

## KRYSTAL LEEDY IN YOUR WORDS

# Find the 'us' instead of the 'them' in our way of thinking



We live in polarized times. We live in “us and them” times. The culture that we swim in, the people that we interact with on a regular basis become our “us,” and everyone else is “them.”

A few years ago, I was given the opportunity to participate in a presentation of my culture. We were assigned to talk about our family in which we grew up, rather than an ancestral culture project. My first thought was that I didn’t have a culture. I am white. I don’t have culture. We were given the opportunity to share what games, music and clothes our family of origin enjoyed. I instantly began to realize how jealous I was of people who actually had culture: the Korean food, the hip-hop dances, the quincñeras that I did not have. I thought again, “I don’t know. I like normal stuff.”

And there it is. In my mind, I am “normal” because I am white.

My “us” is fellow white, upper-middle-class Christians. Even as I write this article, I am making assumptions when I use terms like “we.” My circle of “us” is very small, and it is so easy for me to assume that the circle of “them” can be ignored.

It is truly an odd thing when Christians read passages out of the gospel of Luke for instance, where Jesus is addressing the crowd and says, “Blessed are the hungry” and “Woe to those who are now full” because we assume that “we” are amongst the blessed. However, the gospel is not always good news when you have everything, especially when you have the privilege of cultural normativity.

We must start reading the gospel from a different perspective if we find ourselves saying “I am the norm.” We pray that passages like the following will show us the intersection between us and them, “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (I John 3:16-17)

At best, we are but secondary readers to our sacred texts. We are the “them” in many gospel stories and teaching, and we should also find ways to be second readers of American culture.

As people of faith, we have a responsibility to be compassionate to the rest of humanity, particularly those who are underprivileged. And please read underprivileged not as just economically disadvantaged, but people in our community that do not share the demographics that we so many times label as the “norm.”

Question-asking is our new calling to help. Empathy is our fuel for compassion. Our sacred texts become our reason. As we “lay down our lives for one another,” hear that as a beautiful metaphor for being aware of and coming down from our privilege and asking questions of a new American culture of which we are ignorant. May our intersections become new common ground so that “us and them” becomes only “us.”

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**University Presbyterian Church series “Racial Truth, Justice and Reconciliation”** When: 9:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings during February, March and April

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