

DOING BELOVED COMMUNITY:
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN PUBLIC SQUARES

A dissertation submitted to the
Theological School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

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August 20, 2021

ABSTRACT

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Doing Beloved Community is a relational model for community change. This is relational work, not transactional. It's coalition building collectively and individually—to *be church as a part of the community not apart from it*. Fostering personal relationships.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's Beloved Community is a global vision *in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it.*

Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.

Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Doing Beloved Community empowers individuals to take up anti-racism work by cultivating relationships at intersections in all levels of the community.

Education and community flourish through personal conversation groups in all public squares—meetings in homes, churches, civic spaces, classrooms—wherever people live, work, and serve.

Think anti-racist creative resources like book studies, documentaries, movies, television series, or expert panel conversations. Create safe spaces and forums to engage neighbors and new friends—to really hear and see each other—to work together to shape a vision and public policies of Beloved Community.

For examples: James Baldwin's *I Am Not Your Negro* or Chelsea Handler's *Hello Privilege. It's Me, Chelsea*. Book studies like *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving or Ibram Kendi's *How To Be An Anti-Racist*.

Meeting topics like Meet the Muslims Next Door, Microaggression, Black Life in this Community, or Meet the Police. This can be baked into a podcast series.

Contents include organizational and conversational tools, sermons, blog posts, public prayers, and meeting remarks to encourage you to take risks in doing the work in public squares.

This is not transactional or about getting new church or club members although you might. It's grass-roots relational community change through all intersections—by empowering individuals to literally infiltrate local civic groups, police, the academy, elected councils, political committees, and community policy action groups.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grace, peace, gratitude, and sighs too deep for words. We don't have the space or time to adequately get into it. Thank you all.

Thank you to my friends, the “committee”: Rev. Dr. A. Craig Dunn, Sister Rosemary Moynihan, Rev. Dr. Brooks Smith, Maureen Byrne, and Barbara Taylor. You are outstanding church, community, and business leaders who welcomed me, inspired me, encouraged me, taught me, and partnered with us in building Beloved Community.

I am especially grateful to Michelle, a Licensed Professional Counselor, for everything you taught me about family systems, microaggression, and your life experience. Your story adds so much to this project as well as your tweaks to the structure of the Beloved Community meetings—all with compassion, wisdom, and kindness. Thank you!

Finally, thank you to my cohort and to our mentors in the Doctor of Ministry in Public Theology track at the Drew Theological School: Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis, Rev. Dr. John Janka, and Rev. Dr. Terry Todd. We all promised to build the plane as we went—and we did. Thank you for the light you have shined on the work and thank you for an incredibly inspiring ride!

INTRODUCTION

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood...

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.¹

On August 28, 1963, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. leans into the microphone on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to share a change manifesto for all people the world over. He is doing public theology, speaking truth into the public square in a raging debate on the world stage advocating for the basic human rights of millions. He is not the first or the last.

Dr. King adds his voice to the interfaith, interreligious, and sociopolitical lexicon of ancient Judeo-Christian Biblical prophets, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, ancient to modern theologians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, politicians, and the media. All continue to speak basic human truths *and untruths* into the public square even as its dimensions expand with new technologies and channels of media messaging platforms.

Dr. King is *doing Beloved Community* in public squares through relational coalition-building by living into it—going beyond church doing justice for all into and

¹ M. L. King, "I Have A Dream...", Archives.Gov, Last modified 1963, <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>.

with the community—as part of it, not apart from it. This work is not just for clergy and church members. Public witness fluidly transcends the church property line.

This is deeper than community organizing. The goal of doing Beloved Community is using all available platforms and forums to advocate and cultivate greater love and community for the common good of all through individual relationship building (coalitions) and public conversation. Political differences soften when relationships become personal. Biases, intolerance, and racism break down when relationships become personal. People begin to really see and understand the hearts of their neighbors—their commonalities, shared experiences, wants, and deepest desires—when relationships become personal. They begin to live into it when relationships become personal.

Doing Beloved Community works at one-on-one relationship building in all aspects of community. Beloved Community work facilitates and empowers people to act and use their voices to build fluid *relational* partnerships and coalitions to foster the common good. This is community transformation work that radiates both *from* and *into* public squares at all levels of our intersections.

Beloved Community work is risky work.

Some definitions may help frame the conversation:

Beloved Community

From the King Center.org:

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power.

Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.²

Public Square

Merriam-Webster defines *public square* as the “sphere of public opinion.”³

And what that public square looks like is a moving target! The modern “internet of things” and media platforms render the scope of the public square(s) beyond measure, beyond exact science except possibly as a static point in time. The modern public square is constantly evolving—growing, shifting, changing, and reinventing along with its content channels.

Public Theology

Conversations about *public theology* come at it from a Christian perspective likely because the term was coined by Martin Marty, a noted Christian historical scholar, to extrapolate Reinhold Niebuhr and contrast public theology against the civic religion of the time.⁴ David Tracy expounds a bit on what is “public” as the intersection of society, the academy, and the church.⁵ While *Doing Beloved Community* will also come at it from my faith tradition (Presbyterian), I define *public theology* a little more broadly as a conversation in the public square not always through the lens of interfaith and interreligious interaction, but across all these disciplines holding a mirror up to issues of

² “The King Philosophy,” The King Center, Last modified 2020, <https://thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy/>.

³ “Definition Of PUBLIC SQUARE,” Merriam-Webster.Com, Last modified 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/public%20square>.

⁴ Martin E. Marty, “Reinhold Niebuhr: Public Theology And The American Experience,” *The Journal Of Religion* 54, no. 4 (1974): 332-359, doi:10.1086/486401.

⁵ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3-5.

the common good related to matters of state, the media, religious communities, the academy, civil society, and socio-economics.

A few weeks following the Michael Brown killing by police in Ferguson, Missouri, protesters were chanting “show me what democracy looks like.” Protest leader Michael-Ray Matthews was approached by a seminarian who grabbed the bullhorn. She asked if they could change the chant to “show me what theology looks like.” Mr. Mathews says, “She was calling her sisters and brothers in the faith to go *all in*—to be totally immersed in mind, body and spirit, to bring the richness of our faith into the public space.”⁶

From this more broadly defined perspective, *Doing Beloved Community* is *exactly what public theology looks like*.

⁶ Katie Day and Sebastian Kim, “Introduction,” in *Companion to Public Theology*, ed. Sebastian Kim and Katie Day (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), 1.

PROJECT RATIONALE

Trying to live into the love-God, love-your-neighbor-as-you-love-yourself Gospel of Christianity gets to the root of doing Beloved Community and seeing the world through this lens is probably as good as any sum-total of my call to ministry. Preaching and public witness have been my first passion from the earliest days of my call. I probably spend the most time working on my voice—how and what that looks like. Every aspect of it. My comfort level and call to preaching is no doubt an extension of my career as a rock and roll radio disc-jockey in the 80's. So public expression isn't a new thing for me—what keeps changing are the platforms.

I have never been shy nor short of an opinion which is both a gift and a curse. It certainly drives my call to advocacy, witness, and my need to build relationships, ally, and partner with groups mainly in the margins and voices that need to be heard. Public theology keeps coming to me—clearly it is a call along with the call to be present and speak on relevant social witness issues of the common good. Turns out, there's something helpful in the optics of outspoken balding straight white male clergy advocating on issues of race, immigration, women's issues, LGBTQIA, or mental health. It's an effective counter-advocacy to the DNA-level systemic policies created and perpetuated almost exclusively by Euro-American white-privileged males who look just like me.

My colleague Rev. Chris Moore was serving Mayflower Congregational Church (UCC) in Oklahoma City as Associate Pastor in the spring of 2011. I was newly ordained and serving a small Presbyterian congregation in the Oklahoma City suburb of Guthrie. Chris calls my cell and says, "What are you doing for lunch? Go home and get a suit on.

Meet me at the capitol at noon because there are five anti-immigration pieces of legislation in committee at the State House and they meet today.”

I didn’t even hesitate—“I’ll be there,” and we successfully shared our voices with the sub-committee who eventually let the legislation die in committee. And so begins a relationship between my vocational ministry and my comfort zone in the public square.

From the very root of our country’s history, and especially into the 2016 presidential election cycle (early 2015) and subsequent victory of Donald J. Trump, the national political, social, and economic hate dialog in the United States exploded into the public square. But remember, this is not new!

This is not news!

Political, social, economic, and cultural division blessed and empowered at the highest offices in the land have threatened this democracy from the roots of the constitution, to our electoral processes, to the socio-economic and shifting norms of our culture. And where we are right now is just today’s snapshot! All this—openly fomented from the bully pulpit of the presidency, powered by and organized through social media platforms and covered by the mainstream media—emboldens the public squares from urban centers to the suburbs and the most rural areas of the country.

Entire new generations are now emboldened and empowered haters at all levels of the socio-economic strata. Countless people in mainstream liberal polite American culture (read that: white-privileged culture) were lulled into a mythical false sense of security in their political correctness, kindness, and individual social witness. Some of them are still cluelessly congratulating themselves on “how far we’ve come.” This looks and sounds like denial.

Denial.

White Euro-Americans have *always* been in denial.⁷

More on this later...

The 2016 and 2020 presidential and down ballot races changed the whole nature of the dialog. The entire hate conversation on race, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia is at a new pitch—boiled to the surface out of the local bars and coffee shops, bowling alleys, shooting ranges, and workplaces. And it is not just rural American InfoWars, QAnon, Parler, NewsMax, Fox News, NRA, and Donald J. Trump acolytes. It is not just the “religion and guns” populations President Obama often talked about.⁸

“The Black Lives Matter Global Network (blacklivesmatter.com) is a chapter-based, member-led organization whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.”⁹ From the police brutality of Los Angeles, California against Rodney King in 1991 to the horrific deaths of so many other unarmed young black people like Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida at the hands of a neighborhood watch vigilante, to Eric Gardner in Staten Island, New York, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, and now George Floyd in Minneapolis—some of the most noted who have died at the hands of law enforcement. The social media hashtag #BlackLivesMatter is a rally cry for justice.

⁷ Ibrahim X. Kendi, “Denial is the Heartbeat of America,” *Atlantic*, January 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/denial-heartbeat-america/617631/>.

⁸ Mayhill Fowler, “Obama: No Surprise That Hard-Pressed Pennsylvanians Turn Bitter,” *Huffington Post*, Last modified 2008, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/obama-no-surprise-that-ha_b_96188.

⁹ “Black Lives Matter—About,” Black Lives Matter, Last modified 2020. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.

These are just a precious few of the shameful fatalities perpetrated upon innocent unarmed people of color in this generation at the hands of the very people who are charged with *protecting* them.

George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020 while under arrest for trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill. Mr. Floyd's arrest was captured on a now iconic viral video as the officers kept a knee on his neck and their bodily weight on his upper torso restricting his breathing in spite of his "I can't breathe" protests for 8 minutes and 46 seconds! Almost 9 minutes—and long after he had died.

Eight minutes and forty-six seconds.

"I can't breathe" is a ghastly and ghostly echo of the Eric Gardner case in Staten Island in July of 2014. An independent autopsy absolutely confirms the death of George Floyd as homicide by deliberate asphyxia, or strangulation.¹⁰ This is racial homicide by police clearly caught on video literally *in the public square*.

Protests exploded all over the country.

There were a number of violent exchanges between police and protesters with some vandalism and looting. Across the 50 states mega to mini peaceful protests were held at street intersection after intersection. #BlackLivesMatter #EndWhiteSilence rallies in public square after public square, including here in suburban New Jersey where I live.

At this writing in the first half of 2021, we are in the midst of the roll-out of vaccines and just passed a larger wave (including various more-contagious mutations) of the world-wide COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic. Even as more than 50% of our

¹⁰ Frances Robles and Audra D. S. Burch, "How Did George Floyd Die? Here's What We Know," *New York Times*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-autopsy-michael-baden.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

national population has currently received at least one dose of the vaccine, the USA turns out to be the largest concentration of world cases and fatalities, the Black and Brown Communities have been hardest hit as a population:

As the coronavirus spread across the United States, sweeping through low-income, densely populated communities, black and Hispanic patients have been dying at higher rates than white patients.

Crowded living conditions, poorer overall health and limited access to care have been blamed, among other factors. But a new study suggests that the disparity is particularly acute for black patients.

Among those seeking medical care for Covid-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus, black patients were hospitalized at nearly three times the rate of white and Hispanic patients, according to an analysis of patient records from a large health care system in Northern California.¹¹

Madison, New Jersey is a thriving affluent largely white-privileged suburb of New York City whose history is inextricably connected to the Revolutionary War and the “Manifest Destiny” of American Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism. There are countless Madison, New Jerseys in every region of the country where varying degrees of hate and fear churn and harden the culture. Hate spills onto the streets, into the local government councils, and onto local editorial pages even out of local civic groups and political and social action committees against progressive local actions such as adopting Sanctuary City policies. In Madison, it looks like opposition to the Borough Council adopting a Welcoming Community policy which among other things, relaxes the local police

¹¹ Roni Caryn Rabin, "Black Coronavirus Patients Land In Hospitals More Often, Study Finds," *New York Times*, May 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/23/health/coronavirus-black-patients.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

enforcement and cooperation with the national Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE) agency.

2016 was my first summer in Madison and I was recruited by the Rev. A. Craig Dunn, Pastor at First Baptist Church—a primarily Black congregation, and Sister Rosemary Moynihan, Superior of the Sisters of Charity at the College of St. Elizabeth, to join in leading a series of conversations based on the Martin Luther King concept of Beloved Community. A leadership coalition to be sure!

We hosted a number of community conversations on race, privilege, entitlement, “Meet the Muslims Next Door,” and knowing our neighbors. Our events drew a number of civic group and community leaders including the local police. All of that was obviously pre-pandemic.

Here lies the genesis of this *Doing Beloved Community* project. From this experience through our work at trying to foster Beloved Community comes the inspiration for this template. My hope is to empower you to do your own Beloved Community from your own public squares, *into* your public squares.

Public theology is about justice combat!

This is not just about Christian preaching.

This is practical witness, presence, community forums and use of media channels from live dialog and traditional electronic broadcast media to social media, blogging, internet streaming, and podcasting. There are so many ways to connect with an audience these days that the public square can go virtually global very quickly—it does—it has to!

Doing Beloved Community in the public square is bigger than the church pulpit. While it can fluidly radiate out of and into the church, this is bigger.

This is bigger than a press conference at the State Capitol.

It is bigger than nationwide peaceful protest rallies and marches.

This is bigger than a couple of well-placed Tweets.

It is the sum-total—all of those channels and more. There is an entire army of people *doing Beloved Community* for the common good engaging the work on a number of levels all over the world—right here, right now, from their individual public squares, their intersections on the streets, city councils, local news, blogs, and social media which transcends church property lines.

My role in all this has turned into this project—creating an empowering model for doing Beloved Community based on what I believe is the most critical element of the Kotter change model (Appendix 1)—coalition building—relationships and partnerships at local grass roots levels.¹² At coffee one day with one of my Doctor of Ministry advisors, I was encouraged to focus on this witness aspect of public theology. After some thought and prayer, I began to draw inspiration from some of the champions in the field. MLK, William Barber, Jacqui Lewis, Nadia Bolz-Weber, Letty Russell (a good Presbyterian!), and Linda Sarsour all came immediately to mind and you will find them in the bibliography.

There are growing numbers of local public community actors—not just clergy—who embrace, ally, build partnerships and relationships out of and into their public squares and intersections. They are doing the work—*doing Beloved Community*, for the

¹² “The 8-step Process for Leading Change,” Kotter Inc, n.d., Accessed January 29, 2021, <https://www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>

common good of the community—by engaging in person, or through traditional media, and using virtual intersections via social media, blog posts, websites, email lists, podcasting, plus leadership in local civic service through government, political, and non-profit groups.

RELEVANT THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Judeo/Christian Bible and Context

While I believe public theology is interdisciplinary and much broader than Abrahamic faith traditions, Old Testament biblical scholars are a helpful place for me to start fleshing out the public theology nature of the literature from the major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel. According to current scholarship, these prophecies from the exilic period are not projections of future happenings per se, but instead a reading of the tea leaves in their current contexts. They are doing ancient public theology, preaching to the people of God about what God may be doing (emphasis mine) *with them—it is their truth to their powers, to their people, for their specific places and times*.¹³

That is precisely what I think public theology is today—a speaking of truth not just to power but into the public square holding mirrors up to the culture, to the contexts, to the places and times of all people, *today's people of God*. Everybody. Every. Body.

I think it is a fair generalization that John the Baptist, Jesus and his disciples, and the Apostle Paul were doing public theology, coalition building, and *doing Beloved Community* throughout their entire ministries. Though I am not sure Jesus intended to start a movement in and of itself, the far-reaching history, longevity, and impact of his ministry obviously evolved into one. In Acts 9:2 in the story of the conversion of the Paul, then known as Saul, we find the first reference to such a movement as “the Way.” “Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if

¹³ Julia M. Obrien, “Introduction to the Prophetic Books” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 5th ed., ed. Michael D. Coogan et al., (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 971-974.

he found any who belonged to *the Way* (emphasis mine), men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”¹⁴ It is only later in Acts 11:25-26 that we find reference to those followers of Jesus and the Way as “Christians”— “Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “*Christians*.”¹⁵

Shifting focus specifically to Jesus’ ministry, the Gospel of Mark can function as an historical reference guide of sorts in tracking Jesus across the region. This Gospel account is fond of using words such as “immediately,” “after this...”, to move the story along and create a sense of urgency. Location references such as “he passed along the Sea of Galilee...the whole crowd gathered around him and he taught them” or “When he returned to Capernaum...” help provide a locale for Jesus’ work in the public square.¹⁶

The parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, verses 25-37 is a ready and evident example of Jesus doing public theology directly addressing racism in his time and place. Jesus often illustrates his teachings with parables that are designed to engage, challenge, and illuminate while holding a mirror up to his listeners to examine their ways of life and sense of community. “Who is my neighbor?” is a classic running Jesus theme.

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind;

¹⁴ Michael D. Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV)*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1973.

¹⁵ *New Oxford Bible*, 1976.

¹⁶ *New Oxford Bible*, 1829-1832.

and your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”¹⁷

Similarly, the story of the Woman at the Well in John 4 is another classic Jesus reversal-of-fortune story as he shows up literally in the public square of the village at Sychar at Jacob’s Well at noon in the heat of the day. Village women, little more than slaves in the household, typically gathered in the cool of the mornings or evenings to draw water from the wells, socialize, and catch up on village news and gossip. This woman, with a multiple marriage “checkered past,” comes to the well in the midday to avoid the other women and any confrontation about her low status in their community. She meets Jesus instead:

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” ¹¹ The

¹⁷ *New Oxford Bible*, 1898-1890.

woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water...”

²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?”²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”¹⁸

The use of Samaritans and a woman(!) as heroes in the stories overturns the social order in Jesus’ time and place. There is great hostility between the Jews of the day and Samaritans.¹⁹ By the time Jesus appears on the scene in the first century, the rift is hundreds of years old dating back to the post-exilic period as Samaritans held very firm beliefs against the repatriation of the exiles into their adjacent territories. As the stories are told, the Samaritans are lifted to hero-status as Jesus often does for the “least of these” to not only shock but to challenge his audience against their own embedded racism, misogyny, and xenophobia.²⁰

¹⁸ *New Oxford Bible*, 1925-1927.

¹⁹ "Hatred Between Jews And Samaritans | Bible.Org," Bible.Org, Last modified 2020, <https://bible.org/illustration/hatred-between-jews-and-samaritans>.

²⁰ Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 189-202.

According to the purity codes and social strata of the time, if Jesus' primary audience for this parable is Jewish, Samaritans would be considered at the very bottom of the purity hierarchy, never mind a woman. The ranking is thus:

1. *Priests*
2. *Levites*
3. *Full-blooded Israelites ("laymen")*
4. *Illegal children of priests*
5. *Proselytes of Gentile converts to Judaism*
6. *Proselytes who once were slaves, hence proselyte freedmen*
7. *Bastards (those born of incestuous or adulterous unions)*
8. *The "fatherless" (those born of prostitutes)*
9. *Foundlings*
10. *Eunuchs made so by men*
11. *Eunuchs born that way*
12. *Those of deformed sexual features*
13. *Hermaphrodites*
14. *Person of all other ethnic groups ("Gentiles")*²¹

Samaritans could be "the other" in number 14 at best and fall completely out of the societal Venn diagram. You may notice that women are never considered or counted at all, and don't even make the list. Nevertheless, these are just two specific examples which happen to address racism (and sexism) from the number of scenarios in the Gospel stories of Jesus doing public theology.

Marcus Borg

Marcus Borg really changed my life, certainly theologically, in the early days of my call to ministry as vocation. *The Heart of Christianity* really spun my head before I even went to seminary. Borg gave me permission to challenge the more traditional theologies of my upbringing and then to take them apart, re-examine them, and put them

²¹ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 174.

back together again. I started seminary with a very open mind about the Bible's relationship with our culture and our culture's relationship with the Bible!

Very specifically it was chapter 7 "The Kingdom of God: The Heart of Justice" which set my heart for contextual public theology on fire! I see the possibility of spiritual transformation through social and political transformation by living into this Christian kingdom as advocate—out there, into the real world! Borg made this possible for me.

The Bible is political as well as personal. It combines sharp political criticism and passionate political advocacy: radical criticism of systems of domination and impassioned advocacy of an alternative social vision. Protesting the nightmare of injustice, its central voices proclaim God's dream of justice, a dream for the earth. Criticism and advocacy are grounded in their understanding of the character and passion of God: a God of love and justice whose passion of our life together is the Kingdom of God.²²

I never read the text the same way again! Borg set me on a course of theological/political/social awareness. He turned on my radar in such a way that I started seminary a few months later with an open mind to what it was going to offer me in shaping a theological, ethical, and biblio-political foundation. Borg showed me a way to begin unwinding all that so that the seminary experience would ultimately give me the tools to wind it back up. And it gave me permission to be constantly unwinding it and winding it back up again as it all shapes the trajectory of my world and ministry.

The entire American culture based on the "self-made person" as he says is:

...[P]rimarily the product of our own initiative and hard work...to ignore the web of relationships and circumstances that shape our lives" (our contexts)... "Racism and sexism are systems...embedded in political and economic structures and conventional attitudes...'systemic injustice'—sources of unnecessary human misery created by unjust political, economic, and social systems. Its opposite, of course, is 'systemic justice,' also known as structural, social, substantive, or

²² Marcus J Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: How We Can Be Passionate Believers Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 126.

distributive justice. The test of the justice of system is their impact on human lives.

This is what the political passion of the Bible is about. Its major voices protest the systemic injustice of the kingdoms and empires that dominated their world. They do so in the name of God and on behalf of the victims—slaves in Egypt, exiles in Babylon, exploited peasants in the time of the monarchy and again in the time of Jesus, and the most vulnerable in all times—widows, orphans, the poor, and the marginalized. And in the name of God, the major figures of the Bible advocate a very different vision of our life together.²³

Hello, contextual theology! Hello, social witness! Hello, public theology!

Douglas John Hall

Working through constructive theology in seminary, the contextual theological perspective of Douglas John Hall really resonated with me as a conversation partner as I began to build a personal theological/ethical construct of a world where the Cross of the Christ of faith is in constant motion through space and time. I begin by suggesting that Hall's theology is applicable to the public theology of doing Beloved Community because it is in motion, even as he quotes Jesus' words from the Cross: "It is finished." Foundationally, if the eschatology of the Cross means that this is the end of the story, that is it. There is no more, but it occurs to Hall that *chronos*—time continues. The world keeps turning, and the world remains as does humankind so then, is this the beginning of the Gospel and not the end? The Cross does not put a period on the *chronos*, but a comma as the risen body of Christ is comprised of the disciples who are sent "into the world." The Cross signals the beginning, or as Hall steals from Elie Weisel a beginning "again"

²³ Borg, 128-129.

of the chronos, of time, of the story. My interpretation of this suggests a building of public theological momentum into the world right into our time.²⁴

There are a couple important distinctions for the contextuality of public theology. It is important to frame the discussion in a North American context since this is the “our” context to which Hall refers, as opposed to some other. As an important sidebar, we need to mention cultural perception or description of context and its actuality which are often, and especially here, different understandings. An example might be the mythical concept of the USA in the classic “melting pot” metaphor of “all white men of European decent are created equal”—the class, socio-economic and ethnic privilege reality in the North American context. These describe what “our” context is in truth.²⁵

We tend to avoid the suffering when we discuss “the problem” because this avoidance lies in tension with a theology of the Cross that actually engages the world. The closer followers of the crucified Christ come to engaging the world, the greater the risk and probability of what Hall calls “rebuff.” Loving a world that does not love itself says Hall, invites a vengeful wrath from that world. He cites the example of the legend of Peter, fleeing the burning Rome, encountering the Risen Christ who is moving toward Rome. Why? To be crucified again. Loving an unloving world. Peter returns to Rome, so goes the legend, to his own upside-down crucifixion. In the method of contextual theology, we examine the tension between avoidance of suffering to the Gospel reality of

²⁴ Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 41.

²⁵ Hall, 46.

world engagement that demands nothing but suffering in the connectedness of faith.

Suffering is not the point of discipleship. It is a consequence.²⁶

One of the risks of contextual public theology is the challenge to more conservative theologies as it engages the world. It is risky because it threatens tradition, tradition that is dug-in based on narrow scriptural interpretation, and we can quickly find ourselves losing fundamentalists and conservatives in the dialog. Or worse, we find conservative theologians, politicians, and community leaders (read that: religious right or alt-right) co-opting and politicizing the Gospel to support the white supremacist/privileged nature of the United States government, state and local governments, and culture. Contextual public theology perpetuates the conversation illuminated by the changing time, place, and cultural world with which it is in conversation. Hall uses the metaphor of the coin given to the servant by the householder. The coin is minted and has value only when it is put in circulation. Without circulation, the coin sits, collects dust, and becomes something like a fundamental theology. It does not gain value. Living into doing Beloved Community puts that coin into circulation gaining greater value and relevancy.²⁷

This enormous risk actually becomes the inherent value of doing Beloved Community and doing contextual public theology for the common good. There must be a willingness among Judeo-Christians to hold on to the Gospel loosely—that is, to be willing to let go of it as it dialogs with the context it is in. The risk is that the context will *influence* the Gospel, that it will drive it, cultivate it, enculturate it, and even *change* it.

²⁶ Hall, 54-55.

²⁷ Hall, 58.

This is both the value and risk, a tension, of contextual public theology. For the Gospel to fully engage the world, it must be willing to bounce around in that world, to become a part of it and not the other way around. A static Gospel message has no room to grow or challenge the minds of its listeners. On the other hand, a dynamic Gospel message in the context of the world works like a live streaming video camera. The camera is *always* on and cries for integration of perspectives, ideas, contradictions, argument, and true *engagement* of the culture and of the anthropologic moving context in which it exists.²⁸

²⁸ Hall, 58.

SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The working bibliography is by no means an exhaustive list of source material. There are plenty of resources there—helpful scholars, commentators, pundits, documentaries, and even dramatic television and movie productions on the development and current state of the public theology addressing racism specifically and more broadly the common good in America. Any of them empowers and adds to the conversation in the public square. They all influence the trajectory of my thinking, but I chose a few key highlights from the list since time and space prohibit going in-depth into all of them.

Whether you are a clergy person or not, all the sources are great conversation builders—book-studies and fodder for relationship, coalition, and partnership building from the church board or session level to small neighborhood groups and larger community conversations. One relationship at a time. They provide a building community through shared experience and dialog, gained mutual awareness and understanding. The better we come to know and love our neighbors, the more beloved our communities become. They all help frame and indict the development of the mash-up current state of the American socio-economic, political, theological, racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic human condition based on the white privilege and exceptionalism that exists in the DNA of our country.

The following sources are good choices for book studies, and they all directly drive my thoughts, hopes, and dreams for doing Beloved Community—reshaping the trajectory of American white privilege and injustice to all people of color. They especially inspire me and call me out through my own lens of white male privilege, and I hope they will inspire and embolden you, too. The best place to start may be at the

earliest known origin of the myth of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism and the concept of manifest destiny.

Kelly Brown Douglas

In *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and The Justice of God*, author Kelly Brown Douglas charts the remarkable course of exceptionalism and manifest destiny.

From my mid-1970's high school history class, I remember well the concept of manifest destiny as the great "American dream" of westward expansion. Even the revolution itself was based on theft of the colonies from the British Empire—never mind that the initial settlement of the original colonies came at a price for North American indigenous tribes. Never mind that America was built largely on free labor from the brutality and inhumanity of the African slave trade. Never mind the price paid by the forced relocation of indigenous Native Americans in the 19th century (many to my home state of Oklahoma).

The whole thing was romanticized as "progress," the "birth and growth of a nation," "bi-coastal commerce, transportation, communication, and prosperity." Never was race a part of the conversation. The whole myth of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism is clearly the subtext, but totally ignored in our history texts.

Kelly Brown Douglas does an amazing job on the deep background of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism and "'stand-your-ground-culture' ... which spawned various social-cultural devices—legal and extralegal, theoretical and ideological, political and theological—to preserve America's primordial exceptional identity."²⁹ She considers

²⁹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies And The Justice Of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 3-4.

Tacitus' *Germania*—in 30 pages (wow)—the “most dangerous” book ever written. *Germania*'s observation and research of ancient Germanic tribes—their organization, governance, and social/moral characteristics would later serve as a blue-print for the Nazis' superior race strategies. The “superiority and purity of blood became the focus of the Anglo-Saxon myth.”³⁰

While there's no *actual* DNA connection available since the technology did not yet exist, early Englanders considered themselves descendants of the original Germanic tribes. During the Reformation, they strove to throw back to the era of their free Anglo-Saxon pure-blooded heritage “free of taint” from the Catholics and the Normans. The original Pilgrims and Puritans sought to make a break from the church and state of England and fled to America bringing their sense of superiority and exceptionalism with them. It was to become part of the “DNA” of The New World.³¹

Thomas Jefferson (a notorious slave-owner) and Benjamin Franklin wrote extensively about the superiority of Anglo-Saxons, chauvinism, and the “city on the hill.” America was the “new Israel” and its people the Israelites. Quoting Robert Bellah, Douglas says it wasn't about Christianity for Jefferson and Franklin as much as “the sacred nature of Anglo-Saxonism.” Anglo-Saxonism *was* their religion.³² And it remains as religion today.

The concept of Manifest Destiny arrived on the scene in the 19th century in both civil and religious ways. Riffing on “Manifest Destiny” first coined in 1845 by John

³⁰ Douglas, 6.

³¹ Douglas, 6-7.

³² Douglas, 10-13.

O'Sullivan in an editorial, Protestant clergyman Josiah Strong linked America's "divine calling" through two great Anglo-Saxon ideas: "civil liberty" and "a pure *spiritual* Christianity." Establishing the "exceptional" nature of Anglo-Saxons, Strong "makes his case for the Manifest Destiny of the race." Merging the "two great ideas" Strong says the Anglo-Saxons are their "brother's keeper." Paraphrasing: North American Manifest destiny is to be the great home of the exceptional Anglo-Saxon and his power, the center of life and influence.³³

Thandeka

Thandeka, a Unitarian Universalist minister and theologian, in 1999 published an amazing analysis on what it means to be white in America. *Learning To Be White: Money, Race, and God in America* gets at the inner psyches of the white identity in America as a foundational shame which has driven power, privilege, division, and the very roots of racism.

The "Shame of America" rests in the class struggle identified by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's "Poor Peoples Campaign." By 1968, Dr. King lamented to some of his staff just days before he died that America was much sicker than he realized when he started out in 1955. Thandeka quotes writings by Dr. King from his book *Where Do We Go from Here*, and from unpublished FBI reports of the time. I am paraphrasing—By 1968, Dr. King assessed that the struggle was much deeper than just the human rights of Black America but a struggle that would force America to address its interrelated flaws:

³³ Douglas, 93-95.

racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is a class struggle which exposes the “evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society.”³⁴

Dr. King proposed a class alliance between impoverished white Americans and Black America. This alliance would indict and confront American capitalism. His hope was that it would address the great divide between the incredible wealth and incredible poverty that crossed racial lines in the late 1960’s. White America did not heed his call to this alliance³⁵ and clearly the division between the economic elite and our most impoverished people has grown exponentially in the half-century since.

Perhaps the reluctance to address the divide not just in economic terms but also racial terms on the part of whites in America rests in the inability to confront what it really means to be “white.” It would require a “DNA” root-level transparency and ownership of the entire myth of exceptionalism and the shame that comes along with this self-confrontation.

Thandeka invented her Race Game to help Euro-Americans identify the racialization to which they (me, we) have all been subjected from birth in the USA and before. There is only one rule to the game, and it works like this: for seven days, the person “must use the ascriptive term *white* whenever mentioning the name of another Euro-American cohort. For example, “my white husband, Phil,” or “my white friend Julie” or “my lovely white child Jackie.”³⁶

³⁴ Thandeka, *Learning To Be White: Money, Race, And God In America* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 79-80.

³⁵ Thandeka, 80.

³⁶ Thandeka, 3.

Thaneka's hope was that in learning to describe themselves and others in racial terms, Euro-Americans would learn what it is like to be identified in the same way African Americans have learned to use racial language to describe and identify themselves. Her goal was that in developing a racial lexicon, whiteness would be exposed to that racial group as the "great unsaid." But it *rarely* worked—she thinks because of the danger of exposing and confronting in the self-identification the embedded racism and "otherness" defining all non-whites created, nurtured, and embodied by the entire white racial class. In short, they would have to personally own the shame of centuries of racism.³⁷

Debby Irving

Waking Up White: and Finding Myself in the Story of Race is a personal journey by Debby Irving, almost a memoir. It is her story—how she becomes "woke" to race and her place in it. She takes us through most of her life story as a Euro-American in which she reflects on race in America playing a very big "Race Game" of her own.

Most helpful to her was a wake-up call she received during coursework for her master's degree. She took a course in "Racial and Cultural Identity" which she expected to "...teach [her] about 'other' races and cultures so I could better help students of color. I thought I'd get some tips, some dos and don'ts that would keep me from offending students and parents." What she got was a "turning of the lens" onto herself and serious introspection which caused her to confront a shocking and gapping problem that she thought was outside herself. "Racism wasn't about this person or that, this upset or that,

³⁷ Thandeka, 3-19.

this community or that; racism is, and always has been, the way America has sorted and ranked its people in a bitterly divisive, humanity-robbing system.”³⁸

Very few Euro-Americans are ever as woke to the shame.

J. D. Vance

J. D. Vance’s best-seller *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, comes at Euro-Americanism from the perspective of a white male of Appalachian ancestry who picked himself up “by his bootstraps” and broke his own cultural cycle of poverty. I include it as helpful in the conversation not because I think Vance owns his American white exceptionalism, he does not. But he is helpful in the conversation to chart entire generations of lower-class white Americans who feel “left behind” in the economic class struggle of globalization yet tone-deaf to their white privilege and racism.

Hillbilly Elegy helped me to understand the rural political, economic, and racial base for the rise of Donald J. Trump and the Tea-Party crowd. The Info-wars, alt-Right, 2nd Amendment “Bible and Guns,” “Lock Her Up” people. The “good people on both sides” in Charlottesville. The people who answer to the dog-whistle populist Trumpism:

There is an ethnic component lurking in the background of my story. In our race-conscious society, our vocabulary often extends no further than the color of someone’s skin—“black people,” “Asians,” “white privilege.” Sometimes these broad categories are useful, but to understand my story, you have to delve into the details. I may be white, but I do not identify with the WASPs of the Northeast. Instead, I identify with the millions of working-class white Americans of Scots-Irish descent who have no college degree. To these folks, poverty is the family tradition—their ancestors were day laborers in the Southern slave economy, sharecroppers after that, coal miners after that, and machinists and millworkers

³⁸ Debby Irving, *Waking Up White, And Finding Myself In The Story Of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press, 2014), 43-44.

during more recent times. Americans call them hillbillies, rednecks, or white trash. I call them neighbors, friends, and family.³⁹

J. D. Vance traces his own family origins through Appalachian migration from the mining industries of Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina to the steel mills of Ohio and Pennsylvania and related manufacturing industries. Entire populations followed jobs to steadier—and steadily declining—employment opportunities ultimately replaced by automation or outsourcing. These are the largely blue-collar families and union employees who picked up their bootstraps for evaporating labor opportunities in a country that was globalizing and repurposing to technology. J. D. Vance served his country in the US Marine Corps, took advantage of his white privilege, and took charge of his own destiny breaking his own familial cycle to complete a 4-year degree and ultimately land in Yale’s law school.

Ta-Nehisi Coates

Framed as a letter to his middle-school son, *Between the World and Me* is part social-historical analysis of the black experience in America, part memoir, and a revealing personal account of what it means to be a black man in today’s USA. This may be the “A” side of the J. D. Vance record. This is the leading edge of the partnership that Dr. King envisions in the alliance between Black America and White impoverished people.

In 155 pages, Mr. Coates shares his version of “the talk” that every black parent has with their children. It is the stark reality of black life in a country wired from its

³⁹ J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir Of A Family And Culture In Crisis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 2-3.

origins that all white Euro-American male property owners are created equal and where everyone else serves them and their cause:

Black people love their children with a kind of obsession. You are all we have, and you come to us endangered. I think we would like to kill you ourselves before seeing you killed by the streets that America made. That is a philosophy of the disembodied, of a people who control nothing, who can protect nothing, who are made to fear not just the criminals among them but the police who lord over them with all the moral authority of a protection racket.⁴⁰

Sadly, this has never been truer than today. Let me say that again. It breaks my heart that this has never been truer than it is today. Read the book! He goes on:

Here is what I would like for you to know: In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body—it is heritage. Enslavement was not merely the antiseptic borrowing of labor—it is not so easy to get a human being to commit their body against its own elemental interest...it had to be blood. It had to be nails driven through tongue and ears pruned away...It had to be some woman “chear’d...with thirty lashes a Saturday last and as many more a Tuesday again.

It could only be the employment of carriage whips, tongs, iron pokers, handsaws, stones, paperweights, or whatever might be handy to break the black body, the black family, the black community, the black nation. The bodies were pulverized into stock and marked with insurance. And the bodies were an aspiration, lucrative as Indian land, a veranda, a beautiful wife, or a summer home in the mountains. For the men who needed to believe themselves white, the bodies were the key to a social club, and the right to break the bodies was the mark of civilization. “The two great divisions of society are not the rich and poor, but white and black,” said the great South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun. “And all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals.” And there it is—the right to break the black body as the meaning of their sacred equality. And that right has always given them meaning, has always meant that there was someone down in the valley because a mountain is not a mountain if there is nothing below.

You and I, my son, are that “below.” That was true in 1776. It is true today. There is no them without you, and without the right to break you they must necessarily fall from the mountain, lose their divinity, and tumble out of the Dream.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between The World And Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 82.

⁴¹ Coates, 103-104.

Michelle Alexander

To help White Euro-America understand the myth of “how far we’ve come” since the Civil Rights Movement, here comes *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. Written a couple years after the election of Barak Obama as president, Michelle Alexander blows up the “colorblind” lie American white folks have been telling for decades, the lie they trumpeted all the louder during the Obama presidency, the lie that President Trump and his ilk ignored and did not even care enough to tell.

Michelle Alexander exposes the raw horror of this systemic attack on Brown and Black America as the US Judicial System works their War on Drugs of coordinated racial control targeting all people of color. The key is in its three-stage simplicity. And here is how it works:

First the roundup: huge numbers of “perpetrators” are pulled into the judicial system by targeting drug busts in poor communities of color. These are funded by federal grant programs and police are free to stop, question, search and detain anyone with no regard for racial bias. In fact, racial profiling is a key ingredient which guarantees black and brown men are sucked into the system.

Convictions are phase two: formal control of the population. Defendants are denied adequate legal representation, forced to plead guilty or agree to plea deals despite the truth of their guilt, and prosecutors are free to pile on the charges with no challenges to their own bias or authority. Once convicted, they are incarcerated at world-record rates due to the heavy sentencing requirements of the War on Drugs, and once they are in the system every aspect of their lives is under the control of and monitored by the largely

privatized for-profit correctional system. Any form of resistance is subject to punishment, possibly more charges, and extended sentencing.

While the majority of those convicted are eventually released, they come into the third, final, and most far-reaching stage of the process with social, economic, and legal sanctions that will follow them for their lifetimes. They will face *legal* discrimination in almost every facet of their lives going forward: denial of employment, housing, education, and of public benefits. Recidivism rates are high, and most will return to a cycle of imprisonment/release/imprisonment for the rest of their lives.⁴²

Miguel De La Torre

Burying White Privilege: Resurrecting a Badass Christianity. So much to unpack here, and not just from the LatinX perspective. Do not be fooled by the size of this book! Miguel De La Torre exposes the whole problem of white supremacy and privilege. In every aspect of our country, as Dr. King often said, the flaws of our country come down to fundamental racism. Some key quotes:

After 2016, white Christians lost any and all moral authority they might have possessed to say anything concerning the probity of anyone. The mask has slipped to reveal the undergirding racism—in all of its vile glory—that always existed beneath of the façade of holy and pure superiority...In a nation divided between those who view themselves as exceptional and those who recognize the racism of such a position, neutrality and silence in the face of injustice make those muted complicit...whether they like it or not...white Christianity has crucified the faith of the oppressed on its crosses of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and all the other -isms imaginable.⁴³

⁴² Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration In The Age Of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 185-186.

⁴³ Miguel De La Torre, *Burying White Privilege: Resurrecting A Badass Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 19.

Fear of the other and a patriotic desire to return to a simpler, more racist time had more to do with casting votes for Trump than the wish to fight against any politically correct alternative offered...The not-so-secret reason as to why white Christians voted for and continue to support Trump was their desire to ensure the White House would be white again and would remain so for the foreseeable future...If the president or his white Christian allies cannot bring themselves to condemn the perpetrators of home-grown terrorism, then [they are all] racist. Yes, I know white people hate being called racist, but honestly, what other term best captures and explains this phenomenon? Embrace the term and repent, or simply prove me wrong. Not in words, but in deeds!⁴⁴

Badass Christianity is one that disturbs, disrupts, and literally *screws* with the structures of oppression as a valid alternative when repression limits ethical responses. I have coined the phrase, “an ethics *para joder*” to describe this “screwing with social structures”...to *joder* is the Spanish verb form of a word one never uses in polite conversation. To *joder* is “to f*ck with”...unapologetically and unashamedly “screws” with the prevailing power structures...the disenfranchised, who stand before an entrenched Christian nationalism designed to marginalize those who fall outside of the white ideal, have few alternatives...Badass Christianity...upsets the prevailing apple cart needed to maintain empire, is an ethical response from those on the margins of society who are disillusioned and disturbed with US Christian values and virtues.⁴⁵

I think this is a viable answer to the “what now?” question! Who does not want to be a badass? This is “trickster” strategy of infiltrating the system and “joderando” or literally “f*cking stuff up” from the inside. This is super-helpful!

So, what now?

This is a good place to jump into what’s next.

⁴⁴ De La Torre, 82-83.

⁴⁵ De La Torre, 141-143.

DOING BELOVED COMMUNITY

Join me in this project!

As I'm trying to decide how to best lay this out, it occurs to me that the heart of it is getting your commitment. The most individually actionable ingredient of this project is your coalition building through one-on-one relationships. The real work of Dr. King's Beloved Community—dismantling systemic racism, discrimination, bigotry, and prejudice through peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation where love and trust triumph comes down to one thing.

Relationships.

The goal of this project is to encourage you whether you are a Christian or not, whether you are clergy or not, whether you teach or not, whether you hold office or not, whether you lead, or none of the above—not yet. This is for you, especially if you're a white person! I'm asking you to own your white privilege and maybe even make use of it for good.

This is here to encourage you, empower you, maybe even equip you to take up the mantle of advocacy and community building through fostering relationships at the intersections in your world. Linda Sarsour's recent book inspires even from her title, ...”We are not here to be bystanders.”⁴⁶

Preach it, sister!

Don't be a bystander.

Be a badass!

⁴⁶ Linda Sarsour, *We Are Not Here To Be Bystanders: A Memoir of LOVE and RESISTANCE*, (New York: 37INK, 2020), III.

This is not transactional work. This isn't about "what's in it for me?" It's not about attendance numbers at your church or rotary club, or financial development, though those things *can happen*. It's about larger community building, forging relationships, and changing the hearts and minds of our neighbors all over. I'm asking you to be a badass relationship and coalition builder to foster greater community through trust and love. One relationship at time. Whatever it takes.

This is not about quid pro quo although you may be surprised and certainly amazed at what you get back from the work. This is about the one-on-one work you do in your intersections, into *your* public squares and how you inspire others to do the work in their own intersections. It's about putting long-range ripples in the pond and creating access to that pond for everyone.

This is relational work. While the coalition building looks macro from a 20,000-mile satellite view, the coalitions are built by zooming into one-on-one relationships and fostering environments for others to take up that work through their own flourishing one-on-one relationships. This is literally about us—you and me—walking the walk and talking the talk in our individual and collective intersections.

The concept of the work is simple, but the work is not. The work takes time and energy and your willingness to reach out to your neighbors, faith community members, civic club members—whatever friendships you have. Bring them together at your intersections to have the dialog, to foster friendships and understanding, and to encourage them to share with others and do the same.

Start with building a little coalition of your own by recruiting a couple other people (or more) to partner with you in leading the work. The work could start in your

neighborhood inviting neighbors into your home to meet, share some wine or food, and share a movie or TV or book discussion. Whatever media tool you're using forms the framework for the dialog. Some good meeting ideas are in the appendices or sources from the bibliography. You will learn together about whatever aspect of the Beloved Community you're taking on, but the real learning at the heart of the matter will come in the relationships that you build as you come to *know and understand each other*. It becomes personal and when it becomes *personal*, hearts and minds grow and change!

White people, especially now, have a responsibility to own our white privilege and the myth of White-Anglo-Saxon-American Exceptionalism. This is the DNA-level cultural, political, and humanitarian issue that drives the whole national conversation on race. Especially the continuing brutality and murders of people of color by law enforcement—again and again—and the disproportionate number of COVID-19 novel coronavirus victims of color!

Stop and conjure a mental image, your recollection, of the insurrection riot and attack on the US Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Are you with me?

Remember the responses to the attack from all over the world?

Over and over and over again, I heard leaders, citizens, and ex-pats everywhere say, “This is *not* who we are.”

This is not who we are?

Thursday morning, January 7, 2021, I was driving to work and listening to NPR—coverage from the BBC on the death and destruction of the day before. It was incredibly

eye-opening and heart-wrenching to hear *unvarnished non-American* coverage. And I can't even remember whose quote they used, but it came out again in a soundbite.

"This is not who we are."

It jumped out of the speaker at me.

In the ensuing days, I heard it repeatedly in soundbite after soundbite across news sites, electronic media, social media.

"This is not who we are."

As an American, it made me angry every time.

This is *exactly* who we are!

This is who we have always been.

And we've always been in denial about it.

A few days later, Ibrahim X. Kendi wrote in *The Atlantic*:

To say that the attack on the U.S. Capitol is not who we are is to say that this is not part of us, not part of our politics, not part of our history. And to say that this is not part of America, American politics, and American history is a bald-faced denial. But the denial is normal. In the aftermath of catastrophes, when have Americans commonly admitted who we are? The heartbeat of America is denial.

It is historic, this denial. Every American generation denies. *America is establishing the freest democracy in the world*, said the white people who secured their freedom during the 1770s and '80s. *America is the greatest democracy on Earth*, said the property owners voting in the early 19th century. *America is the beacon of democracy in world history*, said the men who voted before the 1920s. *America is the leading democracy in the world*, said the non-incarcerated people who have voted throughout U.S. history in almost every state. *America is the utmost democracy on the face of the Earth*, said the primarily older and better-off and able-bodied people who are the likeliest to vote in the 21st century. *America is the best democracy around*, said the American people when it was harder for Black and Native and Latino people to vote in the 2020 election.

At every point in the history of American tyranny, the honest recorders heard the sounds of denial. Today is no different.

Americans remember and accept the enfranchising of citizens and peaceful transfers of power as their history, while forgetting and denying the coup plots, the attempted coups, and the successful coups. White terror is as American as the Stars and Stripes. But when this is denied, it is no wonder that the events at the Capitol are read as shocking and un-American.⁴⁷

Read the whole article. Kendi is right on!

This is who we've always been!

January 6, 2021 isn't our darkest moment. We cannot dismiss it as such. It is a *big dark moment*, to be sure. But it's truly and shamefully *one of many* big dark moments in a long history of nauseating national big dark moments of violent white supremacy.

I'm from Tulsa, Oklahoma which is home to one of the biggest race riots and massacres in our country's history. I currently live in New Jersey adjacent to Newark, another location of another violent race riot. That's only two.

Just Google the topic.

It goes back to the revolution and even before in US history.

We must own this.

Seriously now, can you imagine? Can you just imagine if this insurrection of death and destruction that stormed the US Capitol in view of the entire world were made up of black people or brown people?

I'm just going to leave that right there to sink in—especially if you are white. I hope you can imagine that.

We cannot be bystanders. It's on us—to take action, to do something about it. To advocate, ally, and act on it. To see the world through this lens simply by owning the

⁴⁷ Ibrahim X. Kendi, "Denial is the Heartbeat of America," *Atlantic*, January 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/denial-heartbeat-america/617631/>.

inequity of white privilege and the systemic racism at the root—in the DNA—of our American culture.

Speak out. Take action. Forge relationships. In your neighborhood. Build coalitions and inspire others in your coalitions to do likewise with their own coalitions.

The ripples just keep on going!

Take the active leadership role of fostering trust and love in spreading awareness of the systemic racism that forms the very bedrock of our country and now more than ever threatens to destroy it. There's no better place to start than forming one-on-one relationships with people you know and recruiting their voices, their hearts, minds, and souls into the relationship. Build Beloved Community! Encourage *them* to build Beloved Community and pay it forward to encourage *their friends* to build Beloved Community in *their* own contexts, in *their* intersections, in *their* public squares.

Silence is complicity.

Don't be a bystander.

Be a badass!

Addressing Bias

I stumbled into an amazing understanding of conscious and sub-conscious bias, biases that we all have, through Father Richard Rohr's Daily Devotional blog and email in my inbox on March 1, 2021. He summarizes some definitions from a self-published Brian McClaren eBook. As I'm working out the templates for this project, it occurs to me that the systemic racism and bigotry in the DNA of the United States' culture is rooted and perpetuated out of the fear and biases that drive each person, all of us, including the

leaders throughout our history from all aspects of culture—from public policymaking to how people interact every day. Quoting from Brian McClaren, Fr. Rohr offers this:

People can't see what they can't see. Their biases get in the way, surrounding them like a high wall, trapping them in ignorance, deception, and illusion. No amount of reasoning and argument will get through to them, unless we first learn how to break down the walls of bias...

Confirmation Bias: We judge new ideas based on the ease with which they fit in with and confirm the only standard we have: old ideas, old information, and trusted authorities. As a result, our framing story, belief system, or paradigm excludes whatever doesn't fit.

Complexity Bias: Our brains prefer a simple falsehood to a complex truth.

Community Bias: It's almost impossible to see what our community doesn't, can't, or won't see.

Complementarity Bias: If you are hostile to my ideas, I'll be hostile to yours. If you are curious and respectful toward my ideas, I'll respond in kind.

Competency Bias: We don't know how much (or little) we know because we don't know how much (or little) others know. In other words, incompetent people assume that most other people are about as incompetent as they are. As a result, they underestimate their [own] incompetence, and consider themselves at least of average competence.

Consciousness Bias: Some things simply can't be seen from where I am right now. But if I keep growing, maturing, and developing, someday I will be able to see what is now inaccessible to me.

Comfort or Complacency Bias: I prefer not to have my comfort disturbed.

Conservative/Liberal Bias: I lean toward nurturing fairness and kindness, or towards strictly enforcing purity, loyalty, liberty, and authority, as an expression of my political identity.

Confidence Bias: I am attracted to confidence, even if it is false. I often prefer the bold lie to the hesitant truth.

Catastrophe or Normalcy Bias: I remember dramatic catastrophes but don't notice gradual decline (or improvement).

Contact Bias: When I don't have intense and sustained personal contact with "the other," my prejudices and false assumptions go unchallenged.

Cash Bias: It's hard for me to see something when my way of making a living requires me not to see it.

Conspiracy Bias: Under stress or shame, our brains are attracted to stories that relieve us, exonerate us, or portray us as innocent victims of malicious conspirators.⁴⁸

If you're so inclined, this could even be framed as interfaith spiritual practice! No matter your definition of the Supreme, every major faith tradition includes an understanding of community—the collective connectedness—of the common good.

Relationships.

Personal relationships.

Forging coalitions through one-on-one relationships nurtured in dialog and greater understanding may be the best way to “see what we cannot see” to break-throughs addressing these biases. Greater understanding helps forge greater love and respect individually and in community. The better we know and understand our neighbor, the better we can foster beloved community for the common good of all, at all levels of our culture.

Microaggression

Understanding, addressing, and being sensitive to microaggression is helpful in fostering safe environments for doing Beloved Community one-on-one at every level. Once I learned to identify microaggression and break it down, I learned to see something

⁴⁸ Fr. Richard Rohr, “Recognizing our Biases,” from *Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations* (blog), quoting Brian McClaren's eBook *Why Don't They Get It? Overcoming Bias in Others (and Yourself)*, March 1, 2021, <https://cac.org/recognizing-our-biases-2021-03-01/>.

I did not see. Just reflecting on my life experience, I suspect that microaggression is so pervasive, systemic, normalized—literally so *de rigueur*—that it may be as important as the bias barrier to building Beloved Community.

Addressing microaggression can also be framed as interfaith spiritual practice! Doing Beloved Community—building community for the common good rests on a foundation of understanding how we interact with each other at a micro-level, one-on-one, as we cultivate trust in our personal relationships.

I interviewed Michelle, a Licensed Professional Counselor who operates a solo practice. I am grateful for her willingness to share not only her expertise but to share her vulnerability in these personal stories. I simply asked her to help me better understand microaggression and she asked if she could anonymously write a response. This is it.

Let's begin:

Microaggression is a comment or action that negatively targets a marginalized group of people. It can be intentional or accidental, and it is a form of discrimination. People who engage in microaggressions often mean no harm, but over time, it can weigh on those who are constantly on the receiving end. I am writing my personal experience on microaggression with the intent to shed light on a commonplace discriminatory act that many people of color and other marginalized groups face on a regular, at times, daily basis. So, “what is a microaggression?”, you may ask. Here's my story.

It is important to note that I am a first-generation Latina whose parents came to the United States in the early 1980s from Peru, South America. Both of my parents who are Peruvian come from different racial backgrounds (my mother has European ancestry, and my father has Asian and Native Indian ancestry), with that being said my siblings and I do not “look a particular race or ethnicity.” This in itself can be confusing to others, and I quickly learned at a young age about this “need” to put people in a “designated box.” I grew up learning that there are different shades of skin color, different eye shapes, different hair textures, etc.; but unfortunately, I observed that depending on the combination of physical features one can be treated quite differently. Here are some of real-life examples that I grew up hearing since I was in grade school and throughout by adulthood:

1. “Wow, you speak very good English.”

- a. My actual response, “Well, of course, I was born here.” This comment made me more conscious about my speech and nervous whether or not my slight accent could be heard. I am almost certain that this is one of the reasons I absolutely hate public speaking to this day. It is as if I want to avoid the judgement from others.
2. “You can’t be Hispanic, you have *chinky* eyes.”
 - a. My internal thought, “Chinky – that’s incredibly rude?”
 - b. My actual response, “I have almond shaped eyes, and fun fact there was huge wave of Chinese and Japanese immigrants who set new roots in Peru.”
 - c. An alternate response, “Yes, I have Asian ancestry, but I identify as Peruvian-American and I’m a Latina.”
3. “Your children are light-skinned and have light eyes; you must be happy.”
 - a. My actual response, “I am happy my beautiful daughters are healthy.”
 - b. My internal thought, “So, if they were darker skinned or had my dark brown eyes, they would not be viewed as worthy?”
4. In high school, during a competitive interview process for some type of scholarship; I observed that my Caucasian female peers were getting more time with the panel of interviewers. I did my best to not let this get in the way of my focus and attention. However, I remember when it was turn, I noticed that their quality of questions was very simplistic, there was limited eye contact, and honestly, I felt like I was rushed off the stage. There was almost a part of me that wanted to ask how come they spent more time with the other young ladies; however, I did not want to be perceived as paranoid, rude, or trying to start any trouble. Later that day, two Caucasian female students got the scholarship. I just remember being incredibly upset because I knew I met (actually surpassed) their academic and community service requirements, but I knew that those students had more leverage given their parents’ influence with the community and generations of financial influence to the school. For the first time, I saw the power of privilege—and that my merits alone would not be enough. It was not only soul-crushing, but also it was a harsh reminder of the need to continue to work harder. It’s like I can never take a break because I have to constantly catch up. I remember another friend of mine, who identified as Filipino-American, consoled me that afternoon and felt the exact same way. What is sad about this whole experience is the fact that at my young age I already felt the differences in treatment whether that treatment towards me was intentional or unintentional.
5. I remember asking my mother about one of her early experiences in the United States. I can tell from her body language that she became uncomfortable and annoyed. She shared that when she arrived in New

York it was winter, and she was incredibly cold. All she wanted to do was to purchase a hot chocolate from a food truck. It is important to note that she was the valedictorian of her high school and took English classes all throughout high school. My mother felt confident in placing her order. However, she mispronounced the word, *chocolate*. The attendant laughed at her and corrected her pronunciation. My mother simply walked away with no hot chocolate. That was the last time I ever asked her about her immigration experience. I'm sure the attendant was trying "to be funny," but what he did to my mother was humiliating.

6. I was at a training with some of my bilingual colleagues; and during my break, my colleagues and I would speak in Spanish as we talked about our families and just simply caught up with each other. Then we saw two White female therapists looking at us with disdain, and we all knew that there was 'an issue' with us speaking in Spanish. One of my colleagues was brave enough to ask them what the problem is. Of course, they looked away and said nothing. Needless to say, I was surprised that this even happened amongst fellow colleagues.
7. "How come you don't dress like a typical Latina?"
 - a. My internal thought, "Seriously, what does a typical Latina even look like?"
 - b. My usual response, "We all have different styles, there is not just 'one look.'"

These are just a few microaggressions that stand out for me, and I am sure I missed a lot more. These experiences are unfortunately very common for many people of color and of different marginalized groups. What I do hope that the audience take notice is the immediate emotion that comes up when hearing these examples. I do hope that the emotions evoked are shame, disappointment, anger, sadness, disbelief to just name a few. As mentioned before, over these microaggressions do build and can create a narrative that can have a negative impact on how one views themselves or how to perceive others that do not look or sound like you. It is important to note that even there are microaggressions that occur within marginalized communities, and this also needs to take a closer examination.

I am fortunate and proud to say that my parents did a fantastic job in raising us three kids despite having limited financial resources and no extended family support in the US. They made sure that we developed strong work ethics and most importantly that we knew our worth. My parents helped create the idea that we can do anything, but we need to want it and work hard at it. There would be no handouts, no connections to colleges or jobs, or no worry about paying for college in our situation. We were very well aware of this limited access, but my parents made sure that we stayed the course and met our goals. However, growing up with these microaggressions can be soul-crushing, can weaken a fighting spirit,

and can cause serious self-doubt. I am just fortunate that I had protective factors such as family who have great pride in their culture, parents who took care of our emotional well-being and surrounded us with people who look like us, friends who come from different walks of life, and a loving family. In college and graduate school, I sought peers who come from different cultural and racial backgrounds, as a visual reminder that I belong and can succeed here. Representation matters and should not be undermined. Without these protective factors, I wonder how much of these microaggressions would have stymied my success.

My tips on how to stop yourself from making microaggressions:

1. Read articles/books on microaggressions
2. Be mindful on what and how you say things
3. Read people's body language and ask if you what you said was offensive or hurtful
4. Be open to constructive feedback. The minute you start defending or justifying your hurtful statement – you lost your audience
5. Allow for corrective experiences to happen.
6. Be humble. Mistakes happen, just be open to learning and how to contribute to the healing process
7. Observe and question your behaviors when you are in a setting that is not culturally or racially like yours. What do you notice? What do you feel? Explore your responses.⁴⁹

I am grateful for Michelle's thoughts and her stories which help directly shape the Beloved Community meetings in this project.

See No Stranger (Living into It)

Doing Beloved Community through coalitions developed one relationship at a time is the very foundation of this project work. Valarie Kaur does an amazing job of fleshing out the idea of human relationships in Beloved Community as well as any modern prophet I have seen. In her memoir *See No Stranger*, Ms. Kaur shares her deeply personal family history in the Sikh tradition where “see no stranger” is more than a

⁴⁹ Michelle, interview by author, Madison, New Jersey, March 15, 2021.

mantra. It is a *way of life*, like the Beloved Community. In short “see no stranger” is *the practice* for life-giving beloved community. Here are just some of her thoughts:

See no stranger has become a practice that defines my relationships... Seeing no stranger begins in wonder. It is to look upon the face of anyone and choose to say: *You are a part of me I do not yet know*. Wonder is the wellspring for love. Who we wonder about determines whose stories we hear and whose joy and pain we share. Those we grieve with, those we sit with and weep with, are ultimately those we organize with and advocate for. When a critical mass of people come together to *wonder* about one another, *grieve* with one another, and *fight* with and for one another, we begin to build the solidarity needed for collective liberation and transformation—a solidarity rooted in love...

Out in the world, I notice the unconscious biases that arise in me when I look at faces on the street or in the news. To practice seeing each of them as a sister or brother or family member, I say in my mind: *You are a part of me I do not yet know*. Through conscious repetition, I am practicing orienting to the world with wonder and preparing myself for the possibility of connection. (Sometimes I do this with animals and the earth, too!) It opens me up to pay attention to their story. When their story is painful, I make excuses to turn back—“It’s too overwhelming” or “It’s not my place”—but I hold the compass and remember that all I need to do is be present to their pain and find a way to grieve with them. If I can sit with their pain, I begin to ask:

What do they need? Listening to more stories, learning about a community’s history, or showing up to vigils or marches or memorials gives me information for how to fight for them. I seek out organizations that are already fighting for them and offer my voice or time or money or labor to assist them. When I worry that I’m not enough, I ask myself: *What is my sword and shield? How will I fight? What will I risk?* When I get overwhelmed, I ask: *What is my role in this moment?* I remember that I only have to shine my light in my corner of sky.⁵⁰

“Shine my light in my corner of the sky.”

That’s it! *Doing Beloved Community*.

⁵⁰ Valarie Kaur, *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love* (New York: One World, 2020), 310, 311–312.

How do you? How do I? *How do we* shine our lights into our corners of the sky and build relationships with everyone in our corners of the sky to do the same in their corners of the sky?

Doing Beloved Community.

That's the sum-total of this project.

Doing Beloved Community

Beloved Community work is risky.

We are not here to be *bystanders*. We are here to shine our lights into our corners of the sky. We are here to be *badasses*—build coalitions, relationships, and teach our coalitions how to do beloved community by *doing beloved community*.

The appendices of this project contain tools and suggested outlines for forging beloved community coalitions and relationships at literally all levels, one relationship at a time. All of these ideas can be implemented at any level from small house-hold gatherings to club meetings and/or larger community meetings. All the appendix choices are good suggestions, but only suggestions. They are all supported with excellent discussion resources developed by advocacy organizations like the Campaign for Youth Justice, political action groups, churches—even from our Beloved Community Conversations in Madison, New Jersey. All were created to facilitate learning and relationship-building in civic group meetings, classrooms, communities of faith, neighborhoods—honestly, they work at all levels. Your local neighborhood community issues will guide the development of your own conversations and resources!

Expect Resistance—Like Traffic

When doing Beloved Community, pushback is a *way of life*—

And it comes in communities of all sizes, colors, privileges, educational levels, and socio-economic classes. No doubt, you remember the violent pushback during the Civil Rights Movement. The echoes resonate today. I'm sure you've witnessed the pushback and the backlash just from Black Lives Matter protests in the likes of Washington D.C., Portland, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Louisville, or Ferguson. Suburbs, rural farming communities, boroughs, villages, towns, and cities. It doesn't matter!

Turns out, it's a way of life.

Don't be surprised.

We must be willing to dialog with all voices in the conversation. It's how we come to love and understand each other. We have to create safe environments and open doors to include opposing dialog. It's how hearts and minds change—when the relationship becomes *personal*.

In the suburban New Jersey town of Madison, the borough council developed and approved a Welcoming Community resolution to make Madison a more welcoming place to live and work for people of color, immigrants, and undocumented residents. It was a response to local action across the country creating “Sanctuary Cities” inviting undocumented people who have migrated to their areas.

There was severe pushback from a small but very vocal group of conservative people who were more supportive of immigration policies like building a wall on the southern border of the United States. Our church supported the mayor's forum with this opposition group providing a neutral and safe space to be heard on this issue. The mayor, borough council members, and borough legal representation addressed the concerns and fears of this citizens group which were mostly focused on concerns that non-tax paying

people would draw outsized public benefits and occupy local affordable housing due to relaxed ICE enforcement efforts.

Resistance happens.

I received anonymous notes from congregation members the first time I did a same-sex marriage in our church in Oklahoma. Every preacher gets whispered “people are saying” negative feedback on sermons or blog posts that touch nerves, or challenge us, or call us out on our politics, our beliefs, our privilege, or our wealth. Pushback is a way of life if you’re willing to take the risks and some of those sermons and blog posts are in the appendices to encourage you to take those risks. And when you do—you *will* get pushback.

Be strong and let your heart take courage!

When a Madison civic club booked a “Meet the Muslims Next Door” speaker for one of their regular club meetings, the program chair received an anonymous post card that said simply “No Muslims at our meetings!” Really!

I was outraged and offended, and I expressed my outrage to my friend, Rev. Craig Dunn, the pastor of the primarily Black congregation at First Baptist in Madison. He laughed and said, “Hey man, that’s just your white privilege talking. I get that kinda stuff all the time. All. The. Time. *It just is.* To me, it’s just like traffic.”

It is just like traffic...

And doing Beloved Community is *rush hour*.

Tools for *Doing Beloved Community*

There are some basic tools in the appendices to help you do Beloved Community. Your community is unique so you will obviously discover a need to model your own

tools. Customize your approach to your community intersections. What issues are top of mind in your neighborhood? In your town? In your faith community? In your state?

These tools are just some ideas curated from our experiences here in suburban New Jersey and they will be helpful as your experiences and community issues will clearly be different.

The Kotter Eight

The Kotter Eight change management model is the gold-standard, yet obviously I believe the most critical element of it is step 2: Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition.⁵¹ This is a foundational starting point for the entire project. I include it here just for your convenience. The Kotter group is a key resource for change management at any level of organizational and community management.

Conversation Protocols

Another key element in Beloved Community work means holding our personal agendas loosely and advocating gently by creating safe spaces for the work in one-on-one conversations and large gatherings. Active listening and thoughtful conversation are personal at every level. Fostering trust in this way assures all people that we're in a space that's open and we're present to listen and learn about each other without judgement. It opens our hearts and minds to viewpoints and perspectives other than our own. It provides a window into the heart of our neighbors!

Simply, how we present and talk to each other changes the whole scope of the work. Guiding the conversation by balancing advocacy and inquiry is a key learning skill

⁵¹ "The 8-step Process for Leading Change," Kotter, Inc., Accessed January 29, 2021, <https://www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>.

from *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* in organizational change management that works at very personal levels. It teaches us how to listen, how to learn, and how to share. There are protocols for balancing advocacy and inquiry in the appendix. These conversational norms help create trust, shared values, and safe spaces.⁵²

Video/Movie and Book Study Groups

Video/Movie discussion groups and book groups are great ways to learn and build relationships in community. Of course, learning together is a wonderful gateway to relationship building. Simply gathering around shared interest opens pathways to understanding and offers windows into the personalities and motivations of the individuals. Personal sharing and story-telling exchanges from lived experiences and perspectives nearly always develops trust and draws people closer. The more intimate and personal the stories, deeper trust is established, and the deeper our relationships grow. When the relationship becomes personal, the issues become personal. Activism becomes personal.

The Madison Area Call to Action (MACTA) political action group was born out of the Pantsuit Nation movement in the post-2016 presidential election cycle. In Madison, New Jersey, a shocked and awakened community began organizing mostly around advocacy for women's rights and continues to meet today. At some point, they chose the *Waking Up White* book as a very popular and successful discussion group to learn together, to build community, and to deepen relationships.

Beloved Community Meetings

⁵² Peter M. Senge et al, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, (New York: Currency, 1994) 259.

This probably forms the heart of the Doing Beloved Community project. I mentioned getting recruited by my friends Rev. Craig Dunn, and Sister Rory Moynihan to join in leading a series of these large Beloved Community Conversations in Madison. We hosted a number of community conversations on race, privilege, entitlement, knowing our neighbors, and even “Meet the Muslims Next Door.” All of our events drew attendance from civic group leaders, faculty of the local universities, local government officials, the police department, and advocacy groups.

These Beloved Community meetings inspired action in the community like the Welcoming Community resolution from the council of the Borough of Madison. The local police began a series of “Coffee With a Cop” meetings. Our panel from the “Meet the Muslims Next Door” Ramadan Iftar meetings (there were two) organized a community of Ahmadiyya Muslims (a sect of Islam) who began meeting to worship for their regular Friday afternoon prayers hosted at the Presbyterian church. Our ministerial alliance began supporting and promoting a completely student-run annual Peace March through the campuses of The College of St. Elizabeth, Fairleigh-Dickenson University, and Drew University.

These ripples continue today!

The Beloved Community meetings are there to simply bring people together to learn and to build and grow relationships with neighbors—transforming and building community through personal one-on-one relationships. *Doing Beloved Community*.

Your meetings could just as easily be about supporting and building up the Asian community or the LGBTQIA community, for example. Customize them, mix, and match them, but build them! Create dialog and build relationships at the street level of your

intersections. Beloved Community meetings inspire participants to live into it in their roles and policy making at their intersections. The ripples grow.

Do Beloved Community!

But wait! Haven't COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns killed public gatherings all over the world? What do we do now? We pivot on this, too—

Doing Beloved Community—the Podcast

The COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has irrevocably changed our culture. All our public gatherings were forced to pivot. School children went to online learning in virtual classrooms. Churches were forced to develop online worship recorded in advance for YouTube or live on Facebook Live! Nobody commuted to offices for work anymore. Everything went virtual and online using tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Hangouts. Our entire culture shifted to virtual environments.

I come from a previous career of radio broadcasting as a rock & roll disc-jockey (when there were still *discs to play*), program director, and producer of terrestrial radio content. So, as I am in the final stages of completing this *Doing Beloved Community* project for my doctorate, I pivoted too. The idea of a podcast creation around Doing Beloved Community was born. I hope this encourages you to be creative in your content creations and portals to build community across available platforms.

As I'm writing, the podcast series isn't in production yet. The shape of this part of the project (echoes of the Beloved Community Meetings) is in the appendix along with a link to my Soundcloud account for the podcast series and my sermon archive.

Public Prayers and Remarks, Blog Spaces or Social Media, and Sermons

All these examples are included here to encourage you to take up doing Beloved Community across any available platform you can find. Get active in your community! COVID-19 has redefined what Beloved Community looks like!

Take risks, be strong, and let your heart take courage!

Not an introvert, I'm a presbyterian minister and I actually enjoy being involved in the larger community beyond the walls of the church. I think vibrant and relevant faith communities encourage members to live their traditions out into the world, the neighborhood, the intersections of life that bring us together.

Doing church and faith community isn't just a weekend thing in a sanctuary or temple or mosque. Not anymore. I believe that being a person of faith no matter your tradition is a *24/7 thing*. We carry our faith traditions with us—it's who we are. We have a responsibility to do Beloved Community, to do life wherever we are however we can.

Similarly, even if you're not a clergy person or connected to any faith tradition, I hope this rings true for you. For the common good of all peoples, our neighbors, our communities, our intersections—

Political differences soften when relationships become personal.

Biases, intolerance, and racism break down when relationships become personal. People begin to really see what they cannot see—in the hearts of their neighbors—in their commonalities, shared experiences, wants, and deepest desires—

When relationships become personal.

People live into it when relationships become personal.

We are not here to be *bystanders*.

We are here *to shine our lights into our corners of the sky*.

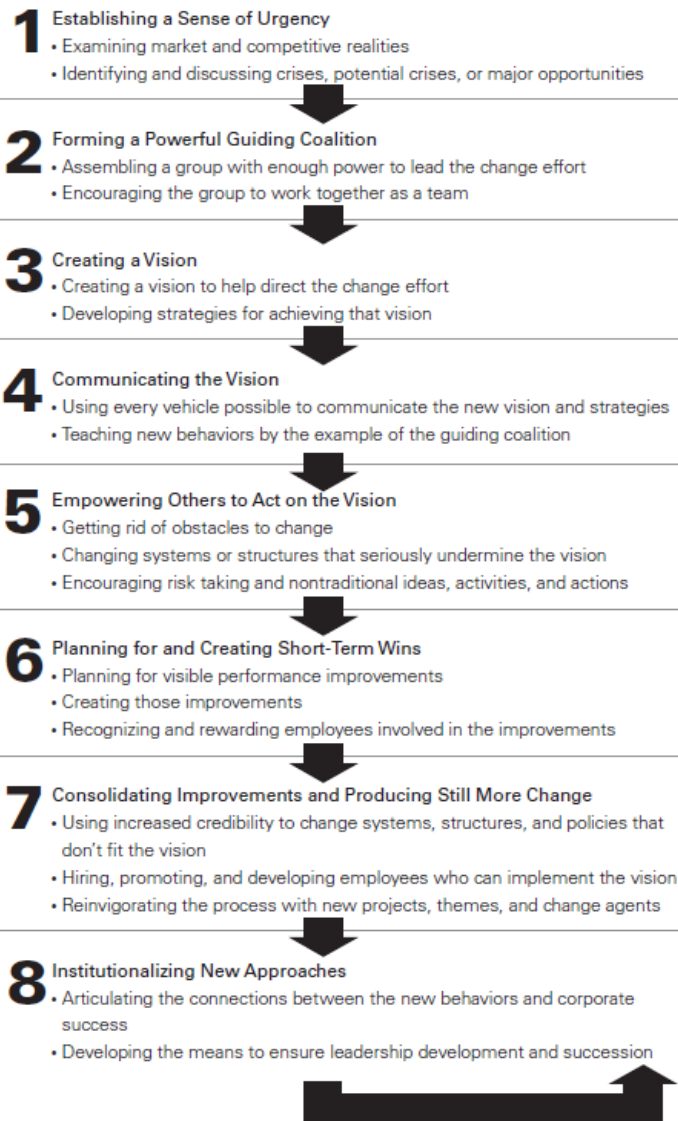
We are here to be *badasses*—

Doing Beloved Community.

Appendix 1 — The Kotter Eight

The Kotter Eight⁵³

EIGHT STEPS TO TRANSFORMING YOUR ORGANIZATION



⁵³ “The 8-step Process for Leading Change,” Kotter, Inc., Accessed January 29, 2021, <https://www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/>.

Appendix 2 — Conversation Protocols
From *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*⁵⁴

Appendix 2a — 1. PROTOCOLS FOR IMPROVED ADVOCACY

Make your thinking process visible (walk up the ladder of inference slowly).

What to do	What to say
State your assumptions, and describe the data that led to them.	<i>“Here’s what I think, and here’s how I got there.”</i>
Explain your assumptions.	<i>“I assumed that ...”</i>
Make your reasoning explicit.	<i>“I came to this conclusion because ...”</i>
Explain the context of your point of view: who will be affected by what you propose, how they will be affected, and why.	
Give examples of what you propose, even if they’re hypothetical or metaphorical.	<i>“To get a clear picture of what I’m talking about, imagine that you’re the customer who will be affected ...”</i>
As you speak, try to picture the other people’s perspectives on what you are saying.	
<i>Publicly test your conclusions and assumptions.</i>	

What to do	What to say
Encourage others to explore your model, your assumptions, and your data.	<i>“What do you think about what I just said?” or “Do you see any flaws in my reasoning?” or “What can you add?”</i>
Refrain from defensiveness when your ideas are questioned. If you’re advocating something worthwhile, then it will only get stronger by being tested.	
Reveal where you are least clear in your thinking. Rather than making you vulnerable, it defuses the force of advocates who are opposed to you, and invites improvement.	<i>“Here’s one aspect which you might help me think through ...”</i>
Even when advocating: listen, stay open, and encourage others to provide different views.	<i>“Do you see it differently?”</i>

⁵⁴ Peter M. Senge et al, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1994)
259.

Appendix 2b — 2. PROTOCOLS FOR IMPROVED INQUIRY

Ask others to make their thinking process visible.

What to do	What to say
Gently walk others down the ladder of inference and find out what data they are operating from.	<p><i>“What leads you to conclude that?”</i></p> <p><i>“What data do you have for that?”</i></p> <p><i>“What causes you to say that?”</i></p>
Use unaggressive language, particularly with people who are not familiar with these skills. Ask in a way which does not provoke defensiveness or “lead the witness.”	<p><i>Instead of “What do you mean?” or “What’s your proof?” say, “Can you help me understand your thinking here?”</i></p>
Draw out their reasoning. Find out as much as you can about why they are saying what they’re saying.	<p><i>“What is the significance of that?”</i></p> <p><i>“How does this relate to your other concerns?”</i> <i>“Where does your reasoning go next?”</i></p>
Explain your reasons for inquiring, and how your inquiry relates to your own concerns, hopes, and needs.	<p><i>“I’m asking you about your assumptions here because ...”</i></p>
<i>Compare your assumptions to theirs.</i>	

What to do	What to say
Test what they say by asking for broader contexts, or for examples.	<p><i>“How would your proposal affect ...?”</i></p> <p><i>“Is this similar to ...?”</i></p> <p><i>“Can you describe a typical example ...?”</i></p>
Check your understanding of what they have said.	<p><i>“Am I correct that you’re saying ...?”</i></p>
Listen for the new understanding that may emerge. Don’t concentrate on preparing to destroy the other person’s argument or promote your own agenda.	

Appendix 2c — 3. PROTOCOLS FOR FACING A POINT OF VIEW WITH WHICH YOU DISAGREE

What to do	What to say
Again, inquire about what has led the person to that view.	<i>“How did you arrive at this view?”</i> <i>“Are you taking into account data that I have not considered?”</i>
Make sure you truly understand the view.	<i>“If I understand you correctly, you’re saying that ...”</i>
Explore, listen, and offer your own views in an open way.	<i>Have you considered ...”</i>
Listen for the larger meaning that may come out of honest, open sharing of alternative mental models.	
Use your left-hand column as a resource.	<i>“When you say such-and-such, I worry that it means ...”</i>
Raise your concerns and state what is leading you to have them.	<i>“I have a hard time seeing that, because of this reasoning ...”</i>

Appendix 2d — 4. PROTOCOLS FOR WHEN YOU'RE AT AN IMPASSE

What to do	What to say
Embrace the impasse, and tease apart the current thinking. (You may discover that focusing on “data” brings you all down the ladder of inference.)	<i>“What do we know for a fact?”</i> <i>“What do we sense is true, but have no data for yet?”</i>
Look for information which will help people move forward.	<i>“What don’t we know?”</i> <i>“What is unknowable?”</i>
Ask if there is any way you might together design an experiment or inquiry which could provide new information.	<i>“What do we agree upon, and what do we disagree on?”</i>
Listen to ideas as if for the first time.	
Consider each person’s mental model as a piece of a larger puzzle.	<i>“Are we starting from two very different sets of assumptions here? Where do they come from?”</i>
Ask what data or logic might change their views.	<i>“What, then, would have to happen before you would consider the alternative?”</i>
Ask for the group’s help in redesigning the situation.	<i>“It feels like we’re getting into an impasse and I’m afraid we might walk away without any better understanding. Have you got any ideas that will help us clarify our thinking?”</i>
Don’t let conversation stop with an “agreement to disagree.”	<i>“I don’t understand the assumptions underlying our disagreement.”</i>
Avoid building your “case” when someone else is speaking from a different point of view.	

Appendix 3 — Video/Movie Discussions

Appendix 3a — Video/Movie Discussions

Hello Privilege. It's Me, Chelsea. Chelsea Handler's documentary study on White Privilege. The goal of this meeting is not necessarily to critique Ms. Handler or the content of her documentary. Rather, its purpose is to spawn thoughtful conversation in community with our neighbors.

Define privilege.

Who does and doesn't have privilege in the community?

Why is privilege bestowed upon some but not others?

Can you think of specific examples of White Privilege? What are the origins of this privilege?

If you're a person with privilege, what can you do that someone without it cannot?

Conversely, if you're a person *without* privilege, what are you prevented from doing that a privileged person can do?

What are White Privilege-related limitations placed on persons of color?

Is there a price to be paid for White Privilege by white people?

Discuss your thoughts on the effect of White Privilege on public issues such as the media, healthcare, housing, economic status, and education.

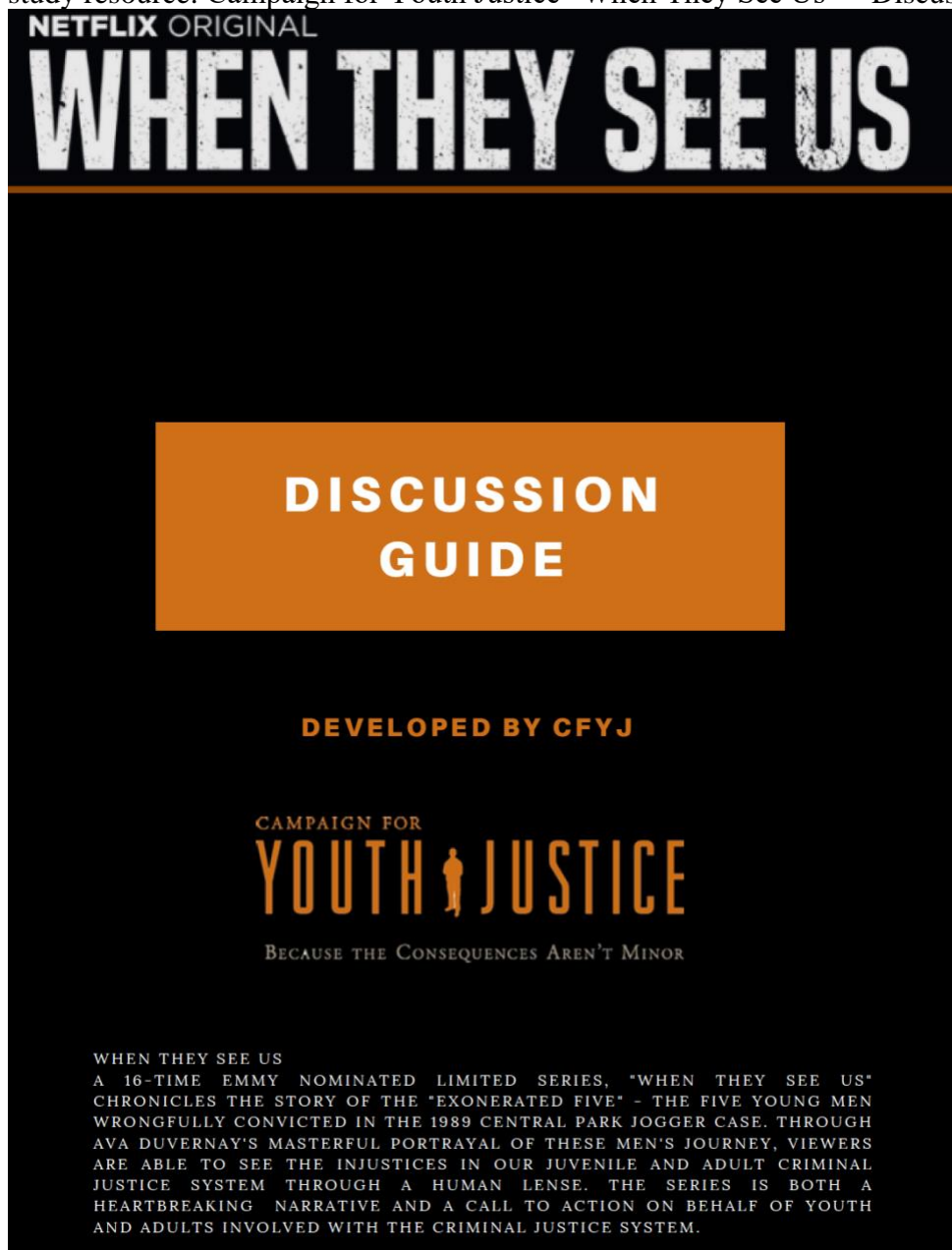
Discuss the effect of White Privilege on policing, jobs, drop-out rates, crime rates, addiction, and food security.

Why is it challenging for white people to think about privilege? And what can and should white people do about it?

If you're white, when did your whiteness first occur to you?

Appendix 3b — Video/Movie Discussions

When They See Us. A 4-part (1 hr. each) Netflix limited dramatic TV series—the case of the Central Park Five—five innocent Black youths arrested by the New York City Police Department, prosecuted, and convicted for aggravated assault and rape of a white woman, Trisha Meili, in Central Park in April 1989. Use with permission, recommended study resource: Campaign for Youth Justice “When They See Us” – Discussion Guide.⁵⁵



⁵⁵ "When They See Us – Discussion Guide," Campaign for Youth Justice, Last modified 2019, [http://cfyj.org/images/weeklylegislativeroundsups/When They See Us Full Discussion Guide 2.pdf](http://cfyj.org/images/weeklylegislativeroundsups/When_They_See_Us_Full_Discussion_Guide_2.pdf).



About the Campaign For Youth Justice

The Campaign for Youth Justice (CFYJ) is a national initiative dedicated to ending the prosecution, sentencing, and incarceration of youth under the age of 18 in the adult criminal justice system. The stories portrayed in this four part series happened 30 years ago, and led the United States to respond to youth crime in a brutal and extreme manner. Nearly every state in the nation changed its laws to make it easier to treat children as adults in the justice system. Ava DuVernay's series touches on many issues that the 76,000 youth prosecuted as adults each year face. This includes police interrogations, understanding miranda and protections against self-incrimination; conditions of confinement including placement far away from families, solitary confinement, and abuse; collateral consequences of an adult conviction and mandatory registration on sex offender registries; extreme sentences, innocence claims, and lost childhoods.

Every October, CFYJ celebrates Youth Justice Action Month (YJAM) to raise awareness and mobilize people against the treatment of youth in the criminal justice system. We have created a discussion guide for you to use in your community, college, church, or among friends and family to discuss the implications of such harsh penalties against our children. We invite you to use this guide to talk discuss the series, "When They See Us," and talk about ways you can help make change!

For more information about CFYJ:

Visit our website



www.cfyj.org

Follow us on social media



@youthjustice



Campaign For Youth Justice



@justiceforyouth



Campaign For Youth Justice

Get in touch



info@cfyj.org



202-558-3580



Quick Facts

The practice of prosecuting youth in adult court and incarcerating them in adult facilities is:

- **OVER-USED:** Every year, at least 76,000 youth are prosecuted in the adult criminal justice system solely because of their age and not the severity of their offense. In fifteen states and the District of Columbia, there is no minimum age for judicial transfer of certain offenses. On any given night in 2017, approximately 4,656 youth were in adult jails and prisons.
- **DISCRIMINATORY:** Although Black youth made up 14% of the overall youth population in 2016, they accounted for 35.5% of cases in juvenile court, and were 51.9% of those youth transferred to adult court by a juvenile court judges. In California, the state with the highest Latino population, Latino youth were direct filed at 3.3 times the rate of white youth. This number increased from 2.4 times more likely a decade ago. Tribal youth are 1.84 times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence.
- **HARMFUL:** To comply with the Prison Rape Elimination Act's Youthful Inmate Standard requirement to keep youth under age 18 sight and sound separated from adults, adult jail and prison administrators may place youth in solitary confinement where they are in their cells for 22-23 hours a day. Youth housed in adult jails are roughly five times more likely to commit suicide than youth in juvenile facilities. The Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Act has required all youth under the age of majority belong in youth-appropriate facilities pre-trial, not adult jails.
- **CONTRADICTED BY SCIENCE:** Research into adolescent brain development shows that youth are more likely than adults to be permanently traumatized by the harsh realities of the adult system. Youth are also more likely to respond positively to rehabilitation available in the juvenile system.
- **NOT POPULAR:** In a 2014 poll, 65% of voters agreed that juvenile offenders should be treated differently from adult offenders. In 2019, polling found that 75% Americans preferred rehabilitation as a response to youth crime, a perspective shared by law enforcement and victims as well.
- **A FAILED POLICY:** Research tells us that youth who are prosecuted in the adult system are 34% more likely to recidivate and with more violent offenses than those handled by the juvenile system. Youth sentenced as adults carry their criminal record their whole life, diminishing their chances to find jobs, access decent housing, obtain student loans, and go to college, join the military, or even vote.
- **CHANGING:** Since 2007, 39 states and Washington, DC, have enacted more than 100 pieces of legislation to remove youth from adult jails and prisons, limit the prosecution of youth in adult court, or revise sentencing laws. Comprehensive and age-appropriate approaches receive wide support across the political spectrum, including from conservative groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council, R Street Institute, and the James Madison Institute.

CAMPAIGN FOR

YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR



Episode 2 Discussion Guide

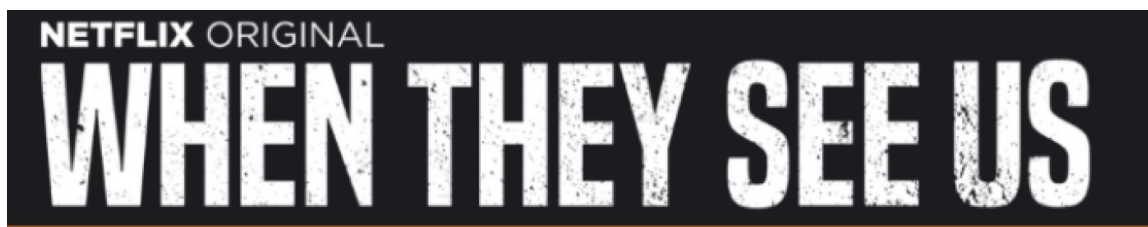
- In Episode 2, Kevin, Raymond, and Antron were held in a juvenile detention facility and Korey, the only 16 year old was held in an adult jail. Why was 16 thought to be an appropriate age to assign criminal responsibility? Should youth under eighteen be held in adult facilities during their trial?
- Antron and Yusef were able to post bail and stay in their homes during their trial while the other boys remained in jail. What does this say about the people we allow to be free versus those we keep imprisoned?
- How should prosecutor Linda Fairstein have balanced seeking justice for the victim with holding someone accountable? Were her actions appropriate?
- Several times, prosecutor Elizabeth Lederer expressed concern with the reliability and quality of the boys' testimony and evidence. How should she have properly addressed those concerns?
- How did this series impact your thinking on the power of prosecutors and law enforcement?
- How did this series impact your perspective on the role of the media in cases involving youth under 18?
- How should the media balance communicating relevant news to the public with printing identifiable information on youth who have not been convicted?
- How did race impact how the boys were treated by the prosecutors, police, and media?





Episode 3 Discussion Guide

- In Episode 3, Yusef's mother mentions that a 10 minute phone call with her son costs \$22. Should youth and families have to pay for phone calls?
- Upon release, the episode shows Kevin and Raymond registering as sex offenders and being informed that they must register every ninety days or risk being re-incarcerated. Should youth be required to register as a sex offender for the rest of their lives? How does this help or hinder rehabilitation and reintegration into society?
- What was the impact of Kevin, Ray, Yusef, Korey, and Antron's incarceration on their families?
- Re-entry can be difficult for individuals leaving incarceration due to a number of barriers related to having a felony conviction. What barriers did Kevin, Ray, Yusef, Korey, and Antron face upon release?



Episode 4 Discussion Guide

- Should any youth under the age of 18 be prosecuted as an adult?
- If yes, is it ever appropriate for that prosecution to be automatic or for a prosecutor to be the sole decision maker for whether the youth is prosecuted as an adult?
- Should youth under eighteen who have been convicted as adults be held in an adult prisons? Why or why not?
- At one point, Korey is held over 350 miles from his family's home in Harlem. Should youth or adults ever be held that far from their families? Are there more appropriate options?
- Should solitary confinement exist in prisons? As a punishment? For protection?
- Do you think there are other differences between an adult prison and youth prison? What do you think they are?
- Korey spent 16 years incarcerated, when his co-defendants did 4-5 years. What do you think about subjecting youth to decades in prison?
- What, if anything, does society owe to individuals who are proven to have been wrongfully convicted and incarcerated?

Appendix 3c — Video/Movie Discussions

I Am Not Your Negro. A film documentary finish to a book by James Baldwin.

Discussion questions courtesy of St. John's Episcopal Church in Boulder, Colorado.

Issues of Race Ministry, September 13, 2020.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

—James Baldwin

1. A white woman speaking in the 1960's on school integration said, "God actually curses all who integrate." How has (or does) Christianity promoted this belief? Was this belief part of the Christian faith you were taught?
2. In speaking of Medgar Evers' investigating the murder of Black people, James Baldwin said there is a thin line that separates a witness from an actor. That line is thin but real. What do you think he meant about that and what does it say about the "cost" of being a witness for racial justice today?
3. In a conversation with Malcom X, MLK said that acting in love doesn't mean you do nothing. One of the first principles of non-violence is to be the recipient of violence without retaliating in kind. Can you identify a time in your life when you followed this first principle? What prevents you from following it all the time? Who today is taking up MLK's message?
4. Baldwin said apathy and ignorance are the price we pay for segregation. He described the vast white majority as heedless, cruel, unthinking moral monsters, and that Black people are terrified at their apathy. Look at Rev 3:15-16; Matt 5:13; Matt 12:30 for a few examples of what scripture has to say about apathy. For what apathy in your life do you feel the most regret?
5. Baldwin said, "The Negro has never been as docile as white Americans wanted him to be." He also said, when you [a person of color] stand up and look the world in the face like you have a right to be here, you have attacked the entire Western power structure. Baldwin attributes this, in part, to the white person's "bottomless" emotional poverty in his or her private life. This poverty makes it hard to achieve any viable connections in public life, and Black people become the scapegoats. How do you respond to these statements? Can you find any truth in them?
6. As a child in Harlem, Baldwin was friends with a little blond white girl. He said she was safer walking through the streets at night without him than she was with him, so they were obliged to walk separately through the streets of "the land of the free and the home of the brave." He said Americans have yet to realize what a sinister thing this is and what it says about them. What do you think this says about white America?
7. One scene in the film depicts clip after clip of white people saying how sorry they are. The scene is followed by Baldwin's wry observation that complicity and immaturity are American values. How do you think we can move from saying we're sorry to actually living it?

8. Baldwin said of the entertainment industry that it presents a self-perpetuating fantasy of reality, and we are cruelly trapped between what we are and what we hope to be. If this is so, how do we break free from that trap?

9. Baldwin observed (in the 1960/70's) that the most segregated place in America is church on Sunday morning. A half-century later, has anything changed? To what do you/we cling that discourages change?

10. Baldwin said: The real estate lobby keeps me in the ghetto; the education system gives my children [cast-off books and buildings], and white people are trying to assure me of an American I've never seen. Look at the evidence! The state of this country's institutions says it hates Blacks. What systems do you feel called to work to change?

11. Baldwin: America's prosperity has cost the lives of millions, and the recipients of that prosperity can't endure prosperity's benefits, can't live without them, can't afford to know why their victims are revolting, and cannot imagine the price their victims have paid for this way of life. This is a formula for a nation in decline. Where/how/to what extent do you see this being played out today?

12. Baldwin: Change doesn't require numbers; it requires passion. The tragedy is that most of the people who say they care about it [racial injustice] do not care. What they care about is their safety and their profits. Think about your personal safety, your retirement account, your home value, etc. What would you be willing to give up for racial justice?

13. Baldwin: You cannot lynch me and keep me in ghettos without becoming something monstrous yourselves, and furthermore you give me a terrifying advantage. You never had to look at me, but I had to look at you and I know more about you than you know about me. How do we change this?

14. Baldwin: The only difference between the North and the South is the way they castrate you. Does this statement challenge the narrative you were taught about the North and South? Does it make you uncomfortable, and if so, why?

15. Baldwin: The future of the Negro in this country is precisely as bright or as dark as the future of this country. The future of the country depends on white people asking themselves the question: Why do I/we need the n*****? Can you venture an answer to this question?⁵⁶

⁵⁶ "Issues of Race Ministry 'I Am Not Your Negro' Discussion Questions," StJohnsBoulder.org. Last modified 2020. tinyurl.com/pnuxv5c7

Appendix 4 — Book Groups

Appendix 4a — Book Groups

Waking Up White, And Finding Myself In The Story Of Race.

By Debby Irving. Part memoir, part self-help, part wake-up and woke. Insightful.

Recommended study resource:

Waking Up White, And Finding Myself In The Story Of Race by Debby Irving: A Study Guide by Rev. T. Denise Anderson and Rev. Jan Edmiston former Co-Moderators (2016) of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Available via download from PC(USA) office of GA website. See link in footnote.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ T. Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston, *Waking Up White, And Finding Myself In The Story Of Race by Debby Irving: A Study Guide*, (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA), 2019). https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/waking_up_white_study_english.pdf

Appendix 4b — Book Groups***How To Be An Anti-Racist.***

By Ibram X. Kendi. A literal how-to book for individual and community transformation.

Recommended study resource:

Book Club Kit by Ibram X. Kendi downloadable from the link in the footnote.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Ibram X. Kendi, Book Club Kit, (Self-published, 2019).
<https://www.ibramxkendi.com/s/bookclubkitANTIRACIST.pdf>

Appendix 4c — Book Groups

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.

By Michelle Alexander. The textbook not just for what's wrong with the American judicial system, but the systemic racism that lives on through the grossly disproportionate systematic mass incarceration of Black and Brown people in the USA.

Recommended study resource:

The New Jim Crow Study Guide and Call to Action by Veterans of Hope. Available on Amazon at link in footnote.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Veterans of Hope, *The New Jim Crow Study Guide and Call to Action*, (Scotts Valley, California: CreateSpace, 2016). https://www.amazon.com/Crow-Study-Guide-Call-Action/dp/1535530243/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=new+jim+crow+study+guide+and+call+to+action&qid=1621267754&sr=8-1

Appendix 5 — Beloved Community Meetings

Appendix 5a — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 1 — Beloved Community Introduction—Meet Your Neighbors

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community and introduce the organizers of the conversation. Brief introductions should be shared by everyone if possible or break into small groups for conversation and sharing stories around the questions (be sure to collect notes from each group, if possible).

Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

How do we know our neighbors on the block? Next door? Across the street?

How and when do we meet and get to know our neighbors and their families?

Do we feel safe in our community?

Who feels like an “other” and how can we establish radical hospitality?

Can we name and unpack cultural misperceptions in our community?

How can we continue to gather to tell and hear our stories and experiences?

How does our community address equal access to public physical and mental health services, housing, and what resources are available?

What about food security in our community?

Do we have the proper tools and leaders to evaluate our community issues?

How do we understand the importance of telling our stories, listening to, and really seeing our neighbors, as an act of love for our community?

Regroup and if there’s time, have each group share key takeaways with the larger group.

Appendix 5b — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 2 — Meet the Town Council

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community and let the panel self-introduce. Ideally, the room is set with small groups around tables with 3X5 index cards to collect questions for the council members from the larger group.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Suggested questions to get the conversation going:

How does the council stay touch with the constituencies to better understand the needs, hopes, and dreams of our community?

Can we name and unpack cultural misperceptions in our community?

How does our community address equal access to public physical and mental health services, housing, and what resources are available?

What about food security in our community?

Do we have the proper tools and leaders to evaluate our community issues?

How do we understand the importance of telling our stories, listening to, and really seeing our neighbors, as an act of love for our community?

Allow time for some small group conversation and each table can write questions for the panel on a 3x5.

Regroup and select a few questions from the 3x5 cards

Appendix 5c — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 3 — Meet the Police

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community and let the panel self-introduce. Ideally, the room is set with small groups around round tables with 3X5 index cards to collect questions for police officials from the larger group.

Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Suggested questions to get the conversation going:

How would you describe the concept of policing specific to our community to someone who doesn’t live here?

How do our police stay touch with the constituencies to better understand the needs, hopes, and dreams of our community?

Can we name and unpack cultural misperceptions in our community?

Do we have the proper resources and leaders to evaluate our community issues?

What are our most pressing community safety issues?

What tools and community support do you need to best address these issues?

How do our police actively foster trust within the community?

How do we understand the importance of telling our stories,—listening to and really seeing our neighbors—as an act of love for our community?

Select a few questions from the 3x5 cards

Appendix 5d — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 4 — Meet the Chamber

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community and let the panel self-introduce. Ideally, the room is set with small groups around round tables with 3X5 index cards to collect questions for the chamber members from the larger group.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Suggested questions to get the conversation going:

How do businesses in our community stay in touch with the public to learn about and meet community expectations?

Can we name and unpack cultural misperceptions in our community?

How do we address community safety doing business in our community?

Do we have the proper tools and leaders to evaluate our community issues? What is needed?

How can we establish radical hospitality?

How can we continue to gather to tell and hear our stories and experiences?

What resources do the large and small business communities need to better understand and address larger community issues?

Select a few questions from the 3x5 cards

Appendix 5e — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 5 — Poverty: Food Security and Housing

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community and let meeting facilitators and/or panel experts self-introduce. Ideally, the room is set with small groups around round tables with 3X5 index cards to collect table feedback/questions for the larger group.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Suggested questions to get the conversation going:

On Food Security:

What statistics exist to give us perspective on the issue of food security in our community?

Discuss local food pantries and how they address the needs of their clients?

What meal programs exist for our neighborhoods?

On Housing:

How is our community addressing the issue of affordable housing?

What resources exist in the community to support equal access to affordable housing?

How do our zoning plans include revitalizing for affordable housing?

Small group conversations around storytelling will produce questions and even anecdotes to share with the larger group.

Regroup and share.

Appendix 5f — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 6 — Microaggression

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community and the definition of microaggression. Let meeting facilitators and/or panel experts self-introduce. It is essential to have a mental health counselor or expert as a facilitator to help guide the conversation. Ideally, the room is set with small groups around round tables with 3X5 index cards to collect table feedback or questions for the larger group.

Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

A microaggression is a comment or action that negatively targets a marginalized group of people. It can be intentional or accidental, and it is a form of discrimination. People who engage in microaggressions often mean no harm, but over time, it can weigh on those who are constantly on the receiving end.

This conversation may create moments of unrest or emotional discomfort. This is normal. You should know that you are in a safe space. It’s safe to be you and comfortable in your own skin here. Be comfortable in your discomfort because we all will be uncomfortable.

Some examples of microaggression to get the conversation going:

“Wow, you speak very good English.”

“You don’t sound like the typical [stereotype]”

Or “How come you don’t dress like the typical [stereotype]?”

“Your children are light-skinned and have light eyes; you must be happy.”

Describe a time when you were victimized by microaggression or outright racist treatment.

Appendix 5g — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 7 — Black Life in Our Town/Neighborhood

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community. Let meeting facilitators and/or panel experts self-introduce. Ideally, the room is set with small groups around round tables with 3X5 index cards to collect table feedback/questions for the larger group.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Suggested questions to get the conversation going:

Share your racial heritage and family traditions.

What kind of contact have you had with people from different racial backgrounds?

First memories of white people being treated differently than people of color?

First memories of people of color being treated differently than white people?

Recall specific incidents if you can. How did you feel?

How did important adults (e.g. family, teachers, your clergy) help you understand and interpret your experiences with racial groups different from your own?

What did they tell you about specific groups? Tell stories!

When did you first become aware that being born white in the United States came with certain assumptions and advantages?

Describe a time when you were victimized by microaggression or outright racist treatment.

Appendix 5h — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 8 — White Privilege

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community. Let meeting facilitators and/or panel experts self-introduce. Ideally, the room is set with small groups around round tables with 3X5 index cards to collect table feedback/questions for the larger group.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Suggested questions borrowed from *Waking Up White, And Finding Myself In The Story Of Race* by Debby Irving: *A Study Guide* by Rev. T. Denise Anderson and Rev. Jan Edmiston former Co-Moderators (2016) of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Available via download from PC(USA) office of GA website.⁶⁰

Share your racial heritage and family traditions.

What kind of contact have you had with people from different racial backgrounds?

First memories of white people being treated differently than people of color?

First memories of people of color being treated differently than white people?

Recall specific incidents if you can. How did you feel?

How did important adults (e.g. family, teachers, your clergy) help you understand and interpret your experiences with racial groups different from your own?

What did they tell you about specific groups? Tell stories!

When did you first become aware that being born white in the United States came with certain assumptions and advantages?

Can you think of a time when opportunity or advantage presented itself based on race?

⁶⁰ T. Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston, *Waking Up White, And Finding Myself In The Story Of Race* by Debby Irving: *A Study Guide*, (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA), 2019). https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/waking_up_white_study_english.pdf

Appendix 5i — Beloved Community Meetings

Meeting 9 — Meet the Muslims Next Door

This meeting is best conducted as a pre-sundown conversation connected with a pot-luck Ramadan Iftar (the fast-breaking meal at the end of a day in Ramadan).

Read the MLK definition of Beloved Community. Let meeting facilitators and/or panel experts self-introduce. Ideally, the room is set with small groups around round tables with 3X5 index cards to collect table feedback/questions for the larger group.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Suggested questions to get the conversation going:

What is Ramadan?

Who are the Muslims next door?

History, Structure, and Essential Tenets of True Islam

Muslim practices, pilgrimages, community, and family life

The hard question: How can we all best respond to the national environment of travel bans, hate, abuse, and violence?

How can we support you—to continue to bring down the fear and the volume of the conversation?

Appendix 6 — Doing Beloved Community Podcast

Soundcloud link: <https://soundcloud.com/revscottfoster>

Episode 1 — Doing Beloved Community Introduction—Meet Your Neighbors

Episode 2 — Doing Beloved Community—Meet the Town Council

Episode 3 — Doing Beloved Community—Meet the Police

Episode 4 — Doing Beloved Community—Meet the Chamber

Episode 5 — Doing Beloved Community—Poverty: Food Security and Housing

Episode 6 — Doing Beloved Community—Microaggression

Episode 7 — Doing Beloved Community—Black, Brown, Asian Life

Episode 8 — Doing Beloved Community—White Privilege

Episode 9 — Doing Beloved Community—Meet the Muslims Next Door

Appendix 7 — Public Prayers and Remarks

Appendix 7a — Community Town Hall Remarks Central Avenue School Affordable Housing January 22, 2020 Madison, NJ

My name is Scott Foster—I live at 235 Greenwood Avenue—just a few blocks from this proposed site near the Central Avenue School.

I am here tonight to speak in favor, and I applaud the Borough’s efforts to continue to provide yet another affordable housing option for those who work and want to live in Madison. Affordable housing in Madison lives into our promise as a welcoming community and our commitment to the common good of all people in the area.

Over the years, Madison residents have either capitalized, adjusted to, or have been gentrified out of their neighborhoods by soaring property values—teardowns and new construction. Young couples relocate from out of state or move out of Manhattan to take advantage of the easy commute to New York City. Their goals are to buy their first homes, to start their families, and to take advantage of our beautiful borough and our attractive schools.

There are so many reasons why Madison is ranked the #1 place to live in New Jersey. This town is a post-card. Who wouldn’t want to live in Madison? Just look at it! I love to say that Madison looks like a snow globe.

But not everyone has an equal shot at living here. All you have to do is pay attention to the people walking along Main Street. Talk to the check-out clerks at Stop and Shop. Talk to your waiter at 54 Main, or the person who makes your breakfast sandwich at Bagel Chateau. Talk to the person who drives you home in the shuttle from the service department at your car dealer.

Virtually none of these people live in Madison. They are not able to support their families in Madison. Some of them are working 2-3 jobs—and they can’t afford to live here. They earn their money here. They shop here. They are key players in our local economy, but they can’t afford to sleep here.

I am pastor of Presbyterian Church of Madison and I spoke recently at another scoping hearing for the tract of land near the MRC. Our Interfaith Ministerial Alliance and our church have both been approached by Drew, by Fairleigh Dickinson, and by The College of St. Elizabeth to help ease their student housing shortages. Please don’t forget how important the universities are to our common economic well-being and the contributions they make to this community.

I’m proud to live and work in Madison and I’m especially proud of our Borough’s efforts to make sure that everyone can work and live in Madison too. Thank you.

Appendix 7b — Community Prayer
March for Our Lives Community Send-off Rally
Borough Hall Steps, Madison, NJ
October 12, 2018

Holy One,

We come together with broken hearts. We are here again to offer our thoughts and prayers and flowers for the victims — and the families of the victims of violent crimes in our schools. In our country.

We ask you to comfort them as we lift their honor today.

Each flower.

Each life.

We honor their memories by saying “enough is enough” and “never again.” We offer our thoughts and prayers for our leaders to change the laws—to put controls in place on weapons and who may have them.

Thoughts and prayers are not enough.

Empower the voices of our students today and protect them in safety as they March For Our Lives — all over the country — as they March For Our Lives.

May all branches of our government hear these brave voices loudly and clearly.

Never Again, Holy one.

Hear our prayers...

Appendix 8a — Blog Spaces or Social Media

Nov. 10, 2016

Now What?

That's the text message on my phone at 7:15am Wednesday morning.

"Now what?"

Well...

Flashback: November 9, 1960. My birthday. 9:15am.

Part of my birth story has always been that I waited to see who the president-elect was before I made my debut. My dad was a TV news director at the time and I'm sure he'd been up all night with the rest of the country waiting to hear if it was Nixon or Kennedy. The election was close. People were freaking out!

The first Roman Catholic president! Four years later, people were freaking out again when the hawkish Barry Goldwater could have put his finger on the nuclear button, but Johnson was re-elected.

'68 was Nixon or Humphrey. '72 Nixon was re-elected over McGovern. '76 Carter beat Ford. '80 Reagan instead of Carter. '84 Reagan re-elected over Mondale. '88 Elder Bush gets the nod over Dukakis. '92 Clinton upsets Bush. '96 Clinton re-elected over Bob Dole. 2000 W squeaks by with 271 electoral votes (uh-huh) over Vice-President Gore who won the popular vote by a half-million. '04 Bush re-elected over Kerry. '08 Obama beats McCain. '12 Obama voters say "no" to Romney.

In every one of those elections, people woke up the next day and said, "Now what?"

And these are just the elections in my lifetime!

President-elect Trump defies the system as a political outsider and wins the electoral college. But even as I'm writing, Secretary Clinton is winning the popular vote.

People are freaking out. There are protestors in the streets. Never mind the debate about the electoral college. Never mind the hate speech of the campaign.

Now what?

Here's the good news: this is our country.

Here's the bad news: this is our country.

Tomorrow is Veteran's Day.

We pay tribute to the generations of women and men who fight and die for freedom and justice all over the world. They fight and die because this land is your land—this land is my land. This is our country.

They fight and die so we can say who we want to be our president.

They fight and die so we can jump for joy when it goes our way.

They fight and die so we can freak out when it doesn't.

And just in my short little lifetime people freaked out in some form or fashion every time. They voted and they got up the next morning every time. Every time they said, "Now what?" Every time.

So now what?

We pray.

We pray every day.

But especially tomorrow, we pray so many prayers of thanks to whomever we pray to for this: our country. Thank you, because we get to pray. This is our country where we get to pray and be Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, even Atheist!

Thank you, God!

On Election Day, my daughter Emily took the oath as an officer of the court and was admitted to the Bar in the State of Tennessee. A whole new generation of #nastywoman. Emily can be president and your daughter can, too. Thank you, God!

Thank you for a country where our daughters can be president.

Thank you for a country where a guy like Trump can be president.

Thank you for a country where we can freak out about that.

But mostly, thank you for a country where we can say this prayer openly and worship you unabashedly, openly. Every day.

Thank you for our veterans and the sacrifices they and their families make.

All gave some, and some gave everything, just so we can wake up, freak out, pray, and say, "Now what?"

So now what?

Put on your pantsuit.

Put on your leisure suit.

Cue the O'Jay's "Love Train."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXlsJKP_FWI

I'm getting back on the train.

Making sure we don't go backwards.

I'm getting back to work speaking truth to power.

I'm getting back to work making America kind again.

One nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

This is our country.

So get on the train, 'cause if you miss it I feel sorry, sorry for you.

That's what now.

Grace and Peace,
Scott

Appendix 8b — Blog Spaces or Social Media

Jan. 11, 2017

Dr. King

It's great to be back and recharged after such a great Christmas. It was awesome! My list? I checked 'em off—one by one.

No social media—check.

No news—check.

No computer—mostly check.

I did cheat every couple days and file the emails, but it was minimal.

Binge-watched some TV—check.

Read a book (and even picked up *Hamilton* again. Almost done)—check.

Napped almost every day.

Meditated.

Contemplated.

Prayed.

Sat.

Sat with God. Check, check, check, check, check, and check.

And I feel like I've been to the mountaintop!

This Sunday, we're celebrating the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at 7:30pm in the Holy Family Chapel on the campus of the College of St. Elizabeth off Madison Avenue on Convent Station Road. It's just to the right as you get on campus.

Come and let your soul and spirit fly!

We'll hear the voices of Community Leaders, Students, The Sisters of Mercy, and other area clergy reflecting and celebrating on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We'll hear the voices of some area choirs, maybe even ours too.

Guess which message I get to reflect on?

Yes!

"I've Been to the Mountaintop"

Dr. King's last message, from Memphis, April 3, 1968.

Just typing out those words gives me a chill and a tingle.

So powerful. So raw. So real. So prophetic.

If I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of taking a kind of general and panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?" ...

Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the 20th century, I will be happy."

Now that's a strange statement to make because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding.

Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee -- the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."

And the cry still is the same.

Last night in President Obama's farewell address he said:

"Hearts must change.

"For white Americans, it means acknowledging that the effects of slavery and Jim Crow didn't suddenly vanish in the '60s; that when minority groups voice discontent, they're not just engaging in reverse racism or practicing political correctness; when they wage peaceful protest, they're not demanding special treatment, but the equal treatment that our founders promised."

He quoted Atticus Finch and said, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

The President said, "Show up, dive in, and stay at it."

So, let's accept the challenge and show up at the mountain. Let's start by walking around in Dr. King's skin for a little while. Let's worship God, together, in the Beloved Community. Let's sing, and dance, and pray for changed hearts this Sunday night.

Let's dive in and be the face of equal treatment.

And let's stay at it all year long.

Maybe we'll hear the voice of the Almighty echoing off the mountaintop:

"And what age would you like to live in?"

Me? I will be happy with showing up in 2017.

It's just fine with me.

Grace & Peace,

Scott

Appendix 8c — Blog Spaces or Social Media

Feb. 8, 2017 “Everybody Always Talks About the Weather...

...but nobody does anything about it.” — Charles Dudley Warner

His good friend Mark Twain quoted it and forever gets the credit.

"Between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference." — Fredrick Douglass

And the president thinks Douglass is “an example of somebody who's done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more, I notice."

Douglass was drawing a comparison between Christianity and American slavery versus Jesus' Christianity in 1845. The president was relating to a breakfast meeting of African Americans *last week* on the beginning of Black History Month. Guess he was just trying to be “down with the peeps.”

I keep thinking that it might be good for the president's staff to put some solid bedside reading in the stack, but it seems there's no stack—just a TV remote control and an open Twitter feed on his smart phone.

Saturday, I was listening to “Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me...” and they thanked the president for all the material. In fact, they asked him to maybe slow it down a little because “we only get an hour a week. It feels like Lucy and Ethel with all the chocolates coming down the conveyor belt. But in our case, it's not chocolate!”

That's pretty good comedy, but the problem is this.

It's not reality TV.

It's real life.

And it's really not funny.

It's not funny to the people whose hopes of new life in America were almost dashed, literally in mid-air. It's not funny to the people who were coming back home to their permanent residency and green card empowered jobs. It's not funny to the refugees in Syria. And it's not funny to the children of immigrants like in Madison, New Jersey.

The Rose City was built by immigrants. (We get the job done!)

So, the Madison Borough Council stepped up Monday night.

I was so proud to be there to support them it and see it happen.

We've been talking since the summer about building community through the #BelovedCommunity efforts begun by my friend Rev. Craig Dunn of First Baptist and Sister Rory Moynihan of the Sisters of Charity. We've been talking about hospitality and having the “big talk” about the white privilege and the racism and the bigotry that boiled to the surface during the political season. And we've made a lot of progress to that end.

With promises of more conversations to strengthen the measure The Madison Borough Council, led by Mayor Bob Conley, passed a “Welcoming Community” resolution at their budget meeting Monday night. Deciding to be a part of the national conversation in light of all the executive orders and court orders, Madison jumped into the fray! We've got skin in the game, literally! Madison not only recognizes its heritage and roots in the immigrant community, but continues to be enriched, to prosper and to grow through them and their descendants.

The community spoke with heart-wrenching personal stories of mistreatment, violence, and assassination. They challenged our Borough Council that this measure

“doesn’t go far enough” to protect the community. Madison wants to be a Sanctuary City. Our heritage and our legacy cry for it. And more conversations are forthcoming. God bless us!

The national storm is raging! And we’re getting out in front of it. All you have to do is listen to the talk as you walk around Madison. It’s everywhere.

We talk all day about the weather!

And thank God we’re doing something about it.

Grace & Peace,
Scott

Appendix 8d — Blog Spaces or Social Media
February 28, 2017 “Girls with Guns”
Written from a peace-making trip to Palestine/Israel—

Bethlehem. Back to reality in occupied territory. We're back in the West Bank now in area A, administered by the Palestinians, but still controlled by the Israelis.

Going south from area A into B and then C, besides the check points every time you turn around, besides the wall that surrounds the entire area, besides the guard towers, besides the security cameras, besides the black tanks on top of all the buildings, it's increasingly easy to tell you're in occupied territory.

The guns are back, everywhere you look. Israeli Soldiers are thick. And a good number of them are young women. It's not just guys with guns. Army service is compulsory, and it looks like that means no exceptions. Everybody serves. But it's really noticeable in The West Bank because there are so many troops running around.

I don't think I told you about the black water tanks on the buildings. Water. Israel controls all the water in Israel proper and in the Palestinian occupied territories. There is 24/7 running water in Israel. Not in Palestine. Sometimes they shut off the water to Palestinian territory for a week or two at a time. So, every building or dwelling has a water reservoir tank on top to tide them over.

That is, every building except in the settlements. The Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory have 24/7 running water. And in the settlements, there are swimming pools. You can't make this up!

To add insult to injury, The West Bank (Palestinian territory) supplies almost all of Israel's water. That is, since the Israelis control all the water, they sell it back to the Palestinians for 5.5 (\$1.49 US) shekels per cubic meter. They charge Israel and the settlements, wait for it, 0.5 shekels (14 cents US) per cubic meter.

They keep track of the cars by the color of the license tags. Yellow is Israel, green is for taxi cabs, and white is Palestinian. Palestinians must stop at every checkpoint. Make no mistake. And there are guard towers and military vehicles at most of them.

There are 100 different walking or vehicle checkpoints in Hebron alone. We went through two of them to get into the Ibrahimi Mosque which is built over the Cave of the Patriarchs. According to tradition, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, are all buried here in the cave that Abraham bought in the OT stories in Genesis.

Help me understand the reason for 100 security checkpoints and 2 of them into the most historic mosque in the world. This, in an area occupied by almost 100% Muslims and the 1500 Israeli troops? Who or what is getting protected? Oh wait, I forgot. There are settlements here, too. All of this in a "temporary" occupation, a "temporary" settlement, with "temporary" checkpoints.

This is a complicated situation and too involved to dig into in a blog post. Just know this: I've seen it up close for myself. The Main Street in Hebron was once a thriving marketplace just like you've seen in the movies. But now, many of the storefront doors are welded shut. So, if you live upstairs above what used to be your shop, you may have to enter your house through the backdoor OR WORSE, climb on the roof of a neighbor's house and come down into your house through your attic. No! You can't make this stuff up.

We had lunch today in the home of a Palestinian family in Hebron. Abu-Mohammad and his family have been in the neighborhood for years. They still own the store downstairs, luckily. Their children have never known anything but occupation. The neighborhood kids go to and from school with the soldiers everywhere. Yes, machine guns everywhere!

One of the main Army checkpoints is right across the street from their store. Guess who was staffing it today? You got it. Two girls with guns.

No, I'm not sexist. Women should serve in the military. No problem with that. But I'm a spoiled American entitled man of white privilege and you just don't see the Army carrying weapons on Main Street USA everyday let alone, two women younger than your own children. And one of them threw me attitude when I stepped out into the street to take a picture of the storefront. You can bet your last shekel that I was getting them in the picture.

She said, "Do you need something?" I said, "No thanks, I got it. Just getting a picture of the street."

What could I *possibly* need? I'm in occupied territory and
you're the one with the gun.

Grace and peace,
Scott

ps. This just keeps getting curiouser and curiouser. Hit the church's Facebook for today's pictures.

Appendix 8d — Blog Spaces or Social Media
Jan. 24, 2018 I Don't Like Mondays

This is gonna date me.
 I don't care.

Back in the day, 1979 actually, The Boomtown Rats had a #1 song in the UK that we played over and over on college radio—"I Don't Like Mondays." Even if you're in the right generation, it wasn't a hit in the US so if you didn't have a cool radio station in your town, it probably wasn't on your radar.

Though he became better known later for his work against world hunger (Live Aid, Band Aid) Bob Geldoff, the head Boomtown Rat, wrote the song about a school shooting in San Diego.

1979—Brenda Spencer, a frustrated 16-year-old, lived across the street from Cleveland Elementary School and one morning decided to start sniper-style shooting at the kids across the street lining up waiting for the principal to open the gates. She fired 30 rounds into the crowd killing the principal and the custodian who was trying to save the kids. She shot 8 children and a police officer arriving on the scene.

It was shocking national news for days! The stories of the two men who died, the injured students and their families, the police officer, and Brenda Spencer. While she held the school under siege, she was interviewed on the phone by a news reporter in San Diego. When asked why she did it—Brenda said, "This livens up the day. I don't like Mondays."

Everyone was appalled.
 Shocked.
 Outraged.
 Angry.

It reminded everybody of the shooting at the University of Texas in the late 60's.

Yesterday in Benton, Kentucky a 15-year-old kid brought a gun to school, shot, and killed two other 15-year-olds, and injured 18 more people.

This is the 11th school shooting in the US *this year*.

As of January 23rd.

Let that sink in.

Right now, (11:00am January 24), it's the 6th headline down the page in the New York Times website. The Border Wall, DACA, Broken Senate, Russia Inquiry, and two Sexual Harassment stories including the US Olympic Gymnastics Team claim the real estate ahead of it. Those are all outrageous stories to be sure, but...

...are you kidding me?

This is the 11th school shooting in the US this year!

And it's only January 24.

Here's the lede from the [NYT article](#):

"On Tuesday, it was a high school in small-town Kentucky. On Monday, a school cafeteria outside Dallas and a charter school parking lot in New Orleans. And before that, a school [bus](#) in Iowa, a college [campus](#) in Southern California, a [high school](#) in Seattle.

Gunfire ringing out in American schools used to be rare, and shocking. Now it seems to happen all the time."

Now it *seems* to happen all the time?

Ain't no "seems" about it!

It used to be rare, and shocking.

Now, it happens ALL. THE. TIME.

But for the grace of God, it could be Madison—or your town. Sandy Hook isn't that far away from here and that was only five years ago. This could be us just as easily.

So, if it's even on the radar anymore, you can expect (if you haven't already seen a Twitterstorm) countless offerings of "thoughts and prayers" for Benton, Kentucky.

Well, how nice! Thoughts and prayers. Nice.

But here I am, writing about it again—

And thoughts and prayers *are* nice.

But they're not enough.

I'm sending this blog to Senators Booker and Menendez, and to Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen. The President is no help because MAGA clearly means the NRA still had the US on 2nd Amendment Lock-down.

Relax sports hunters. Keep your gun. We don't want your guns. We're not coming after your guns, but our gun laws *are* outdated and broken. Our Congress is broken.

We've been thinking and praying for these victims and their families for decades. Clearly.

Decades!

This is beyond ridiculous.

Time's up.

Time's up for thoughts and prayers.

Time for change now...

Now, because there's no more time before the next kid with a gun wakes up tomorrow and walks into school shooting—

cuz they don't like _____.

You know what to do.

Grace & Peace,

Scott

Appendix 8e — Blog Spaces or Social Media
May 16, 2018 *Ramadan Mubarak!

Welcome to the high Holy Month of Ramadan.

I'll never forget my first Ramadan Iftar.

I was invited to the breaking of the fast with a friend from college and his Muslim community at Oklahoma State back in the day. So much fun! And great food! Good times!

Today is the first full day of Ramadan, which falls in the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. Like our Easter and Lent, the date moves around because their calendar is 11 days shorter than ours.

It's similar in a lot of ways to Lent but their traditions are stricter than ours. For example, for our fast we "give up something for Lent" to be reminded of Jesus' fasting in the desert for his 40 days.

The Islamic fast is every day, and no food or drink of any kind from sunrise to sunset for the 29 or 30 days of Ramadan. Every day! The symbolism of the fast allows them to understand the suffering of others. They spend their time (just as we might in Lent) focused on Spiritual reflection, prayer, good deeds, time with family and friends, and reading the Qur'an.

They wake with the "Suhoor" or morning meal before sunrise. Then, fast all day and break the fast after sunset with the "Iftar" meal. Two meals a day for a month. Typically, the Iftar is a time to celebrate with friends and family and community which they often do during the holiday. You may remember we hosted a potluck Iftar last summer in Fellowship Hall to "Meet the Muslims Next Door."

There are exemptions to the fasting ritual. It's obligatory but there's slack for children and the elderly, those who are sick, women who are pregnant or nursing babies, and if you're traveling a long distance. If you're sick during Ramadan, you're obligated to make up the fasting at later time.

Just like our Lent, Ramadan is a time for Muslims to commit themselves to their faith and more to God.

The end of the holiday comes at first sight of the new moon in the sky—just like Easter is the first Sunday after the full moon after the Spring Equinox. And Muslims all over the world observe the end of Ramadan with a big festival called Eid al-Ritr—"The Breaking of the Fast." Family and friends gather to thank Allah for the blessing, support, and strength during the month of fasting. The custom is to give alms at Eid, that is: donate to the poor and those in the margins.

Remember, we host the Ahmadiyya Muslims here in our church for their weekly worship called "Jumah Prayers" every Friday afternoon at 1pm. You're always welcome to attend and you should try it if you haven't. It's incredible!

But, cut 'em some slack for the next 30 days and remember they're skipping lunch!

Ramadan Mubarak,
 Scott

*Happy Ramadan!

Appendix 8f — Blog Spaces or Social Media

Aug. 22, 2018 “Other”

Maybe it’s a part of the planning process for the Inter-campus Beloved Community Peace March coming up on Sept 20, I’m not sure. But I’ve been thinking about who is “other” a lot lately. Like, in the MLK Beloved Community, there are no “others”—just sisters and brothers.

There has been this great daily devotional series for the past couple weeks on faith traditions different from Christianity. Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. I’m sure he’ll get to Krishna, Sikhism, Judaism, Islam, etc. It’s done by Fr. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, who has established a spirituality center in Albuquerque. He’s awesome! [Click here to explore.](#)

One of the things that I like so much about studying different traditions is that it can give you fresh eyes on your own tradition. It gives us ways to see Jesus, ways to see God, ways to see the Holy Spirit, ways to see Christianity in new light.

Examining different traditions can force us to break out of our embedded definitions of what is “right” religion, “right” belief, or “right” practice. It makes us think—deeply—about what we truly believe and how we approach our own spirituality. It gets very personal very quickly when you really sit and think, and meditate, and pray on it!

It may even cause you start tearing things apart and putting them back together.

Please read that last sentence again because that is healthy “journeying” in this little walk we’re on. It’s something I stress to young people in our confirmation classes, especially. It’s a part of claiming your own spirituality, for yourself. Not what your parents taught you, or your church growing up, or your Sunday School teacher, or your pastor—even me! Those are the ingredients certainly, but not the whole recipe.

This is about collating all of those theological influences that have impacted you and putting them into a blender and pouring out your own thing.

What’s interesting to me is not the differences in the traditions. What is most interesting to me is the similarities. The things we share. How we approach God, the higher power, and our definition of what that is.

Okay, that’s plenty enough to make your brain hurt so I’ll stop here. But I’m just the kind of geek that LOVES this exercise. You may notice that I was able to avoid the word in talking about traditions different from my own. It takes deliberate work to do that!

But if you can get your head around it, at least for me—as I think, and meditate, and pray about this—I keep landing in a place where there are no “others”.

Only sisters and brothers.

What do you think?

Grace & Peace,

Scott

Appendix 8g — Blog Spaces or Social Media
June 26, 2019 Border



This picture breaks my heart.

Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez and his little girl, 23-month-old Valeria, died trying to cross into the United States in the Rio Grande at Matamoros, Mexico (opposite Brownsville, Texas) because they were unable to apply for asylum in the United States. According to the *New York Post*, they are at least the fifth and sixth persons to die trying to cross the border this week. Just this week! Three of the others are infants and children.

I wonder if this picture could be the tipping point on this issue, finally.

It breaks my heart like the pictures I have seen of police turning fire hoses and German Shepherd dogs onto student protesters. Prize-winning photographs that were maybe a tipping point for the Civil Rights movement making newspapers all over the world.

It breaks my heart like the 2015 picture of the dead toddler on the beach in the Mediterranean. A tipping point for refugees of the Syrian Civil War. Again, world-wide news.

This photo is all over the world today.

Even as debate rages on about our (United States) obligation to provide toothbrushes, toothpaste, and soap for “safe and sanitary conditions” for children held in detention at the border. Children held in *detention*.

Really?

We are debating this.

We are debating this sanitary issue while people are dying!

Children held in detention is not news, not anymore. But it’s unconscionable. Our border policies are unconscionable, and they have been for years.

This is not a political issue.

This is a human rights issue.

Thoughts and prayers for them and their families aren’t enough.

In fact—trade wars, Iran, Mueller dominate the rest of today’s news cycle. At least if our attention is focused on the toothbrushes, we’re thinking about it.

But how many more people (children!) have to die while we argue about it, ignore it, perpetuate it?

What does it take to outrage us?

WWJD?

Really—not just “What Would Jesus Do?”

Who Would Jesus Deport?

These are real people with real lives, and hopes, and dreams—and they are dying. They have names.

Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez and Valeria are just the latest.

Grace and peace,
Scott

Appendix 8h — Blog Spaces or Social Media
Dec. 4, 2019 More #BelovedCommunity

I had lunch with my friend, Rev. Craig Dunn a couple weeks ago. You know Craig. He's the pastor at First Baptist Church, mostly an African American church over on Cook Avenue. Some white folks there, but mostly black and they've been watching their town change.

The Madison, New Jersey of today in so many ways hardly resembles the Madison, New Jersey of even 20 years ago. There was more diversity in Madison 20 years ago. Certainly, more African Americans.

They've seen their family homes razed for "McMansions" and suburban sprawl and Madison's version of gentrification. The population shifts and migrates from Madison to Morristown, for example, or some other nearby borough or town with more diversity and more affordable housing. A paradigm shift. A socioeconomic reality.

See this conversation through the lens of the myriad cases of police violence against people of color. And through a similar lens, look at the statistical likelihood of incarceration for men of color. And now look through the lens of white privilege.

If you don't know that the white privilege lens exists at all, you may not see any of this. Not a bit of it. You are literally blinded by the white light.

This isn't even on your radar.

If you're white, you may not even know that your whiteness comes with a built-in advantage that people of color do not have. Assumptions get made about your intentions, motivations, and aspirations long before you have a chance to prove yourself. In fact, you don't even need to prove yourself. You've already gotten a pass in so many ways and you may not even know it. The "goodness" of your being is simply assumed, and your starting square is ahead of the game.

This is true.

People of color most often start from less than "scratch."

If you're black, you know that your blackness comes with built-in suspicions that white people do not feel. Assumptions get made about your intentions, motivations, and aspirations long before you have a chance to prove yourself. In fact, you usually don't get a chance to prove yourself at all. You've already been judged, and you totally know it. The "badness" of your being is simply assumed and you're constantly aware of an implicit threat. You don't even get to start the game. Yes, you could wind up dead.

This is true.

And please don't kid yourself. It's dismissive to say, "Well, I don't see color." Even with the best of intentions, you're not being honest. We all see color. Of course, we do!

The host of The Daily Show, Trevor Noah, said this best.

"I don't believe in that at all when people say that," Noah said. "There is nothing wrong with seeing color. It is how you treat color that is more important."

He's right, and that is how I see my big, black, beautiful friend, Craig Dunn. We can't keep kidding ourselves and patting ourselves on the back for making so much progress because even for Madison, New Jersey—clearly, the more things change, the more they stay the same especially for the black community, what's left of them.

We've been shaping this conversation around the "Beloved Community" for years now. When you hear us talking about it, when you see that we're calling another meeting, or promoting the student Peace March, or holding a "Meet the Muslims Next Door" Ramadan pot-luck dinner, we're living into the "Beloved Community."

It's a vision by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*In the **Beloved Community**, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.*

Next month, we celebrate the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Sunday January 19 in a special worship service at the College of St. Elizabeth. We'll be teaming with other churches, the universities, community leaders, even the police.

This MLK service kicks off another year of Beloved Community for us here in the Madison area. Let's come together and celebrate the diversity in Madison. It's small, to be sure and it's on us to see it, lift it, and celebrate community.

Beloved Community.

No others, just sisters and brothers.

Let's do this, white people!

It's a great place to jump into the conversation.

Grace & Peace,
Scott

Appendix 9 — Sermons

Appendix 9a — Sermons

Reflection

January 14, 2018

MLK – Letter from Birmingham Jail 4/16/1963

College of St. Elizabeth

MLK Worship Celebration, Madison

No audio was recorded at this worship

So, it's not so much about how to keep it to 5 minutes—though I will try—It's about *which* 5 minutes? There is so much.

It is so dense.

But it is so fresh that it could have been written this morning.

So, to save time, I'm going to dispense with attribution—between Dr. King's words and mine. You'll see why.

His words speak truth. Truth in 1963. Truth in 2018.

Sadly—Not that much has changed.

You'll be able to tell the difference, but I'm pretty much stealing it all. Hopefully channeling his spirit. His strength. His resolve. His desperation and most hopefully, Dr. King's inspiration. Fair warning—this is a PG-13 message.

April 16, 1963—nearly 55 years ago.

Letter from Birmingham Jail is a hand-written note scribbled literally in the margins of a Birmingham newspaper.

In the dank and nasty jail cell, Dr. King responds to an open letter in the paper published by 8 white-clergymen calling for “unity”—against Dr. King.

Against the actions—the protests, marches, and efforts of the snow-balling Civil Rights Movement.

They call him an “outsider.”

And I can just hear the bad Kevin Spacey southern accent—“see, you're not from around here, boy.”

So, while confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities “unwise and untimely.”

I am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here. But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here.

Just as the ancient prophets carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns,

and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world,

So, am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own hometown?

Like Paul, we must constantly respond to the call for aid.

So, my friends—How woke are we?

Are we cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states?

We cannot sit idly by and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham, Charleston, Charlottesville, Ferguson, Baltimore, Staten Island, Tulsa. The disproportionate numbers of incarcerated people of color. The Travel Bans. The Dreamers.

The athletes who take a knee for injustice.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

Let me say that again.

Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

You deplore the demonstrations taking place. You deplore the #BlackLivesMatter movement. You deplore athletes who take a knee in silent, peaceful protest. You deplore The Women's March. You deplore the LGBTQI community.

And you deplore non-Christians while you fail to express concern for the conditions that bring about the demonstrations because there are "fine people on both sides."

You deplore the #MeToo movement—
because you're culpable.

And you deplore immigration—here comes the bad word—

You deplore immigration because to you,
those are shithole countries anyway.

You fail to grapple with the underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place—but it is even more unfortunate that the country's Make America Great Again white male power structure leaves us with no alternative.

Direct action resistance programs can never be delayed.

You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?"

You would be quite right in calling for negotiation—if you only were calling for negotiation.

Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issues. It seeks so to dramatize the issues that can no longer be ignored.

We are not afraid of the word "tension." Not violent tension, but the constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. The kind of tension in our society that never went away—

The Band-Aid over the dark depths of prejudice and racism has been ripped off and lies again on the surface of our country. Long-time wounds exposed again—

Long-time wounds exposed again to the salvific possibilities of an America that was never truly great without understanding, sisterhood, and brotherhood.

The purpose of direct-action marches, demonstrations, and taking a knee is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.

We must continue to call for negotiation. For centuries—our beloved country has bogged down in monologue rather than dialogue.

But we will not see this without pressure from you and me. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure.

Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.

Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

"Wait" has almost always meant "Never." And 60 years ago, Chief Justice Earl Warren said, "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

So, to borrow a phrase and hashtag—#TimesUp.

Civil disobedience. It's not a new thing. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego disobeyed the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, because a higher moral law was at stake. Christians faced the hungry Roman lions. The Boston Tea Party was a massive act of civil disobedience.

And remember that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal."

It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany.

Civil disobedience wasn't a new thing to Dr. King because what's true then is true now.

What hurts one of us, hurts us all. And justice delayed is justice denied.

So, I'm past my 5 minutes.

And times up.

Times up for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr in April of 1963.

And times up for you and me in 2018.

If I have said anything that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than sisterhood and brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me, too.

Let us not rest until radiant stars of Beloved Community shine over this great nation in all their scintillating beauty.

Amen, Dr. King. Amen, amen, amen!

Appendix 9b — Sermons

Horticulture

C-13

Presbyterian Church of Madison

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

June 30, 2019

Soundcloud link: <https://soundcloud.com/revscottfoster/horticulture>

¹For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁶Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Let us pray...

Alright, I'm not gonna take up too much time today. It's summertime!
Summertime.

And the living is easy.

The fact that you even rolled out of bed to get here says a lot—says a lot about where you are.

The spot you claim in this little journey we're on.

It says this is important—to you. To us. To be here together—to worship God.

Being here on Sunday or whenever we decide to worship.

Streaming online even—Hi earbud person! We know you're here— It's important.

And the "spiritual but not religious" people don't get it.

But even so, I don't know if coming to worship even makes us all that religious, to be honest. I mean, does it?

Why do we come?

We've all got some place to be, that's for sure.

Tee-times.

Lunch reservations.

Steaks marinating.

The Yankees are in Boston right now. Playing, right now!
 Could be binge-watching some show.
 Maybe there's a book you can't put down.
 Get out—do a little gardening before it gets too hot—
 God knows, everything is exploding from all the rain.
 But nevertheless—you're here. Right here, right now.
 And I've noticed—maybe you've noticed. Charles Courtney and I were talking
 about it at Drip coffee on Thursday. There's a common refrain creeping into my
 preaching lately. "Living into it"
 It's very intentional.
 For very intentional reasons.
 There's a key piece of our church vision—a key piece of who we want to be as
 church—and our session has labeled it—identified it.
 Intentionally.
 It's a priority for us—for you.
 For me.
 For Presbyterian Church of Madison.
To see lives transformed through intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.
 (2x)
 We say it every week in prayer.
 Today's bulletin cover says "Community Renewed" because that is a part of the
 vision—it's an outcome.
 It's an outcome of this "Intentional Relationship with Jesus Christ."
 And I say it's an outcome because of this—
 Because it's all about how we live into it.
*Paul says—We belong to Christ Jesus—If we live by the Spirit, let us also
 be guided by the Spirit.*
 It's all about how we cultivate and live into this intentional relationship with Jesus
 Christ.
 I can't help but think that being religious isn't as much about being here today on
 Sunday—it's not as much about listening online.
 It's all about what happens after—
 When we walk out that door—
 I think it's about how we do that tee-time.
 That lunch.
 The kids' Summer Camps.
 The Yankee game.
 The commute, the work. The Merry-Go-Round!
 It's how we do it—
 That's the difference in spiritual versus religious.
 The key to this "intentional relationship with Jesus Christ?"
Is how we live by the Spirit—
 How we care for it—cultivate it.
 Call it Holy Horticulture if you want to.
 How we do it is the key—how we live into it.
 This is intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.

Holy Horticulture works.

(wait...wait)

Back in the day, I get turned on to Dorothy Parker—one of the members of infamous roundtable at the Algonquin Hotel in Manhattan.

25 years ago—I am literally walking past the Algonquin and the Literary Historical Marker catches my eye. So, I search the internet.

Google isn't even a verb yet.

But I learn all about her.

Dorothy Parker is considered the founder of "The Vicious Circle"—a group of writers, critics, playwrights, authors, activists, and social commentators in the pre-Depression 1920's.

Alexander Woolcott, Robert Benchley, Ruth Hale, Tallulah Bankhead and Harpo Marx—even Hemmingway stopped by.

They meet every day for lunch at the Algonquin and who knows how many martinis later—this is the Comedy Central of the Roaring 20's.

These are the Stephen Colberts, the Maureen O'Dowds, the Trevor Noahs, the Bill Mahers of their generation.

And Dorothy Parker is biting! Quippy and funny and a little off color.

(wait...wait)

"I like to have a martini,

Two at the very most.

After three I'm under the table,

Four—and I'm under my host."

(wait...wait)

But she says this about Horticulture—

"You can lead a horticulture. But you can't make her think."

You can't make her think.

On the contrary—I think everything Dorothy Parker did makes us think. She was a professional woman—a poet and a comedic genius—a pioneer—before her time. And I wonder how many women she set free by her work. By her wit. By her example.

Horticulture?

How much freedom did she grow?

How much horticulture did Dorothy Parker do?

The more you cultivate—the more freedom you have.

And that may just exactly be what the Apostle Paul has on his mind today.

Holy Horticulture.

Total freedom from the laws of the old school.

He says let go of the Torah—don't ignore it. But let's do a little Holy Horticulture—cultivating the fruit of the Spirit!

I know, right?

It is not okay to indulge the flesh, and he's not just talking about sex and Dorothy Parker's martinis, here.

In Paul's time—it is not okay to fornicate unlawfully. And it is not okay to be idolatrous.

It is not okay to practice sorcery or jealousy or create factions that separate community.

Drunkenness and debauchery are not okay. Carousing. Canoodling.

All things in moderation.

But, intentional relationship with Jesus Christ means cultivating, weeding, watering—thinking!

The Fruit of the Spirit does not give us a pass on moderation. Alright?

Holy Horticulture.

Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is outcome—the outcome of better people—better community—when we walk out the door today. *We belong to Christ Jesus—be guided by the Spirit.*

We live by the Spirit

And we live into this—

And it makes us think.

Intentional relationship with Jesus Christ—the fruit of the Spirit makes a greater us. Think about it.

You and me.

And maybe in Paul's mind—the law of the Torah becomes less important because we are otherwise occupied.

Yes! It makes us think.

We are otherwise occupied.

And, it's as simple as how we do it going forward today.

Seriously.

If we spend all of our time plowing up that old us. Letting go of ourselves. Right now.

Planting, weeding, watering the fruit of the Spirit.

Holy Horticulture is so simple.

Holy Horticulture is life changing.

Intentional relationship with Jesus Christ is life changing.

And, it starts in here with saying hello to a new person. Make a new person feel welcome.

Knowing you?—makes a new person just a little more comfortable, right here. Right now.

Sure, Holy Horticulture gets complicated. It can!

It can be as complicated as setting up some new meal mission for the homeless—food security for Madison.

You can run it out of our brand-new Fellowship Hall Kitchen.

You could be fighting for affordable housing.

Or the rights of undocumented people.

Let's not forget we live in the center of the universe—Here in this little snow-globe. Here in the shadow of New York City—

Don't think for a second—that changing this little corner of the world can't change the world.

Think about it. Really, this is not rocket science.

It's as simple as how we drive our cars in traffic.

It's about smiling at a stranger on the platform.

Chatting up the check-out clerks at Stop and Shop.

Think about your own footprint.

You have no idea the impact you can have on the world from right here—living by the Spirit.

This intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.

Starts with you. It starts with me.

Think about it.

Plow and plant love—right where you are.

Weed and water the joy.

Cultivate peace.

Pour Miracle Grow on patience, and on kindness.

Prune the generosity.

Transplant the faithfulness and gentleness.

And, put up trellises and cages for the self-control.

If we just work on that—

List-makers, here's your chance...

Feel free to use the white space in your bulletin.

Pick one or two and start today.

You belong to Jesus Christ—guided by the Spirit, living by the Spirit.

Write this down for yourself—

In Love, today I can—

Through Joy, today I can—

I can sew Peace today by—

Today I will be Patient with—

I will show Kindness to—

Today, my Generosity will shine by—

Before the sun sets, I will be Faithful and—

Today, I will take a deep breath and be gentle—

Maybe most of all—

today, I will stop and put everything on pause—

While I reel in my self-control.

It's so simple—so basic.

If we put all of our energy into these things—

Love...joy...peace

Patience...kindness...generosity

Faithfulness...gentleness...self-control.

Simple as it is—

If we work on that?

Holy Horticulture is life change.

This is world change.

Live by the Spirit. Intentionally

Jesus Christ—

Leads us to horticulture—

Jesus Christ makes us think.

That is truth—for you and for me, too.

Amen.

Appendix 9c — Sermons

DNA
Luke 16:19-31

C-26

Presbyterian Church of Madison
September 29, 2019

Soundcloud link: <https://soundcloud.com/revscottfoster/dna>

¹⁹"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' ³⁰He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Let us pray—

Okay—Coffee break's over—

Back on your heads.

I always think of that old joke when I read this story. And I'm not gonna tell it today—but if you want to hear it, stop me later and I'll be happy to.

I don't want to take the time right now because this story?

It's just not that simple.

Is it?

No, it's eternity!

We're talking about eternity in Hades which our Bible steals from Greek mythology.

Hades is the Greek God of the underworlds. The Greek God of Hell or the place name of whatever the concept is. The concept of Hell. And over time, Hades becomes the name for "Hell" or the land of the dead. And this is the locale of our story today.

Hades.

We're talking about spending eternity in Hades.

And the rich man is kinda getting his comeuppance, isn't he?

He has enjoyed his life as a king—clothed in rich purple cloth—feasting at heavenly banquets for his entire life.

A life of privilege.

The rich man has lived a whole life of privilege.

And Lazarus—this is not the same Lazarus that Jesus will bring back to life in some of the Gospel stories. This Lazarus figures very heavily in the life of the rich man in Hades.

In real life—this Lazarus has been living and begging on the street. Living outside the rich man's gate for his whole life. Assuming—since he was very young.

And—for a very, very long time—

This rich man has passed by Lazarus every day—outside his house—every day for his entire life.

The man's never even spoken to Lazarus.

Never actually done the math—on the difference between him and Lazarus.

We assume that this rich man has

never

really

seen

him.

Like he's—Invisible!

(wait...wait)

But, do you notice—that Lazarus, in this story—

Lazarus is the only character in all of Jesus' parables—

Lazarus is the only character that has a name?

Yeah!

He is not—the woman who lost a coin.

He is not—the shepherd who lost a sheep.

He is not the lost son—or the older brother—or the father—and he is definitely not the "rich man."

He is Lazarus.

In the Gospel story, Jesus gives him a name so that the rich man can betray himself in Hades.

The man calls Lazarus by name to Abraham, doesn't he?

(voice) Father Abraham,

have mercy on me,

send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water

and cool my tongue;

for I am in agony in these flames."

(wait...wait)

He doesn't say, "Send that guy over there to bring me some drops of water...

That man over there—

bring me some relief..." No!

This is the same Lazarus that sat outside his gate—

All those years.

The very same one that he deliberately ignored.

We know that this isn't the first time he notices Lazarus.

No, it's not the first time he has ever seen Lazarus

Because—he knows his name.

Oh no, he *knows* Lazarus.

And here in Hades—there’s a great chasm between the rich man and Lazarus. An impassible chasm—a canyon between those two men. There is a huge gap in this reversal of fortune.

But truth be told—

There’s always been—a great divide between them.

The divide has always been there, right?

It’s in their DNA.

The divide is primordial.

The divide is systemic.

The divide is a part of their DNA

(Wait...wait)

Here’s an oversimplification. Like the “back on your heads” joke—but it’s one that some of us see just about every day.

There’s a gap between the platform and the train, right?

There are signs all over the Subway, NJT, Penn Station, Grand Central.

The signs say, “Watch the gap.”

Watch the gap.

The distance between the platform and the train. It’s easy to trip and fall if you don’t step over the gap. You might even fall between the train and platform.

Break a leg at best—

You gotta watch the gap—

You gotta watch the gap and step over it,

Or you’re gonna get hurt.

But for some people—that gap is huge!

If you’re using a walker or a wheelchair, you can get your front wheels caught in the gap.

You can get hurt—you might not even be able to get on the train! The gap may only be 5, 6 inches across

but if you can’t get on the train—it might as well be 5 or 6 feet! Right?

At some point, that is the great divide

It might as well be the impassible chasm—

And that’s the kind of divide we find

between the rich man and Lazarus.

The divide in the story is more than economics, because it could just as easily be race—gender and gender identity—

I could just as easily be religion—sexual orientation.

Politics.

Immigration.

Healthcare.

Food security.

#BlackLivesMatter

Abuse of power.

Impeachment inquiries.

Anglo-Saxon/American exceptionalism.

White privilege.

Nationalism.

All of it is built into the great divide.

And this great divide is in our DNA.

The country.

Our town.

Even our white, big steeple—272-year-old church.

It's in our DNA.

And, it's frustrating, isn't it?

It drives us crazy.

Screaming at the television.

Screaming at Twitter.

Screaming at the phone.

Screaming at the papers.

Screaming at the Congress.

Screaming at the President.

Screaming at the Boro Council.

Whatever it is—

The rich man can't even say he never noticed Lazarus.

No, he knows him by name—just as we know our differences—by name.

It's all in our DNA—And, that is the elephant in the room.

That is the conversation that has boiled to the surface in our politics, our news, our national and world affairs.

We can't claim that we don't see it. That we can't own it. We can't say that we don't see Lazarus as the dogs lick his sores at our gates.

The divide is there, and it's *always* been there.

It's in our DNA.

I read a book recently in my little doctoral program called *Stand Your Ground*, written by a pastor, Kelli Brown Douglas. The whole point of the book is to note, and name, and track the development of what she calls "Stand Your Ground" culture in the United States.

Her tipping point is Trayvon Martin—Who you will remember is an unarmed Black American teenager—shot and killed by a neighborhood watch person in Florida. Trayvon is shot and killed on the street wearing a hoodie sweatshirt, carrying only Skittles and a tea from a convenience store. He is in the neighborhood visiting his father's fiancé.

You remember—

The neighborhood watch man is acquitted for the crime.

The Trayvon Martin case is just one of the triggers of the Black Lives Matter movement. Black Live Matter boils to the surface in the dialog of our country: the devaluation of people of color in our culture.

The divide between White Privilege and the rest of the country.

Kelli Brown Douglas argues that this is the primordial definition embedded in the DNA of our culture.

It begins with perceived exceptionalism in the Germanic tribes of eastern Europe as long ago as the 1st Century—Biblical times. This degree of Anglo-Saxon

exceptionalism migrates westward in Europe through the centuries—through the reformation—and comes to the new world on the Mayflower and beyond.

We can see it in the way indigenous people are treated by the new settlers—by the British colonies. Ultimately by the United States.

Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism becomes American exceptionalism as our entire country is developed, and well-intentioned men fight and die to win freedom and protect the properties of men of Caucasian European decent.

Read carefully the Declaration of Independence.

Read carefully the Constitution of the United States and its amendments.

The Civil War and slavery are only symptoms of a systemic primordial DNA that shapes us—that shapes our culture today.

We are our history.

Here in Madison—

Here in our church—

It is in our DNA too.

It is inextricable.

Just the name—Madison—changed after the temperance movement as you know—changed from Bottle Hill to Madison because our local government had an affinity for President James Madison.

The same James Madison who is a key architect of the Constitution of the United States. The same James Madison who proposes the 3/5's Compromise for calculating the value of the number of slaves in slave states to be counted for purposes of representation, taxation, and electoral voting in the House of Representatives.

That is 3/5 of the slave population in slave states are counted as people.

Let me say that again.

Each slave is considered only 60% a person—slaves are 60% a human being.

These are the facts.

This divide is in our DNA.

And it's not just about race.

It boils to the surface in our socio-economic strata—

In gender and gender identity—

Religion—sexual orientation.

Politics.

Immigration.

Healthcare.

Abuse of power.

Impeachment inquiries.

Anglo-Saxon/American exceptionalism.

White privilege.

Nationalism.

All of it is built into the great divide.

All of it is built into our DNA.

But in the middle of it all—

I see hope—in us today. As our church lives into this vision: **To see lives transformed, families strengthened, and our community renewed through intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.**

I see hope as we become this church that's a part of, not apart from the community. As we—all of us, you and me.

As we live into this life—that is really life.

In our community involvement, in our politics, in making Madison, the number one place to live in New Jersey.

As individuals and as church—we are trying to live into this kin-dom of God on Earth as it is in heaven.

I believe we are trying to close this divide.

Welcoming Community resolution in Madison.

More affordable housing is on the horizon.

A ban on one-time use plastic bags.

A concentrated effort to raise the 2020 census response in hard-to-measure populations——A Stygma-Free Community!

Refugee Assistance Morris Partners—RAMP to relocate refugees from war-torn countries like Afghanistan and Syria.

Our support and work for the Interfaith Food Pantry.

Homeless Solutions.

Beloved Community Conversations.

The inter-campus Peace March last week.

Our DNA—The divide is so obvious we can't say that we don't see it— we can't pretend that it's not here. Even as the country seems paralyzed by it. Polarized by it.

Even as we may differ on all these issues—still I see hope.

Right here, in the middle of it all.

Our church is part of the solution—you are part of this resurrection story in the making.

All of us.

Doing our part—getting off of Green Avenue and out into the community.

Living into it.

Breaking the cycle—distancing from this DNA.

There's so much energy here.

So much life.

So much potential.

I'm always amazed!

This life together at PCM—it's not perfect—and it's not easy.

And it takes engagement—on your part. On mine.

But I see hope.

I see hope for the world.

I see hope for the country.

I see hope for Madison.

For our church.

For you and me.

To close the divide.

Presbyterian Church of Madison—

Claiming the truth in our DNA—

Injecting hope in our DNA—

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer—Amen.

Appendix 9d — Sermons

On the Border
Luke 17:11-19

C-28

Presbyterian Church of Madison
October 13, 2019

Soundcloud link: <https://soundcloud.com/revscottfoster/on-the-border>

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Let us pray—

So, let's just go right at it. Can we?

This is all about gratitude, right?

And, I appreciate it.

Thank you very much.

Gratitude.

In fact, we probably don't say it enough, "Thank you."

And I'm gonna get real and say thank you—to you, church.

About four years ago—right around the end of November, the dialog starts with the Pastor Nominating Committee of this little church we know and love called Presbyterian Church of Madison.

In late 2015—this is the church you said you want to be:

*We have a strong re-commitment to sustaining, reinventing, and growing our congregation into the future. Our vision statement crystallizes this direction: **To see lives transformed, families strengthened, and our community renewed through intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.***

We feel called to reach de-churched young families who have moved to Madison for the excellent schools and high quality of life in an upper-middle-class suburb of New York City. Returning to church, for themselves and their children.

There's a strong desire in the community to connect in a meaningful way with each other and with God. Our commitment is to serve those in need—to be there for the "de-churched" with support from a congregation, a pastor, worship, and spiritual growth.

And so today, on behalf of your session—and from the depths of my heart and soul—I say thank you.

Thank you because here we are—today—reinventing ourselves. Reinventing what a 272-year-old church looks like for 2019 and beyond.

This is a totally different church today than it was 5 years ago. Totally different.

20 percent of our current membership—

More than 20 percent of members and friends of the church—even you, listening online right now.

More than 20 percent of who shows up now are totally new and part of the re-invention—part of the “de-churched” searching for connection in Madison, New Jersey.

Thank you very much!

Our church has evolved—continues to evolve. Most of our spaces have been updated—made new. We have almost totally new staff—paid and volunteers: Atiya, Anna, Patrick, Cathy —musicians—even me.

Our programming from worship to Sunday school to the nursery and family programs. All new. Our missions are strong. And our presence in the community—we are all over it.

5 years ago, our church was dying—and today we’re evolving and growing again like modern churches do. And some people have left—

That’s to be expected when church evolves.

When church reinvents.

That’s what happens when you start living into the vision:

To see lives transformed, families strengthened, and our community renewed through intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.

You all got a letter this week asking you for your commitment to the vision. To sustain and grow what we’re building—the future is exciting—the future is compelling—but it takes all of us to get there. All of us. Your pledge.

So, on behalf of your session—on behalf of the leadership—I’m saying thank you—in advance.

Thank you.

Thank you for being here.

Thank you for making a church that’s a part of the community—not apart from it.

Living into the vision.

With gratitude.

Presbyterian Church of Madison—just doing our little part to Make America *Grateful* Again.

And Jesus? Today—Jesus is out there! Out there like we are—living into the vision—out in the community.

He’s not at home, he’s not in his little bubble—he is out there—on the border—doing the work of “thy kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

On the border between Galilee and Samaria.

And I think I love the story so much because it gives us a small, tiny, personal glimpse into Jesus, the man.

By now you know, we are well into Jesus’ ministry. He’s pretty famous and Jesus has quite an entourage. There’s not much alone time for Jesus, so it’s pretty likely that at least 2-3 of the disciples are with him.

And, today he’s not actually addressing the disciples, but I think it’s safe to say, they are with him. You know he knows they are listening. He knows there’s always teaching to be done.

And, Emily Post would be proud of that Samaritan, wouldn’t she? He was brought up well. He learned his manners.

Growing up in my mom's house, if you forget "thank you," you get the side-eye. You say, "please" and you say, "thank you," or there's hell to pay.

So, even 2000 years ago—when somebody does something nice for you—the very least you do is say "thank you."

Never mind praising God! In fact, it goes back a lot longer than 2000 years.

Back in the Old Testament—2nd Kings 5, there's the story of Naaman. And Naaman is sort of a "frien-enemy" to Israel.

Naaman has leprosy and he's a commander in the Aramean army. And, in one of their raids on the Hebrews, they take an Israelite girl captive. She ends up serving Naaman's wife as a slave girl.

She says that if she could take Naaman back to her home country, back to Israel—she knows of a prophet that can heal his leprosy. — Elisha!

So, the King of Aram, Naaman's boss, sends him off to Israel to be healed—and Naaman must be a valuable and trusted soldier! The king is well invested in Naaman.

Check this out—

The king sends him off with 10 talents of silver, 6000 shekels of gold, 10 sets of clothes, and a 20% off coupon to Bed, Bath, and Beyond.

He sends a personal email to the King of Israel through the back channel.

"Please cure my servant Naaman and here's a little extra for your trouble."

Pretty good bank just for healing some leprosy!

Nice way to say, "thank you."

So, the king of Israel takes one look at the note, and he immediately deletes it! He doesn't want any part of it. See?

This is way out of his wheelhouse.

He's not a healer—

He tears his clothes in shame because he—personally—cannot help Naaman.

And he can't look bad to the Aramean king. To his frien-enemy. In a culture based on honor and shame, we can't have that! He's gotta save face.

So—the king sends out a Tweet

I'm not a healer! #notfair!

And, across town—Elisha the prophet—springs into action.

Elisha Tweets back— Nip it in the bud. People can't be saying there's no prophet in Samaria! Please! I'm Elisha!

#myreputation

#igotthis

Elisha knocks it out in less than 140 characters and Naaman shows up over at Elisha's house—but Elisha won't even come outside and give him the time of day.

Remember! They are "frien-enemies," and Naaman is an unclean foreigner. So, Elisha sends him a text:

"Naaman—Go take a bath in the Jordan—

Take a bath in the Jordan—7 times and you will be healed."

And Naaman gets all balled up about this—bruises his ego.

A text message!

Elisha will not so much as step out on the front porch!

Naaman storms off in a huff. Knowing how the treat the environment in Aram—
He says, “The rivers are so much cleaner back home—

“Take a bath in the Jordan?

Didn’t that river actually catch fire?

It’s filthy!”

But all his handlers say, “whoa, whoa, whoa,

“Hold on, Boss. Think this through—

“You’re gonna be cured! Elisha could have asked you to climb a mountain—jump
through a buncha hoops.

“You would have done it in a heartbeat.

“You would have done whatever he asked.

“Right? So—Seriously!

“Get over it and go take a bath, man!”

So Naaman does—he bathes—just as Elisha says—7 times he bathes in the filthy
Jordan River—and you know what?

The Spirit moves—and it happens.

He is healed by God.

And not only that.

He’s not just healed—Naaman’s got the skin of a young boy—tight and firm—
Very sexy.

Well, straight away, Naaman goes right back to Elisha and says, “Okay, I
get it. I believe in your God—

“I will worship your God and thank you so much—please accept these tokens of
my esteem.”

But Elisha says, “No thanks—no gift. As the Lord lives, I will accept nothing.”

No thanks necessary.

So, fast forward a few centuries—guess what?

Jesus knows the story! He’s knows all about Naaman. He knows all about Elisha.

He knows all about foreign relations and he’s out here on the border—

Out here between Galilee and Samaria where life imitates scripture for Jesus.

And, there’s not just one, but 10 lepers!

10 Naamans!

And lo and behold, one of them turns back. The unclean, foreigner, Samaritan!

He turns back to say thank you and get a selfie with Jesus!

But, think about it—Jesus is probably like,

No way is this happening—this is unbelievable!

This is just like Elisha!

But Jesus is really nothing like Elisha.

Jesus does not dismiss the Samaritan.

He accepts the gratitude.

And always with the teachable moment Jesus wonders about the other 9 men.
What about them?

Can’t they come back and praise God? Just askin—

But he doesn’t take away the blessing, does he?

No! They’re all still cured. Every one of them.

Right here, right now.

On the Border—

To see lives transformed. Families strengthened. Community renewed through intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God—on Earth as it is in heaven. Thy kingdom come. The kingdom of God comes near—to them. Personally.

Healed.

No thanks necessary.

None expected, none necessary.

No thanks at all.

(wait)

So obviously, this is a very Reformed moment.

God's Grace is not earned.

God's Grace is unconditional.

No matter who you are—how you live—who you love—

Undocumented—wearing a hijab—

A yarmulke—

Whether your trans or cisgender—

A MeToo woman—

No matter who you vote for.

Sinners and saints.

Out here on the border.

Out here in the streets.

We're all children of God.

All of us.

You, and me too.

(wait...wait)

But our egos get the best of us.

The election cycle is heating up.

Our politics get the best of us.

The conversation on race boils to the surface.

And the wounds are fresh. As fresh as ever.

Our culture is bleeding out—

Yet still, we live into this vision—

To see lives transformed. Families strengthened. Community renewed through intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.

This is what that looks like when we go out—

And live into our lives and our jobs and our careers—

We live into this vision—on Earth as it is in heaven.

Think we can't change the world?

Speak truth to power?

Give voice to the margins?

Being the body of Christ in the world—each of us—living into a world—in the shadow of the center of the universe.

We are suburban New York City.

And we live out here—on the border—in the margins—

And that's our job—living into this vision—To see lives transformed. Families strengthened. Community renewed through intentional relationship with Jesus Christ.
And our job—on the border—on Earth as it is in heaven—
Our job has never been harder.
In the midst of the tension.
In the midst of the hard conversations.
Living into the vision—
We all need healing, friends and lepers. One and all—
Friends and lepers—line up—and let the healing begin.
Line up for the cure.
In the shadow of the city—in the shadow of Jesus.
Out here on the border— Let the healing begin.
But, please?
Let's be one of them.
Let's turn back and say, "thank you."
Thank you, Jesus!
Thank you, Lord.
All of us—children of God.
Thank you.
Amen.

Appendix 9e — Sermons

Nevertheless
Luke 18:1-8

C-29

Presbyterian Church of Madison
October 20, 2019

Soundcloud link: <https://soundcloud.com/revscottfoster/nevertheless>

¹Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Let us pray...

Alright—Fair warning—

Buckle up!

This could be a bumpy ride.

You know we follow the three-year lectionary cycle with our scriptures—All over the world—churches all over the world are using the same scriptures. The same Gospel stories.

Today's parable — unlike some of the stories we've been dealing with lately in Luke — today's parable is unique to the Gospel of Luke.

And all the scholars think there's a very good possibility this one was actually told by Jesus. Historically. Authentic to Jesus.

And today's Gospel is a gift from God—a movement of the Spirit. Today's Gospel is in your face. Because it's happening. It's part of the national dialog.

Right now. Right here in our country.

Right here. Right now.

I'm sure you remember a couple years ago—

During the Senate confirmation of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General of the United States.

During the confirmation hearings, Senator Elizabeth Warren attempts to read a 1986 letter to the Senate from Coretta Scott King—a letter that is already part of the Senate Record—

The subject of the letter?

Mr. Sessions political prosecutions of voting fraud in his home district—to curtail voting by African Americans.

Senate Chair Steve Daines interrupts Senator Warren—citing Title 19 of the Senate Rules prohibiting any senator from ascribing "to another senator or to other senators any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a senator."

Senator Warren asks again for permission to continue reading the letter—which is granted.

So, she continues—

And then—Senator Mitch McConnell interrupts her—*again* objecting to her reading the letter on grounds of Title 19.

So, the Senate stops the debate and takes a vote to sustain McConnell’s objection—which passes along party lines and Senator Warren is told to take her seat—

She is told to take her seat.

Senator Warren is now silenced for the duration of Senator Sessions’ confirmation hearing.

Senator Warren is silenced.

So, immediately following the Senate ruling, Senator McConnell says—on the Senate floor: “Senator Warren was giving a lengthy speech. She had appeared to violate the rule. She was warned. She was given an explanation.

Nevertheless, she persisted.”

Nevertheless, she persisted.

(wait)

It becomes a rally cry in the women’s movement!

Nevertheless, she persisted.

(wait...wait)

Now most of you know I’m what they call a “2nd Career Pastor.” Actually, I’ve had several careers.

And, one of them is advertising. I sold radio and television advertising for 10 years.

One of the most important and basic concepts of advertising is frequency.

Frequency.

That is, how many times you hear—how many times you see a commercial.

How many times do you see a commercial? Hear a commercial? Hear a song on the radio.

How many times before it has an impact on you?

How many times?

That’s what they call frequency.

That’s why we get so tired of commercials or the same songs over and over again on the radio. Even today—most people still get their music on the radio.

And, the worst commercial? To me? It’s still—

1-877-Kars for Kids.

I won’t sing it.

But it gets in your head, and it keeps you up at night.

I sang it once—and I won’t do it again.

You’re welcome.

Just listen to Z-100 for more than an hour and you’ll see what I mean.

Lizzo—Truth Hurts.

Lizzo just got bumped out of #1 on the Billboard chart by Travis Scott.

She’s been on the chart for 23 weeks—#1 for a good part of that.

Lizzo Truth Hurts—Maybe you’re not sick of it yet, but you will be.

It’ll wear you out—You know it.

Frequency.

It wears you out!

Over and over again—just like a broken record.

Kids these days don't even get that, do they?

“Like a broken record.”

Spotify, Pandora, Alexa—changed all that.

But on the radio?

—Still, it's frequency

It's the same thing over and over again.

And if it's your favorite song, you can't hear it enough.

If it's your favorite, you can't hear it enough.

Until it's not.

And, it wears us out, right?

Just like a kid on a long trip—

Are we there yet? Are we there yet? They just never let up—

They never let up and this brings us to our little story today.

This little parable is about determination, perseverance, tenacity. It's about results. It's about telling the truth.

And it's about persistence,

Over and over again.

Women in the ancient world have no standing. If you go back to Exodus 11:15—
they're not even considered people!

And the widow knows the deal. She's got no income. She's got no way to support herself. Left without a husband, or any kind of support structure, she's either got to fend for herself or find someone to give her some justice.

Now we don't really know why she needs justice.

We don't really know what her circumstances are. But, her intensity of purpose to the judge—highlights his lack of compassion. His lack of honor. She shames him to get justice, doesn't she?

Nevertheless, she persisted.

She's betting on frequency.

Because in their culture, in their time—

A man's honor is all he's got.

You can have it all—money, big house, big car, whatever—but strip it all away—
because if you don't do the honorable thing, you bring shame on your house.

And, woe be unto him who brings shame to his household! You just don't do it!
You hit the bottom of the social totem pole —you don't recover.

So, it magnifies the man's disrespect for people, and it magnifies his lack of understanding about who God is, or why God is to be feared. And it sets up a great story for the disciples. Yet another great teachable moment for Jesus.

Nevertheless, she persisted.

And, finally the judge gives in, right?

Finally, it occurs to him—she's not giving up.

Nevertheless, she persisted.

(wait..wait)

You know what the Greek word for this is?

Our Bible soft pedals it—saying “wear me out.”
It’s a metaphorical translation because the real word is
hupo-pee-aht-zo.

Alright, it’s been a while.

Say it with me—

Say “hupo”

(wait)

Now try “pee-aht-zo”

Good!

Let’s put it together—

Hupo-pee-aht-zo

Hupo-pee-aht-zo

Nice!

Hupo-pee-aht-zo is a boxing term in Greek—and it means to get a black eye—a
punch right in the face.

That’s what the judge is saying this widow is like—

Hupo pee aht zo!

Bam, bam, bam!

She’s just giving it to him until he’s on the ropes. She’s going in for the knock-out
if he doesn’t give it up.

Nevertheless, she persisted.

Wearing him down like a boxer!

Wearing him out.

Hupo pee aht zo! (wait)

And now—you’re getting a taste of the intensity.

Jesus’ intensity. The determination of the widow.

Her tenacity—

Over and over again. (wait)

Nevertheless, she persisted.

And I can’t help it.

(wait...wait)

I can’t help it.

It’s so obvious.

The whole #MeToo movement.

It’s playing out right now. In this generation.

Right now—in the news.

Right here, right now.

Roger Ales—and Fox News.

Harvey Weinstein—

They just boiled it to the surface.

A couple weeks ago it’s a major world-wide law firm!

Don’t dismiss it.

Don’t be distracted. Don’t turn off the TV. Don’t look away from your phone.
Don’t turn away.

Listen. Listen to the women!

Tune into the conversation.

Forget about the politics.
 Forget about the politics and tune in to the conversation.
 Hupo-pee-aht-zo
 It's a black eye—on our country. And it's beating us in the face and still we
 dismiss it—Time and time again.
 We dismiss it in the news cycle and move on to the next thing.
 Whether it's another athlete beating his girlfriend—
 Or Bill Clinton.
 Or Bill Cosby.
 Or the president.
 These are the cases that made the news!
 And the victims—The victims just keep on coming!
 Just a fraction, really.
 It's not new.
 It's been going on for years. Decades! Centuries!
 It's not in the backrooms, or alleys, or behind closed doors.
 It's in the workplace, in crowded nightclubs, and it's not locker room talk!
 — It's real life!
 So, forget about the politics. And let me ask you this:
 Are you really listening to the women?
 Are you listening to the conversation—because it's more than just words. These
 are real victims—these women.
 Statistically 1 in 5 women are raped or sexually assaulted.
 1 in 5.
 Just in all the stories over the last couple years—I bet it's higher than that.
 I bet that it's closer to half.
 I bet as many as half of all women in this country have experienced some kind of
 inappropriate, unwelcome, physical, or verbal advance. I bet a straw poll of just the
 women in this room—right here, right now.
 It's gotta be half. At least.
 Women are constantly victims of rape, physical, and verbal abuse and you've got
 the scars to prove it. You know it.
 And you can't see it, But the scars?
 The scars are there.
 (wait...wait)
 And I'm sorry.
 I'm so sorry—I touched a nerve.
 I know I have.
 I'm sorry.
 I'm sorry to make you think about it. To remember it right now. I'm sorry.
 I'm so, so, sorry.
 Because there's no excuse for it.
 None whatsoever!
 It's not just words.
 It's deplorable. It's indefensible.
 And it's on us, guys—Nevertheless—

It's on us all to make it stop.
 Zero tolerance. Nevertheless—
 It's on us to teach our boys respect.
 It's on us to teach our boys about consent.
 It's on us to teach our boys about boundaries.
 (wait—wait)
 We love our sports—
 We teach our kids where the foul line is in basketball.
 We teach our kids what's out of bounds in soccer.
 (wait)
 We need to teach our boys what's out of bounds in life.
 (wait)
 Every time.
 Every time we dismiss it—we send the wrong signal.
 Nevertheless—it's what we don't say.
 What we don't say?
 We tell our girls that it's okay.
 We tell our girls that this is just how it is...
 But nevertheless—
 It's not okay.
 And it's a black eye.
 Hupo-pee-aht-zo.
 It's a black eye on you—It's a black eye on me.
 Our kids will accept it.
 Women will be hurt.
 Until we don't accept it—until we say,
 “Nevertheless—No more!”
 All of us, you and me.
 Zero tolerance.
 Right here. Right now.
 (wait—wait)
 Nevertheless—
 When the Son of Man comes, will he find justice?
 Will he find faith on earth?
 Will Jesus find faith on earth?
 Nevertheless—
 Pray always and do not lose heart!
 Pray that he does find justice—and faith on earth.
 Nevertheless—
 Pray that it's truth—for you and for me, too.
 Amen.

Appendix 9f — Sermons

Paradise
Luke 23:33-43

C-Reign of Christ

November 24, 2019
Presbyterian Church of Madison

Soundcloud link: <https://soundcloud.com/revscottfoster/paradise>

³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Let us pray...

Alright, most of you know that I'm working on the Doctor of Ministry at Drew University. Surprise, surprise—the degree is in Public Theology. Speaking truth to power.

Being out in the community, being church—*part of* the community, not apart from it.

Living into this Christian life—out there.

It's what I hope we do as church. You and me—living this life. Though I have to admit—the TV preachers like Joel Osteen?

When I talk about public theology, I'm not really talking about them.

Now, I'm not judging them—I'm not poo-pooing their success. It's just not too often that they deal with the tough subjects.

Pretty much - it's all sweetness and light, right?

It's kinda like—back in the day, the motivational speakers like Dale Carnegie or Zig Ziglar—

It's a lot of rah-rah, sis-boom bah—yea Jesus!

(voice) And God will give you anything you want—if you help enough other people find the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Say "Halleluia!"

And, they swat us on the butt and send us into to the game—Like every little thing is gonna be all right—and it's just not.

They rarely get down in the quagmire—the dirty underbelly of life—the real, day-to-day stuff that burrows into—our skin.

And, I admit—when I’m not ranting up here about something.

I’m guilty, too.

Sermons like that are fun to write—and, they are especially fun to do because I get a kick out of it—and they are so much fun.

You know what I call ‘em?

I call ‘em Cotton Candy because they melt in your mouth—they go down smooth like a good glass of fine wine.

AND oh—are they are fun to write. So, if I ever talk about cotton candy—

You know exactly what I’m talking about.

(wait...wait)

But today, I want you to sit up—

Cuz today isn’t gonna be like that.

Today is more like a losing game at half-time—

Today we’re going to do some heavy lifting.

I’m just warning you now. We’re going to roll up our sleeves and get our fingernails dirty.

Because today we are going to talk about Paradise.

Paradise.

Jesus offers Paradise.

In the Greek—it’s Para-DAY-so.

That’s how you say it.

Para-DAY-so.

We’ve been studying Old Testament—we just wrapped up a class today—a deep-dive into the Old Testament. From our spiritual ancestors—we have learned a lot about Judaism and the foundational scriptures—

And during what they call the exilic period—a time after Jerusalem was sacked and the temple destroyed—the whole nation of Israel was exiled to Babylon and Persia.

The books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel are written during this time. And this word para-DAY-so—starts creeping into their conversation. The ancients took this word from the Persians during the exile—Pairidaeza.

In ancient Persian, Pairidaeza is one of those spectacular formal gardens—nicely terraced on the lawn of a fine mansion or castle—nice piece of real estate.

The Garden of Eden would easily qualify as para-DAY-so. But, in this context, at this time, the Greek Lexicon defines Jesus’ words—para-DAY-so—like a state.

Para-DAY-so—is a state of being.

Para-DAY-so is a transcendent place of blessedness.

A transcendent state of blessedness.

Utopia.

Nirvana.

Para-DAY-so. Paradise.

So, just for fun, let me read Jesus to you in Greek.

(read the Greek)

Ἀμήν σοι λέγω σήμερον μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ Παραδείσῳ

2x

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

(wait...wait)

So, have you ever seen the movie, *The Passion of The Christ*? Came out during Lent in 2004. Mel Gibson directed—*The Passion of the Christ*.

Whether you like the movie or not or whether you like Mel Gibson or not—Everyone knows how graphic the movie is, right? How violent? The torture and the crucifixion—brutal!

So, conjure that up for the moment if you can. I want us to think about the suffering. Think about what Jesus is going through in this moment—when he is saying these words.

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

(wait)

Before the actual crucifixion, Jesus endures trial before the Sanhedrin. He's ridiculed and spat upon. He is beaten at every step by soldiers and Pilate's courtiers. Beating and scourging most of the night—you know what that looks like?

The whip used for scourging?

It's like a cat-o-nine-tails made from leather thongs with little bits of metal and bone—that literally tear at the flesh—the most bloody, brutal torture you can imagine.

And it goes all night long!

At daybreak,

As the Sun rises—

Jesus carries his own cross to his own execution.

At one point, he is so weak—he can hardly walk—let alone, carry this big piece of lumber. And, Simon the Cyrene carries it for him. Up that hill.

I have taken that walk—on the Via Dolorosa—and it's a long way. Over 600 meters.

More than 6 football fields!

And for Jesus, every step is a major effort. Every step to the hill of the Skull, to Golgotha, to the ultimate in suffering—as if he hasn't suffered already—the ultimate in suffering is crucifixion. Jesus almost crawls to his death—

Painful. Torturous. Excruciating may get close. Suffering doesn't say it.

Crucifixion is a very ugly way to die.

(wait, wait, wait)

So—we learned in our Old Testament class a lot about the Hebrew text. And we learned that a lot of people don't like it because it's got a lot of bad news in it.

They don't like it because there are wars and bloodshed and unimaginable things—all in the name of God.

Yeah, it's not pretty—The Old Testament.

Some people prefer the New Testament—where all the good news is, right?

But the truth is, the New Testament isn't all sweetness and light either, is it? No, it's not—there's a price for discipleship.

And that's a hard truth.

But even—even in the ugliness and horror of this story.

There is good news.

Can you believe Jesus? From the depths of his pain and suffering and endurance—he is pastor right to the very end!

Right to his last breath.

Here are two criminals crucified next to him. On either side of him. One on his left. And one on his right.

And it's Roman-Jewish politics.

This is all about politics. The politics of the Roman Empire. He is crucified between these criminals—so the Romans frame the right picture—of our Lord and Savior.

Framed as a criminal—to serve as a warning—

“This is what happens.”

This happens when you challenge Caesar's authority.

And during his own suffering—Jesus reaches out to the criminal. The criminal rebukes the other one for his sarcasm.

You know, the one guy says, “All right, So you're this Messiah—save yourself and save us too, Jesus.

C'mon, man!”

The other criminal is outraged—rebukes the first one.

“Shut up! We did our crimes. We've got it coming—this guy, Jesus, he didn't do a thing and yet here we are suffering together.

Jesus? Remember me when you come into your kingdom!”

And, Jesus—so moved by the man's faith—in the midst of his own suffering—his own distress, his own adversity—Jesus says, “Yes! Yes, today, you will be with me in Paradise.” (wait)

Even in the suffering, Jesus says—come in—come into this transcendent place of blessedness.

Transcendence— is supreme—whole—complete.

Really? Blessedness in the suffering?

That is so hard—

so hard to see—so hard to feel.

Right?

When we're in the thick of it. Suffering—In the perfect storm. When it's all hitting the fan—we're coming apart at the seams.

It's hard to see it, isn't it?

It's hard to find God, let alone blessedness.

When we're suffering—it's hard to see Paradise.

It's so personal and the suffering is downright criminal.

Dealing with loss—pain and grief—sure, it's the “circle of life.” But, there's no comfort—because it rips your heart out.

Even when we've been fired from a job. Or downsized or whatever exit strategy. It's degrading—

Doesn't matter what the circumstances are—it's hard to look in the mirror, let alone talk about it. We put so much emphasis on that identity—in the United States—what we do is who we are.

We suffer in the quagmire of self-pity.

And we need that quagmire to get through it.

Sometimes we just need to sit. And hurt.

And let the time pass.

(wait)

When we're on the floor—crawling across the bathroom floor so hung-over that we are having an out-of-body experience—and clinging to that floor—to the comfort of the tile—the cold against a cheek and it feels soooo good.

Some relief—as we suffer. (wait)

When we see another person with a baby or a small child and—we grieve that we don't have children—maybe we grieve that we didn't have a childhood.

We grieve a relationship with our parents that never was.

(wait)

Maybe it's driving home with the sunrise in the rearview mirror—slinking away from whatever happened last night.

(wait)

In the movie “Unfaithful” Diane Lane should have gotten an Oscar just for the train ride home. You feel it—you're with her.

Suffering—in the quagmire of deception—the lies that we've told—the lies that we've been told.

The guilt and remorse—it's criminal.

We suffer in the quagmire unable to forgive ourselves.

And today, we suffer in the light of the truth—the reality of the political divisions in our country—and

The chasm is deep and wide—

We are slogging through bigotry, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, Islamophobia, loathing, and politics. And, there is downright disdain for others not like us—didn't vote like us—

And even the people we're gonna eat Thanksgiving with!

The people we love the most.

And, that is horrid!

It's horrid because we suffer in the trap of this identity politics—passing judgment on everyone but ourselves. Everyone else—but us. We set up boundaries—between us—and them.

That person—over there.

That person is not me!

(wait)

We suffer the throes of it.

Because we can't just let it go.

Some days are better than others—but it never goes away.

And some of us can't do it—

We can't live with ourselves in God's presence—

Where the light's on.

Sometimes, we just can't even—sit here on Sunday morning because of what “we've been up to.”

And we kid ourselves—as if God doesn't already know who we are.

So—welcome, friends!

Welcome to para-DAY-so.

You're safe here.
 Safe to suffer.
 Safe in this place—no matter what—
 No matter how—
 No matter who.
 The lights are on—and here we are.
 You and me, perfect in our imperfection.
 And, we suffer this world—together.
 Jesus offers the criminal—
 Jesus offers us—sinners and saints—criminals—one and all.
 Paradise.
 Right here.
 Where we can live out our fallibility—own it—
 Our weakness. Called out. Human. Together.
 Paradise—perfect in our imperfection.
 And, that's the good news.
 Today's scripture goes to what that really means.
 For God so loved the world —
 God becomes flesh.
 God becomes flesh to suffer with us.
 To show us how.
 And meet us here—just as we are.
 Perfect in our imperfection.
 Today you will be with me in Paradise.
 But when you're in it—in the middle of it.
 That is hard to hear in the moment, isn't it?
 Paradise? Really?
 Seriously, the way I feel right now?
 Suffering right now. To some extent or another—
 Loss, debt, taxes, politics—whatever it is—we struggle.
 And we suffer through our differences.
 We suffer each other every day.
 And that's the price we pay.
 We suffer—sometimes excruciating pain.
 And Jesus suffers with us.
 This is the Reign of Christ, friends. This is the kingdom.
 This is who we are.
 This is what we do.
 This is our life together.
 The Reign of Christ—
 Together—
 Allies—Connected—empowered—lifted by the other.
 In the light of this crazy, jacked-up world—
 There is a price for discipleship and
 It's excruciating!
 Yet God suffers—with us.

In the light of the Holy Spirit
In the light of Christ the King. Truly I tell you—together today,
You and I— We suffer—
Together in paradise.
And it's a hard truth for you and for me, too.
Amen.

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