursos:

- Un cafecito con Sandra y Luis Barrios
- El Consejo Ejecutivo se compromete a luchar contra el racismo con resoluciones y $ 400K en subvenciones Por Egan Millard
- Entrevista con la Dra. Catherine Meeks, Directora Ejecutiva del Centro Episcopal Absalón Jones a Sanación Racial por Ema Rosero-Nordalm

El complejo asunto de ser una persona blanca

Anna Olson

La enfermedad COVID-19 ya había puesto el mundo patas arriba cuando acordé contribuir desde la perspectiva de una persona blanca a este número de los Escritos Vitales de la Fundación de la Iglesia Episcopal, pero las cosas parecían estar moviéndose al ritmo habitual en cuanto a la lucha a largo plazo de disputar el racismo y socavar la supremacía blanca. Pero el 25 de mayo ocurrió el asesinato de George Floyd y ahora transcurre el mes de junio de 2020. Parece ser el momento apropiado para decir algo útil sobre la raza. Muchas voces están hablando sobre ello en este momento y no estoy segura de si tengo algo que añadir.

Así que voy a tratar de decir más o menos lo que pensaba decir a principios de mayo. Voy a empezar narrando algunas cosas de mi propia historia a través de la lente de la raza, algo que rara vez se estimula a los blancos a que lo hagan. Después voy a hablar sobre el largo plazo, sobre prácticas que me nutrieron en el trabajo vitalicio de arrepentirme pronunciarme sobre el racismo y la supremacía blanca y de arrepentirme de ellos, y sobre el complejo asunto de ser blanca en una comunidad diversa y tratar de ser responsable y fiel en mis relaciones.

Hace muchísimo, en los 1990s (como les gusta decir a mis adolescentes)

Cuando cursaba el segundo grado en 1977, las escuelas públicas de Seattle pusieron en práctica un programa de transporte en autobús a gran escala para cumplir con una orden federal de dar fin a la segregación. De la noche a la mañana, mi escuela primaria K-5 principalmente con alumnos de ascendencia asiática y blancos, se convirtió en una escuela K-2 a la que la mitad de los niños llegaban en autobús desde una escuela con casi todos los alumnos negros del otro lado de la ciudad. Muchas cosas cambiaron ese año en mi escuela, incluyendo tener un año extra para ser una de los “chicos grandes”, pero lo más notable fue un cambio de tono que me confundía.

Adultos que anteriormente parecían haber estado firmemente a cargo, de repente estaban nerviosos y centrados en castigos y control. Anteriormente, ser enviado a la oficina se limitaba a

una amonestación. Ahora había una paleta de madera en la oficina y mi anteriormente alegre maestra de música estaba hablando sobre lo gruesa que era la paleta y lo mucho que dolería si le dieran a uno con ella. Incluso entonces, intuí que no me estaba hablando a mí o a otros niños del barrio. Los adultos les tenían miedo a los nuevos niños. Cabe señalar que la mayoría de los niños negros que venían en autobús cursaban el segundo grado.

Una cosa que pasó ese año fue que por las tardes, mis compañeras de clase que viajaban conmigo en el autobús empezaron a llamar a mi casa y pedir hablar conmigo. Yo no era muy competente socialmente y solo tenía siete años de edad, así que me impresionó mucho la confianza en sí mismas y la sofisticación de esas niñas pequeñas que abrían el directorio telefónico y hacían sus propias llamadas telefónicas. Hablé con todas las que llamaban, pero no las volví a llamar ni tampoco invité a nadie a que viniera a jugar a mi casa. Simplemente tomé las llamadas telefónicas como uno de los muchos misterios de ese año de cambios.

Reflexionando sobre ese año, me imagino a las mamás y los papás negros estimulando a sus hijos a que se hagan amigos de los niños de su nueva escuela. Miro hacia ese año e imagino la valentía de esas niñas que pidieron a mis padres que me pasaran el teléfono cuando la mayoría de los adultos blancos en sus vidas eran la gente en la escuela que amenazaba pegarles. Miro hacia ese entonces e imagino a esas niñitas preguntándose por qué ser amistosas no funcionaba con los blancos.

Otra cosa que pasó más adelante ese año fue que en un momento de bravuconada hacia un compañero de clase que me estaba fastidiando le dije, “Te voy a patear el trasero en el recreo”. Ese niño negro de segundo grado me miró, sorprendido al principio, y después agitó la cabeza como un hombre cansado mucho mayor que yo. “No lo vas a hacer, deja de hablar así”. Dado lo poco que yo sabía sobre patear el trasero, supe en ese momento que no tenía miedo de que lo golpearan. No entendí que él ya sabía sobre un poder que yo todavía no sabía que tenía. Él sabía que los niños negros que peleaban con niñas blancas siempre perdían.

Después del segundo grado mi familia se mudó de Seattle. Pasé la mayoría de mis años escolares en escuelas en que la mayoría de los alumnos eran negros. Aprendí sobre la fuga de blancos observando a mis compañeros de clase de mi barrio todo blanco huir al sistema de escuelas privadas cuando nuestra escuela primaria mayoritariamente blanca se fusionaba a escuelas que reflejaban la demografía más general de nuestro distrito mayormente negro. Aprendí muchas maneras de hablar en código sobre la raza en términos de diferencias culturales y socioeconómicas. Aprendí sobre rastrear: en una escuela secundaria 85% negra no había ni un solo estudiante negro en mi clase de inglés de colocación avanzada. Aprendí que incluso cuando los blancos eran una minoría, incluso cuando yo era la única blanca en el salón, todo el sistema se esforzaba en que me sitiera cómoda y bien.

Lo quisiera o no, tenía el respaldo de un mundo de adultos que hablaban más fuerte, eran más ricos y estaban mejor conectados con el poder que los padres de mis compañeros negros. La mayor parte del tiempo, la sola amenaza sin palabras de su intervención era suficiente para que las cosas salieran como yo quería que salieran.

Prácticas que encuentro útiles

Éstas son prácticas espirituales -- no en el sentido tradicional del término --, sino en el sentido de que el mal es una fuerza espiritual poderosa y que resistirlo es trabajo espiritual verdadero.

• **Resistir la segregación.** Mi niñez rebotó dentro y fuera de espacios segregados. La vida adulta me ofreció oportunidades constantes de replegarme en espacios blancos, temporalmente o para siempre. Me esfuerzo muchísimo en no hacerlo. No vivo en barrios principalmente blancos. No envío a mis hijos a escuelas principalmente blancas y no trabajo en iglesias u organizaciones principalmente blancas ni me uno a ellas. No me siento en mesas todas blancas.

• **Hablar sobre la raza.** Los blancos en EE UU tienden a sentirse incómodos cuando se habla sobre la raza y oyen hablar sobre la raza. Yo hablo sobre la raza porque es interesante y pertinente, y a veces hasta es bueno para reírnos entre amigos y colegas. Hablo sobre la raza porque sospecho que Jesús halla que el lenguaje codificado es tan ofensivo y poco útil como el pecado siempre lo es.

Trato de hablar sobe la raza porque puede dar permiso a que otra gente hable conmigo sobre la raza. Sé que mi presencia inevitablemente cambia las conversaciones entre gente de color, que en mi experiencia tienen una gran probabilidad de hablar sobre la raza entre sí. No quiero que la gente se calle el minuto que yo entre a una habitación, para que no me sienta incómoda, ni tampoco que sea un tema tabú en el medio de mis relaciones. Hablo sobre mis observaciones y experiencia propia sobre la raza porque quiero que la gente con la que comparto el trabajo y el espacio en que vivo, así como el espacio organizativo y de amistades, se sienta plenamente humana y capaz de compartir las experiencias u observaciones de sus vidas cuando están conmigo.

• **Tratar de aprender otro idioma.** Aprender a hablar español bien abrió la puerta a relaciones, oportunidades de trabajo, mucho más amor y diversión y, ojalá, a aportes útiles a las vidas y luchas de la gente. Pero no menciono esto como una práctica porque es gratificante. Cabe señalar que el aprendizaje de otros idiomas en EE UU rara vez se recompensa para alguien que no sea blanco o cuyo idioma natal no sea el inglés. Mis fracasos de aprender un idioma (ay, coreano) me pueden haber enseñado más que un gran éxito.

Estar aprendiendo un idioma lo llena a uno de humildad. Tropezamos y luchamos por comunicarnos cuando la comunicación es vital para el dominio y el poder. Tratar de aprender otro idioma revela que los idiomas son difíciles de aprender, un hecho que muchos en EE UU tienen una sorprendente dificultad en entender. Aprender un idioma más internamente coherente revela lo difícil que es aprender el inglés y la enorme injusticia de que se haya convertido en el idioma de poder de nuestro mundo. Y como alguien que solo aprendió el idioma siendo blanca, me da mucho en qué pensar la diferencia entre la generosidad de la gente y mis intentos de aprender el idioma, y la crueldad que se inflige a aquellos cuyo inglés no es perfectamente blanco y con acento y gramática “estándar”.

• **Dejar espacio en la mesa.** Yo tengo una silla en la mesa. Soy una mujer blanca con un título de una universidad élite, un vocabulario sofisticado y veinte años de ordenación en una iglesia pequeña pero bien conectada. Tengo una hoja de vida sólida aunque un poco no tradicional y fama de hablar sin pelos en la lengua y mantenerme firme. Tengo casi cincuenta años de edad y estoy firmemente en la etapa de la vida en que tengo la oportunidad de invitar a otros a la mesa y ayudar a que se sientan cómodos. Presto atención a invitar gente subrepresentada y a abrirles paso.

Esta práctica no es un sacrificio. Invito a gente inteligente e interesante que disfruto compartir una comida con ellos. Una de las maneras en que los apoyo es nombrando las agresiones contra su presencia que observo. No puedo decir que veo todo, pero veo lo suficiente como para iniciar la conversación y en algunas situaciones ello posibilitó que fuéramos aliados.

Nota sobre la terminología: Acabo de escuchar a un panel de oradores negros en el que a casi todos se les saltaron las lágrimas al narrar lo que identificaron como "micro agresiones", dejándome insegura sobre si hay algo micro en algo que hace a uno llorar décadas después y enteramente segura de que yo no seré la que califica las agresiones contra alguien como micro. Muchas cosas que no nos matan no hacen que seamos más fuertes. Duelen y siguen doliendo.

• **Dejar espacio para que los adultos hagan trabajo de adultos.** Aprendí muchas cosas por haber trabajado con muchas personas diferentes. Pero los niños aprenden muchísimo cómo ser los adultos que serán en la mayoría de sus vidas de… personas adultas. Los niños necesitan adultos que les dicen la verdad y que hacen lo mejor posible por protegerlos mientras que aprenden cosas difíciles. Necesitan maestros y entrenadores y mentores que se asemejen y no a ellos y que puedan hablar libremente desde muchos ángulos. Necesitan adultos con suficiente espacio en sus vidas y empleos como para permitirles decir la verdad sin que se les castigue por ello, incluso cuando la verdad sea sorprendente o incómoda. Los niños necesitan saber que los adultos de sus propias comunidades e identidades tienen la misma integridad que los adultos de otras comunidades e identidades.

Les debemos todo eso a nuestros niños. Los niños pueden hacer cosas increíbles, pero no pueden elevarse entre sí porque ese es un trabajo de adultos. Incluso más importante que mi propio papel en la crianza de mis hijos y de los niños en mis comunidades, presto atención a crear espacio para que otros adultos completen el panorama.

• **Cállese y hágase a un lado.** Puse esto al final porque no es una práctica que puedo decir que sigo, pero una que estoy empezando a explorar más seriamente. Es mayormente en la forma de preguntas. ¿Puedo dejar algo sin decirlo incluso si estoy convencida de que es un aporte brillante a la conversación? ¿Puedo dejar de lado las vías de liderazgo que pueden estar abiertas para mí, porque hay un espacio limitado en esa mesa y ocupar una silla puede significar que algún otro no la obtenga? ¿Puedo hacer más trabajo desde la trastienda para que mis colegas de color tengan los recursos que necesiten para moldear la agenda? Pregúntenme cómo van las cosas dentro de cinco años.

Anna Olson *es sacerdote episcopal residente canónicamente en la Diócesis de Los Ángeles, donde pasó veinte años en ministerio parroquial urbano. En la actualidad reside en los suburbios de Maryland de Washington, D.C., donde se desempeña como directora de Relaciones Externas de Cristosal, una organización de derechos humanos con sede en El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras. Es autora de Claiming Resurrection in the Dying Church (Westminster John Knox Press, 2016).*

Recursos:

- Recorrer la senda de las relaciones por Sarabeth Goodwin

- ¡El Espíritu de Dios se mueve, se mueve, se mueve! ¡Oh hermano deja que se mueva dentro de tu corazón! por Ema Rosero-Nordalm
- Somos Santa María Magdalena por Karen Peña

Una época sin precedents

Isaiah "Shaneequa" Brokenleg

"Esta es una época sin precedentes", leo en los emails que me mandan las tiendas con sus nuevos horarios y normas. Oí de una escuela que este verano está cancelando las clases y que posiblemente no verán a los estudiantes en persona este otoño. Oigo las explicaciones de los políticos sobre por qué esto o lo otro está pasando o no pasó o que está cambiando o no está cambiando.

Esta es una época sin precedentes, difícil e incierta. Esta es una época con muchos objetivos móviles, una época en la que la gente está haciendo el avión a medida que despega. Para muchos de nosotros, la perturbación de nuestras vidas es difícil. Nos preguntamos, ¿cuándo volverán las cosas a la normalidad? ¿Qué *es* la normalidad? ¿Qué *era* la normalidad? Tal vez queremos volver a la normalidad porque es algo que conocemos, con lo que estamos familiarizados, algo que sabemos cómo navegar, incluso cuando la normalidad no estaba funcionando para todos.

Cuando el retorno a la normalidad es el retorno a la disfunción

Es como que nuestra sociedad es una gran familia disfuncional. Si uno saca a alguien de su disfunción, al principio le resulta ajeno e incómodo, incluso si el nuevo lugar es más saludable. No estoy diciendo que nuestra situación actual es saludable. Estoy diciendo que nuestra situación actual es ajena y nueva e incómoda. Y, sin embargo, muchísimos de nosotros deseamos volver al sistema viejo, en lugar de encontrar algo nuevo o mejor que es más saludable para todos. ¿Por qué no podemos encontrar un sistema, un espacio, una manera de relacionarnos que respete la dignidad de todos los seres humanos?

Anhelamos regresar a la normalidad, pero volver a las cosas como eran sería como volver a esa disfunción. Esta pandemia está sacando a la luz lo frágiles que son nuestros sistemas de distribución de alimentos, lo injusta que es nuestra sociedad con los más vulnerables, lo mal que tratamos a la gente de color, a los inmigrantes y a otros oprimidos, así como la medida en que nuestra sociedad funciona con el sudor de la frente de los oprimidos. Esta pandemia también está sacando a la luz lo dispuestos que estamos algunos de nosotros a sacrificar la libre expresión, la salud y las vidas de otros para volver a la normalidad o reparar la economía.

Permítanme hacerles una pregunta: Cuando las disparidades entre los que tienen y los que no tienen son las mayores de la historia, ¿"arreglaría" realmente la economía un "retorno a la normalidad?". Para mí, arreglar la economía significa que alguien que gane un salario mínimo no tenga que trabajar dos trabajos a tiempo completo para llegar a fin de mes. Para mí, arreglar la economía significa que la pérdida de un empleo no signifique también la pérdida del seguro

médico. Para algunos de nosotros, hay una respuesta sobre lo que vale una vida humana, especialmente si esa vida no *luce* como nosotros*,* no *ama* como nosotros, no *vive* cerca de nosotros o no tiene *dinero* como nosotros. Y la respuesta sobre cuánto vale esa vida humana para esa gente… bueno, no mucho.

Esta sí que es una época sin precedentes. Y es en épocas como ésta que estoy tan agradecida por tener los Evangelios para recurrir a ellos y que tenemos a Jesús, que lideró dando el ejemplo y nos preparó para una época como ésta. Los discípulos estaban en una época sin precedentes y sin embargo Jesús les dijo que si lo amaban que siguieran sus mandamientos. ¿Saben de qué mandamientos él está hablando? Son amar a Dios con todo lo que uno tiene, su corazón, alma y mente, y amarnos los unos a los otros como Jesús nos ama.

Como discípulos de Jesús, estamos llamados a seguir esos mismos mandamientos: amar a Dios y amarnos los unos a los otros. Y por ese *amor*, la gente sabrá que somos sus discípulos. Deseo señalar algo. Jesús no dijo que *por tener la iglesia más grande* la gente sabrá que ustedes son mis discípulos o que *por esa gran liturgia* la gente sabrá que ustedes son mis discípulos o *por decirles a otros lo pecaminosos que son* o *por promulgar leyes que oprimen a los seguidores de otras fes.* Jesús dijo, *por…su… amor…* todos lo sabrán. Sus acciones individuales y colectivas, ¿demuestran amor al prójimo? ¿Respetan la dignidad de todos los seres humanos? Estas son las preguntas que necesitamos contestar.

El racismo sistémico y nuestra responsabilidad como cristianos

Mis familiares, las respuestas a esas preguntan me indican que nos queda mucho trabajo por hacer. Jesús dijo que podemos distinguir un árbol bueno de uno malo por los frutos que da. Los frutos que estamos produciendo dejan a nuestros hermanos negros, latinos e indígenas con menos ingresos, menos educación, mayor desempleo, malos resultados de salud, sentencias más severas en los juicios y una infinidad de otras disparidades. Los frutos que estamos produciendo son tóxicos para nuestros hermanos negros, latinos e indígenas. Estoy segura de que oyeron sobre las muertes de Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd y Rayshard Brooks. Algunos nombres sobre los que tal vez no oyeron son Jason Pero, Zachary Bearheels, Paul Castaway, Corey Kanosh, Raymond Gassman, Loreal Tsingine y Benjamin Whiteshield. Son americanos nativos a los que también mató la policía.

Algunos creen que si simplemente sacamos las manzanas podridas o redactamos nuevas normas las cosas cambiarán. Esas cosas son importantes y ayudarán, pero no son la fuente principal del problema. El pecado del racismo es sistémico. Muchos de nosotros, como pensadores occidentales, creemos que el racismo es algo individual, como que alguien es o no es racista. Nuestro sistema completo es racista. Es por eso que vemos disparidades y matanzas por todo nuestro sistema. ¿Qué puede esperar uno cuando nuestro país se construyó en tierras que les quitamos a los pueblos indígenas, en el trabajo esclavo de gente que sacamos por la fuerza de su patria, y que depende tanto del trabajo de inmigrantes indocumentados y de otros a los que tratamos como desechables?

El racismo ocurre en todo nuestro sistema socioecológico. Con eso quiero decir que se puede encontrar en individuos, familias, redes sociales de mayor tamaño como iglesias y escuelas, estados, países y el mundo. Si bien podemos pensar que no somos abiertamente racistas como

gente blanca (o los que tienen privilegio de piel) en una sociedad racista, a menos que estemos trabajando abiertamente para cambiar el sistema, somos parte del problema. Somos parte del problema si somos participantes activos en un sistema injusto. Como mínimo, estamos recibiendo privilegios que no nos ganamos. ¿Cuál es nuestra responsabilidad en ello como cristianos, feligresías y la Iglesia en general?

Como discípulos de Jesús, estamos llamados a amar a Dios y a amarnos los unos a los otros. Estamos llamados a crear el reino de Dios en la tierra. Lo hacemos diseminando el mensaje de Cristo de compasión, amor, perdón y reconciliación. Lo hacemos forjando una relación genuina con nuestros hermanos negros, latinos e indígenas. Lo hacemos no solo dándoles la plena bienvenida a nuestros espacios, sino también saliendo de nuestras zonas de confort y conociendo gente en el lugar en que está.

El amor es una palabra de acción

Como occidentales, cuando hablamos de amar tendemos a pensar en ello como un sentimiento, pero amar es un verbo, una palabra de *acción*. Amar al prójimo debe ser algo que nos llama a la acción. Recuerdo a mi abuela aconsejando a alguien de la familia que estaba luchando con una relación abusiva. Ella dijo, "Lo que cuenta no es que alguien te diga que te ama. Lo que cuenta es que te demuestre su amor por ti con actos". Mi abuela añadió, "Si alguien te ama no debes solo oírlo, sino sentirlo". El consejo de ella me recuerda "sabrán que somos cristianos por nuestro amor" cuando, independientemente de donde estén, puedan sentir ese amor… porque amar es una palabra de acción.

En lakota no hay una traducción directa de "te amo". En lugar de ello podemos decir "techihila". "Thehi" quiere decir sufrir o soportar. "Chi" quiere decir a ti. Añadir "la" al final hace que sea cariñoso. Así que techihila significa "Sufriré o soportaré por ti". Todas las veces que decimos "Te amo" nos recuerda la *acción* a la que estamos llamados a causa de ello. Jesús es un ejemplo perfecto de ese amor. Nos amó tanto que estuvo dispuesto a sufrir y morir por nosotros. Imagino que debe haber tenido miedo y que se habrá sentido solo, tanto como para gritar "Dios mío, ¿por qué me has abandonado?". Bueno, ese es un miedo que ninguno tiene que tener.

No estamos solos

Incluso cuando sufrimos, incluso cuando morimos, nunca tenemos que temer estar solos. Nunca estamos solos. Jesús dice, "No os dejaré huérfanos; vendré a vosotros". Encima de eso tenemos al Espíritu Santo con nosotros, caminando a la par de nosotros y sí, a veces hasta cargándonos. En esta época sin precedentes, con restricciones sobre las visitas a causa de la COVID, a mucha gente le preocupa no poder estar con sus seres queridos en sus habitaciones de hospital. Sé que eso es muy difícil. Como lakota, no lo puedo imaginar, porque nosotros somos los que todo el tiempo tenemos como veinte personas en la habitación. Mucha gente está muriendo, pero sé que no están solos. Nuestro Dios de amor no lo permite. Como antigua capellán de un hospital, sé que no están solos. He estado con mucha gente en el momento de su muerte, cuando empieza su jornada espiritual. Todas las veces tenían familiares o seres queridos, idos anteriormente de este mundo, que regresaban a saludarlos y a ayudarlos con su jornada. A veces les hablaban y otras señalaban y sonreían. Nunca estaban solos.

Recuerdo una vez que fui al hospital con mi abuelo para visitar a una anciana que estaba muriendo. Oramos y él hizo sus cosas sacerdotales. Cuando terminamos, él le preguntó a la anciana si había una canción que quería que cantáramos. Nosotros no estábamos familiarizados con el número de himno lakota que nos pidió y no lo sabíamos. Abuelo le preguntó si podríamos cantar alguna otra canción. Ella interrumpió mientras que él estaba hablando y dijo: "Está bien, padre, ahora los ángeles me están cantando". Falleció a los diez minutos. Ella no estaba sola. Aparte de nosotros, también tenía ángeles y familiares ayudándola en su jornada. La muerte no es algo que hay que temer. Después de que falleció mi abuelo dejé de tenerle miedo a la muerte, porque sabía que él vendría a ayudarme en mi jornada. Los lakota vemos a la muerte como una parte natural de la vida, así que tradicionalmente nunca fue algo que temer ni un tema tabú.

De la misma manera en que Jesús tranquilizó a sus discípulos en ese entonces, Jesús nos tranquiliza ahora. Dice, "Porque yo vivo tú también vivirás". Todos sabemos que la vida eterna nos espera después de nuestra visita temporal aquí en la tierra. Sin embargo, no tenemos que esperar hasta entonces para estar con todos nuestros familiares. Cuando comulgamos creemos que Cristo está presente y no solo Cristo, sino todos los santos. En nuestro sistema de creencias tenemos algo llamado la "comunión de los santos". Todas las veces que comulgamos, aunque sea una comunión espiritual, sabemos que estamos comulgando con todos los miembros de esta Iglesia y con todos nuestros familiares y antecesores que partieron antes. Parte del motivo porque se llama *comunión* es porque estamos en una *común-idad* y mantenemos una relación mediante esta cena sagrada. Esa relación no termina por el mero hecho de que nuestros seres queridos no están físicamente aquí, porque siempre están con nosotros de alguna manera. Creo que los lakota siempre lo supieron. Es por eso que no hay una palabra para decir adiós en nuestro idioma, solo "nos vemos", porque sabemos que pase lo que pase, volveremos a ver a todos nuestros familiares.

Llamada para ser las manos y los pies de Cristo en una época difícil e incómoda

Los edificios de nuestras iglesias están cerrados. Tenemos que navegar un panorama que cambia constantemente. No podemos ver a nuestros amigos y familiares en persona. No se permite que nuestros hermanos negros, latinos e indígenas prosperen en este sistema que es veneno para ellos. Nuestros líderes nos tiran gases lacrimógenos para sacarse una foto ante una iglesia. Con todo lo que está pasando, esta época sin precedentes puede parecer apocalíptica. Si vamos a crecer, cambiar y trascender nuestra disfunción, las cosas serán incómodas. Nos desafiarán y será difícil. Pero sepan que estamos llamados a esta época sin precedentes.

Recuerden que fue durante una época sin precedentes que Dios liberó a los israelitas de la esclavitud y los llevó a una tierra prometida. Fue una experiencia sin precedentes que llevó a Ruth, una extraña en tierra extraña, a la familia de Israel y puso en ella el linaje del rey David y de Jesús. Fue durante una época sin precedentes que Jesús fue traído a este mundo para transformarlo y ayudarnos a conocer a un Dios de amor en lugar de un Dios de furia.

Es en esta época sin precedentes que nos han llamado, traído al mundo, para ser las manos y los pies de Cristo para transformarlo, curarlo y reconciliarlo, este mundo que está enfermo, este mundo que está hambriento de justicia, hambriento por conocer a un Dios tangible que está

presente todas las veces en que demostramos amor al prójimo. *Mitakuye Oyasin* (todos somos familiares).

Isaiah "Shaneequa" Brokenleg *es miembro inscrita de la Tribu Rosebud Sioux (Nación Sicangu). Es funcionaria de planta de Reconciliación Racial de la Iglesia Episcopal. Es sacerdote en la Diócesis de Dakota del Sur, el lugar en que se crio y considera como su hogar. Desde una perspectiva cultural y espiritual, Shaneequa cree que todos somos familiares ("mitakuye oyasin") y que el Evangelio nos llama a ser "buenos parientes" los unos con los otros. Por haberse criado en la reserva, experimentó y presenció los efectos devastadores del trauma histórico-generacional, de la colonización y el racismo. Como winktè (lakota dos-espíritus) está llamada a ser curadora y a orientar nuestras comunidades en la dirección del cambio positivo, en la dirección de la reconciliación y hacia convivir en la relación correcta.*

Recursos:

- Abramos nuestros corazones: el incesante llamado al amor, Una carta pastoral contra el racismo Creado por United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos)
- Resolución de la ONU contra el racismo sistémico sin citar a Estados Unidos Por El Consejo de Derechos Humanos de Naciones Unidas
- Para Crecer Espiritualmente Necesitamos ser Amados Blog por Andrés Herrera

Amenaza Triple

Adialyn Milien

El amor de los Milien por la Iglesia empezó en una pequeña ciudad rural de Haití en la que, en 1909, mi bisabuelo fundó la primera Iglesia episcopal de la zona de Jeanjean. Ello no sólo encendió la pasión de mi padre por entrar en el ministerio, sino que posteriormente lo inspiró a llevar el Evangelio por toda la isla hasta la república Dominicana, donde conoció a mi madre.

Crecer como una episcopal desde la cuna ha sido algo hermoso. Ir a la iglesia los domingos temprano por la mañana, observar a mi padre predicar desde los bancos y desear estar allí con él fue mi primera introducción a amar la Iglesia. Nunca se me ocurrió que algún día me mudaría a los Estados Unidos de América, que mi madre sería ordenada como sacerdote y que mis hermanos crecerían con una pasión por el liderazgo laico.

No tanto de brazos abiertos como decimos que somos

Siempre consideré que soy una persona privilegiada por haber nacido en la comunidad llena de amor y de brazos abiertos que es la Iglesia Episcopal. La frase "La Iglesia Episcopal le da la bienvenida" y el espíritu de inclusión que hace que amemos a todos, sin distinción de género, raza o identidad sexual, marcó mi jornada religiosa. Cuando era niña creía en esa frase. Sin embargo, al crecer en Miami, Florida, empecé a ver que eso no era completamente verdad. Cuando participé en mi primera convención diocesana a los 16 años de edad, vi que los que tenían algo que decir no

eran como yo, que la gente a cargo de los jóvenes eran jubilados y mayores, que la gente de color se consideraba como ministerios étnicos (casos caritativos) y que decir "¡Amén!" en voz alta causaba que me miraran raro. Esa fue la primera vez en mi vida en que mi di cuenta de que la Iglesia que yo amaba no reciprocaba mi amor.

Nos encanta decir que damos la bienvenida a todos, ¿pero lo hacemos realmente? Cuando me fijo nuestras feligresías, sacerdocio, oficinas diocesanas y el Centro de la Iglesia Episcopal, no veo diversidad. Tendemos a aceptar a un puñado de gente de color, poner algunos puntos de color para que podamos decir diversidad cuando en realidad queremos permanecer sin cambios para evitar ir contra el statu quo. La verdad es que nuestras puertas están abiertas, pero que la gente no siente que se les está dando la bienvenida. Tenemos que ir más allá de dar la bienvenida y empezar a incluir a las personas sin juzgarlas, para que se sientan en libertad de ser quienes son en un espacio que ya les es ajeno.

¿Arma para el amor y el cambio o amenaza?

Como líder adulta joven en la Iglesia, consideré que yo era una amenaza triple: joven, negra y mujer. Veo eso como un arma para el amor y el cambio, pero otros lo ven como una amenaza a la estructura organizada de la manera en que la Iglesia necesita "lucir". Algunas frases que oigo en convenciones que siempre me hicieron sonreír son: "*necesitamos más gente joven", "¿dónde están los milénicos?", "tenemos que revitalizar la iglesia".* Nos encanta decir esas cosas, pero no hacemos nada u obstaculizamos que esas frases poderosas se conviertan en realidad. Lo que realmente queremos es que todo siga igual y a la vez declarar diversidad. Tenemos miedo de revolver el avispero, tenemos miedo de que la gente que se sienta incómoda con el cambio se vaya, tenemos miedo de que nos vean como controversiales. Este temor es el mentiroso que nos aparta de la gente que decimos que deseamos amar, pero que en realidad tememos amar.

Como comunidad religiosa, hemos avanzado y tomado medidas sobre las que otras organizaciones religiosas apenas están empezando a hablar. Sin embargo, solo estamos en el comienzo. Necesitamos dejar de ver la juventud, la raza y el género como amenazas, y en lugar de ello como elementos poderosos para ayudar a evangelizar y revitalizar nuestra iglesia. El trabajo de provocar cambios tiene que empezar hoy mismo. La Iglesia Episcopal está llena de grandes voces que todavía no se están oyendo, de canciones y bailes que están en espera para revitalizar nuestras almas. Somos una iglesia llena de potencial, pero necesitamos quitarnos las anteojeras y ver la posibilidad de grandeza en gente que no se parecen a nosotros.

Esfuerzos para efectuar cambios enraizados en amor

A-M-O a la Iglesia Episcopal y opto por deletrear la palabra porque deseo que todos nosotros dejemos de decir esa palabra por decirla, pero que la digamos de corazón. Estoy orgullosa de ser parte de esta organización basada en amor, evangelismo, reconciliación y cuidado de la creación. He visto ocurrir mejoras y redención. Estamos expresándonos más, estamos poniendo mujeres y gente de color en lugares de poder (nuestros dos últimos obispos presidentes son un ejemplo perfecto) y los jóvenes están abriendo puertas para que sus voces se oigan. Mis hermanos y yo estamos trabajando junto con otros adultos jóvenes, no sólo en nuestras diócesis, sino en diócesis de la Iglesia más en general, para entrar en comités y lugares en los que las voces de color tengan

algo que decir en la toma de decisiones. ¿Quién hubiera pensado que tres afrolatinos jóvenes, bisnietos de un haitiano cristiano, estarían generando cambios en la iglesia?

Todos los días estoy inspirada por sacerdotes y laicos en nuestras comunidades que están empleando la plataforma de la Iglesia para hablar abiertamente sobre justicia y amor, y para denunciar la injusticia. Siguiendo su ejemplo, decidí no sólo seguir a Jesús, sino también seguir sus pasos como una miembro activa de la sociedad que busca no sólo mover al mundo hacia un lugar más lleno de amor, en el que todos trabajamos juntos, predicamos el evangelio de Jesús y nos convertimos en el mundo glorioso que él desea que seamos. Prometamos hoy mismo empezar a ver las "amenazas" contra otra gente como armas de bienvenida para el cambio. "Hoy es el día para provocar cambios." "Today is the day to provoke change." "Aujourd'hui est le jour de provoquer des changements."

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Recursos:

- ¿Demasiado joven para liderar? por Liz Luna
- Ven tal y como eres por Lucy Cabrera Montes
- Un cafecito con Sandra Montes y Sandy Milien