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The Beloved Community—Facing Racism
Matthew 22: 36-40, Micah 6:6-8

I had an ***experience*** while on vacation
that opened my eyes to some of my own prejudice.
I am humbled and grateful when God can work on me that way.
I was going through a ***security line*** at a small airport in North Carolina (not
fexafctly the hub of potential terrorists),
and noticed that they seemed to be hyper-vigilant in their security lines,
they were serious about their jobs with TSA!

And sure enough, I set off some kind of ***silent alarm*** while going through the
full body scan machine, just like we have here in Tulsa—and I can only guess
that it was my tiny metal hair tie.
So imagine how excited I was to be escorted over to the side for that oh so
lovely back of the hand pat down!
They were especially concerned about my ponytail, which seemed ridiculous.

The whole time I was thinking, ***this is crazy***.
I'm an average white woman, traveling with family,
why are they searching me?
And weeks later it dawned on me what that inner voice revealed.
By thinking that an average white woman does not deserve the pat down,
does that mean I think people who are not average or white or a woman do?

I don't think of myself as a prejudiced person,
but that little thought reminded me that ***ALL of us have bias and prejudice***,
we just don't always ***think*** about it or ***acknowledge*** it.
It got me thinking about how crucial that is
to really loving my neighbors---***All of them***.

I am white.

Therefore, I am privileged.

I don't worry about being pulled over just because of my skin color.
I don't worry about being followed around in a store suspiciously,
or having someone wonder whether I should use a credit card.

I don't have to fight against a belief that I might be inherently lazy or dangerous.

Like so many of us in this sanctuary, I consider myself “**normal**” or “**average**”.
 People who are not white have race, but not me, right?
 I’m the “regular” skin color.
 Most people do not refer to me as a white preacher.
 But if I was black you’d say I was a black preacher, right?
 Why is that?

If you think you **don't have white privilege**, try this—
 refer to **everyone** you encounter with a skin color descriptor...
.eg. The white checkout lady was really slow today,
and then this white man had the audacity to just cut in line,
and the black woman beside him was clearly upset,
but this giant white guy came and told the white checkout girl to hurry up.
 Ever thought about why we don't talk this way?
 Why we only use color descriptors for people of color?

We who are white, are privileged.

The community and country we live in, are ***bias in our favor***.
 This is just a fact, and we could talk for days about examples.
 This is what people are talking about when they say ‘***white privilege***’.
 Why would we want to understand that?
 Well, didn’t Jesus want us to walk in the shoes of our neighbors?
 So we could truly love all people?

And that’s ***not*** because it’s the ***politically correct*** thing to do.
 It’s because it’s what ***Jesus wants us to do***—
 To love our neighbors, ALL of our neighbors.
 Some say they are ***tired of political correctness***.
 But isn’t some of our cultural progress for the best?
 If we believe as Christ followers,
 that ***God is still speaking, still working on human hearts***,
 isn’t some progress a good thing?
 And it’s up to us as Christ-followers, to discern what needs change.
 As Christians it’s ***not about political-correctness, but Jesus-correctness***.
 And ***Jesus treated everyone with love and respect***.
 Maybe I should say that again...

If that's what someone is suggesting we do,
that's *being Christian* my friends.

Do you remember what happened after Jesus told the lawyer what the greatest commandment was?

We heard those verses today from Matthew 22,

and those same verses became *our church's mission statement...*

In Luke 10 the lawyer knows this commandment, but then he asks: "*And who is my neighbor?*", to which Jesus didn't answer—in typical Jesus fashion, he told a story, the story of the *Good Samaritan*.

Remember that story?

The good Jews passed by the injured man on the side of the road, but a *Samaritan*—someone *hated and despised* by the Jews—an outsider, an outcast from a different land with different customs and different worship—someone Jews might refer to as a dog—that was the one who was the true neighbor!

I have always *prided myself* on not being racist.

Don't many of you think that way about yourself?

I mean, it's a bit hard to be too prejudiced in my *family*,

because we've got white, black, gay, straight, and transgender, so you've really gotta get over your issues to love our family!

And I'm blessed because prejudice *wasn't taught to me* as a kid.

And it does have to be taught.

Growing up, my Dad's best friend Nimrod and his family were black, my 2nd best buddy Kim was black

and some of the closest friends were non-traditional families.

Dad always worked in higher education,

so we met folks from all over.

We knew that not everyone looked and talked the same way.

People came in all shapes, sizes, and colors.

But I do remember going *out for food* as a kid in our 80s van—

my Dad and us kids, Nimrod and his kids,

and how they wanted to take my Dad's order but not Nimrod's.

Talk about seeing my Dad mad!

I remember when **my sister Sharla** said she was bringing home a guy named Rodney to meet the family. And she told our parents that he was black. And these amazing folks who don't utter a prejudiced word, were concerned! And here it was the 90s!

I remember talking to Sharla's daughter Rollins on a family vacation years ago, and her asking if maybe she should have light skin, not dark, because maybe light was better. I told her dark skin is beautiful, and lots of people wish they could have such pretty color!

I remember Rodney telling me about **driving his nice car** and cops pulling over young black men... for no reason.

While visiting friends in law school in VA once we visited a local church with a **confederate flag** draping the Lord's Table. It made me ill. What was even worse was **hearing the n-word** over and over by cadets from a local academy at a restaurant where we were eating.

When my youngest was about 9, he came running into the house saying **Mom! Am I racist?** What?? I said. Why?

Well, the kids at school say I can't be friends with Nikolas because he's black, and I shouldn't go to his house! **Does that make me racist?**

No babe. Racist is how **they** are acting, not you.

Nikolas is your best friend—you just **ignore that nonsense**.

Later, when he had to write a **report and picture of his hero**, he drew an awesome Martin Luther King Jr, and asked me to dress him up like him so he could give an MLK speech on 'hero' day. I still remember him in that suit & tie. Sad thing is, I was **always scared to let them play toy guns** in the front yard, lest someone harass them or worse.

These are some G-rated stories of race in my life.

We all have those stories and experiences about race that shape us.

Some good, some really bad.

Some of us have **big hurdles** to jump because we were **taught prejudice**.

Some of us have **never thought** much about race, and we should.

Because that's the thing about any problem all around us—

the 12 step authors know this—we have to **admit** we have a problem in order to deal with it.

So all of us who happened to be born with white skin,
 we have an **opportunity**, especially as **followers of Jesus**.
 We can **acknowledge** that we are in fact **privileged**,
 and that more than likely we have **some measure of prejudice**
 against people who are not like us, even if we don't act on it.
 Only then can we move beyond that.

After all, **prejudice and racism is taught by our own American culture**—
 movies and media have long portrayed **criminals** or scary people
 As those with dark skin,
 and outcasts as people who look different.

The world usually portrays **terrorists**
 as young Muslim men or women in headscarves,
 and **immigrants** as folks from Mexico who refuse to work or learn English.
 It's **all pretty ridiculous**, but it's right here in our country.

A pastor two days ago was pointing out an example to me when he saw that a
 big billboard for the new **Gathering Place park in Tulsa**—
 Shows only visitors who are white! Why?

And in the past few weeks we've been confronted with the absolutely horrific
end result of racism and bigotry—
 We've witnessed white supremacists, white nationalists, and neo-nazis hold
 rallies that ultimately led to violence.
 It is simply **wrong, and heartbreaking**—to us, and to God.

So what is the **Christian response**?
 Well, aren't we called to **love our neighbors**—
 all of them, regardless of color, creed, politics, status—
 or anything else that divides?
 Aren't we called to **stand with those** who are oppressed?
 Aren't we called to **work toward justice** for all?

Isn't that the **calling of Micah**, who was told what God requires?
 To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.
What does that verse mean to you?

I hear **Jesus' words echoed in it....**

love your neighbor—through justice, mercy and humility.

Stand with the neighbors who need you.

Work for the fair treatment of all people.

This **idea of justice** is as old as humanity itself.

Do you know that **throughout the Old Testament**,
the people of God were expected to **love, welcome, and help**
the stranger, the alien, and the immigrant?

God placed **special emphasis** on the care of those populations!

Are we doing that today?

If you keep on reading through the **New Testament**

you'll see a Savior who did just that,

and asked his followers to do the same.

Do you think God would want us to keep silent in the face of Charlottesville?

That would be easier, right?

But when the world is reeling from racism,

aren't we people called to **stand against that?**

Whether or not we live near a controversial statue, or a state in the Deep

South....we are human beings, and the faces I see here are white,

so what are **we going to say?**

What are **we going to do?**

Martin Luther King Jr. was perhaps one of the wisest people

on what to **say and do** in the face of hatred and racism.

He even had a term for the human family that he envisioned would come
together through **non-violence and love**.

He called it the **beloved community**.

Listen to his words:

*There are certain things we can say about this method that **seeks justice**
without violence. It does **not seek to defeat or humiliate** the opponent but to
win his friendship and understanding.*

*I think that this is one of the basic distinguishing points **between violence and**
non-violence. The ultimate end of violence is to **defeat** the opponent.*

*The ultimate end of non-violence is to **win the friendship** of the opponent. ...and
so the aftermath of violence is bitterness;*

*the aftermath of non-violence is the **creation of the beloved community**;*

*the aftermath of non-violence is **redemption and reconciliation**.
This is a method that seeks to **transform and to redeem**,
and win the friendship of the opponent, and make it possible for men to **live together as brothers** in a community, and not continually live with bitterness and friction. (Martin Luther King, Jr, "Justice Without Violence," April 3, 1957)*

What if that's who we are called to be—**God's beloved community**!

Does that make **sense to you**, as a child of God?

Aren't we **ALL made in God's image**?

Genesis doesn't specify that **only white people are made** in God's image, does it?

And yet our **own government** at one time said that African slaves were only 3/5ths of a person for legislative representation!

What if that was **YOU**?

What if you are **brown, or black**?

Our own **Savior Jesus** was most likely short, big nosed, and dark skinned, a typical middle eastern Jewish man, but for some reason we portray him tall, blonde and blue eyed!

King called us to **something higher** than a community where everyone looks and speaks the same.

He called us to be **a non-violent people, united in love**.

Isn't that what **Jesus calls us to** as well?

Isn't that what he meant when he said to love our neighbor as ourselves, and then went on to specify that neighbor means even those who are **different**, even those we **exclude**, even those we **deride**?

But we have to **admit that we do** exclude and divide people, based on race, and a dozen other differences.

We have to admit--we who are white are privileged, and the culture is bias in our favor.

James Baldwin once said, "*Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced*".

Another great quote is from Edmund Burke who said,

"All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing".

(Debby Irving, *Waking up White, Elephant: Cambridge, MA, 2014, pg. 98*).

I don't know about you,
but I don't want to be just standing by in the face of evil.

I was reminded of those great quotes in an incredible book that I commend to you: It's called ***Waking Up White*** by Debby Irving. Talk about opening your eyes to racism! I bought it last fall after a seminar at our Synod where they were talking about the problem of racism, but I didn't read it until after Charlottesville, when the issue took on new urgency.

Debby Irving says, that saying you don't see race is a problem that allows you to ignore your own white privilege. Here's her words: *Color blindness...actually maintains the very cycle of silence, ignorance, and denial that need to be broken for racism to be dismantled.* (Debby Irving, *Waking up White*, Elephant: Cambridge, MA, 2014, pg. 102).

What if she's right?

We all see race, we ***may not act hatefully*** on it,
but we all have some feelings of bias and prejudice.
So, what if Jesus would ***have us look honestly*** at our feelings,
so we can at least ***try to walk in the shoes***
of our brothers and sisters of color, and work against racism.
Why? ***So we can love***, our neighbors, as ourselves.

That's what strikes me about the confederate statue debate.

I don't know the answer to that.

But I'm struck with this ***question***:

*how would I feel about those monuments ***if I was black***,
if that symbolized a history of oppressing people like me,
for no other reason than the ***color of our skin***?*

Why don't I sit with that question for awhile?

I've been talking to fellow pastors about this issue of white privilege
and my friend Sandy told me that she was talking with a black man in the
doctor's office recently,
and confessing that she just couldn't believe how bias our world is toward
whites. She even started to cry, and then the kind man gently said to her,
but you know, it's not about you.

It's ***not about us***.

It's about our neighbors of color.

It's about our ***brothers and sisters in the human family*** who look ***different***, and sometimes have their own different culture.

And it's ***not about us feeling guilty*** because we're white.

What's the point in that?

It's about our ***Micah passage...***

It's about justice, mercy, and humility.

Living in such a white city like Owasso means we live in a ***bubble***.

The only black family I interact with is my teen's best friend.

Living surrounded by so many white faces ***helps us deny*** what we don't always see—which is ***white privilege and racism, systemic racism***.

We ***can deny*** that such racism exists, but that doesn't make it not exist.

Some deny the Holocaust, but it still happened.

So what are we to do?

As ***followers of Jesus?***

What if the first step is admitting the world is ***bent in our favor***, whether we see it or not.

What if we sought to ***educate ourselves*** about that,

and about the ***history of people of color***—

right here in our city, our state, and our nation.

If God is still speaking, and always working on us,

what if we ***allowed God to work on our hearts and minds regarding race?***

What if we ***allowed God to help us grow***,

so that we could truly ***do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly*** with God,

on behalf of those whose skin does not look like our own.

What if?

Friends, ***the Gospel is very simple*** today:

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,

and ***love your neighbor (ALL neighbors) as yourself***.

May God give us the courage to ***find out*** what that means, and ***live into it***.

And all God's people said, Amen.