

My early years were spent in a privileged bubble within the deserts of west Texas and afforded by the oil and gas industry. In our small world, the wives stayed home raising their children, we socialized at the country club, traveled by private plane to our second homes, and cultivated our talents and interests through private lessons. It was charmed, privileged, predominantly white, and isolated. It took a few years of economic recession and catastrophic illness for my father and grandfather to enable our privileged reality to collapse and our family business to fail. We lost everything but our lives. Or so, we thought.

The bankruptcy was one of the most traumatic, greatest and formative experiences of my life and it transformed my life trajectory for the better. We were stripped of the materialistic façade of success and forced to reconcile with our identities of who we were and whose we were as beloved children of God, regardless of status and assets.

Although my family was fairly progressive in our beliefs towards equality and race, our conservative community was steeped in patriarchal white supremacy that informed our privileged identities and biases. I do not think that I would have been able to identify and dismantle the patriarchal white supremacy within my life as I have if it weren't for the forced grappling. Upon reflection, I am able to acknowledge that even the bankruptcy was one of privilege due to my parents social and familial relationships. However, it was still a difficult reckoning of the realities of life; such as navigating serious health issues without health insurance, transportation for an active family of five, and the social ostracism of no longer being deemed members of "the club." Rumors developed about my parents and their marriage when my mother earned her teaching certificate and went back to work to provide for our family. My sisters and I were teased because we could no longer afford the private lessons, exclusive sports, and trendy new clothing. I learned that money and status were facades of security and people were quick to flee when they experienced discomfort or had nothing to gain.

There were two environments that served us with God's abundant grace that enabled me to endure this season of drought. Our church and a new school. It was through this transformative time that I fell in love with Christ and the more so, the Body of Christ through our church community, as these were the few individuals who continued to support my family as we healed and recovered. My mom was able to enroll us in a public performing arts magnet school that offered the music, dance, and gymnastics training that we could no longer afford, privately. Our former school was majority white and the new school was literally "on the other side of the tracks" with multiple cultures reflected in the students and faculty. Our financial situation was more of the norm rather than exception amongst my new classmates and I found security in my new friends as we celebrated the victories of our families such as employment, stable housing, and sobriety. It was also through this experience that I began learning how the structures of our

society affected our qualities of life and opportunities experienced. I was reminded time and again, that despite all that we had lost, I was still privileged with my whiteness and family foundation. I witnessed the inequity and discrimination experienced by my friends of different races and social classes, especially in regards to the law, freedoms, and opportunity. To the best of my ability, I strived to be a good ally to my black, brown, and Asian friends; but I was still clueless of their experience and the reality of our racist culture in many ways. I recall identifying with the phrase “I don’t see color” and placated myself with that as proof that I wasn’t racist. However, I still wasn’t fully aware of the many facets of white supremacy and privilege within my life, especially the micro aggressions that permeated our culture and white washed history and how that informed my behavior. The journey continued as my world expanded.

In 2013, my now husband, Jason, and I joined the Episcopal Church and were especially drawn to how the church embodied Jesus’ commandments towards how we are called to our faith in Jesus Christ through this journey of life. In our Baptismal Vows, we are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. With God’s help, we are called to strive for justice and peace among all people, with respect to the dignity of every human being. Jason and I understood that expanding our context and relationships were essential to growing as individuals and Christians. We began working with those who experienced food and housing insecurity, human trafficking, and with the youth. We began to discern what changes needed to happen within our lives and faiths to truly reflect our baptismal vows in honoring the holiness within ourselves and others and knew that we needed to address how white supremacy, patriarchy, and ableism informed our identities, biases, and behaviors. This commitment towards dismantling the oppression and sin within our lives has continued and we have been transformed for the better as our experience of God has expanded. The culmination of our small and daily efforts continue in helping us grow into our journey towards wholeness with God.

The commitment to dismantling oppressive structures and beliefs can be intimidating, as it calls for us to change our entire orientation of living with and for God and others, our neighbors. The efforts made toward this new life in loving Christ through loving others, and however that applies to our lives, are worthwhile and productive in our evolution to grow as Christians, individuals, and as a society. This journey is one that calls us to be aware of and invested in the experiences of others and a commitment towards developing a society that enables all of creation to thrive. This awareness and investment in others is the “wokeness” that Jesus calls for us to embody. Like all growth, this journey is also uncomfortable, as it calls for us to address the sin and bias in our lives that prevent our ability of fully experiencing God’s abundant and abiding love for us and our capacity to offer it to ourselves and others. We also work against a society that is permeated with buzzwords that promote a sense of hysteria and prevent the ability to address the issues at hand.

I invite you to embrace this process with lenses of abundance, humility, patience, grace, and curiosity. Remember that any effort is better than no effort in growing towards wholeness in Christ. The onus is on us to engage in the labor. Seek opportunities that enable you to experience other cultures or benefit from educational and professional development. Offer your appreciation to those who are willing to share their experience and expand your awareness.

Learning about the issues at a larger scale can enable us the capacity to engage at more personal levels, when appropriate. There are many resources to read, listen to, and view that address that many aspects of society affected by structures of oppression such as racism, classism, ableism, and sexism. One is the book *The Sum of Us* by Heather McGhee, who utilizes her expertise in economics and social analysis to examine how the practice of racism affects all Americans. Through the presentation of her research and analysis, McGhee offers the hard truths of our society that must be acknowledged and reconciled through relationship and reconciliation. She offers solutions for progress enabled by embracing and celebrating the diversity of cultures within our society. You are invited to join the ARC in a conversation on Heather McGhee's *The Sum of Us* on Thursday, May 22, 6:30-8:30 pm via Zoom. You may learn more about *The Sum of Us* [here](#).

May is Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. I encourage you to engage in opportunities to learn about the specific communities when they are celebrated in cultural heritage months. As Californians, there is a rich and long history of the AANHPI communities within the Central Valley and I encourage you to learn about the history of your local area.

What work do you need to engage in to enable you to answer your call as a Christian to prioritize God through others rather than ourselves?

Some suggestions and considerations:

Eat and learn about another culture and their food. One way is to prepare and patron restaurants of different cultural cuisines and learn what you can about that culture.

Take advantage of our streaming services that offer and watch, read, or listen to media about other cultures.

Can you support educational and youth initiatives that offer opportunity like the Magnet school that I attended? Our community was strengthened by the lives that were transformed by the heavy enrichment opportunities within our schools.

Be conscious that our budgets are reflections of our morals and priorities. What are you spending your money on and who are you supporting with your money? When given the

opportunity of choice, are you patronizing a local business or a globalized conglomerate? Are you supporting or operating businesses that offer a fair wage and benefits to employees?

Do your votes reflect your call as a Christian to support a society that enables all of creation to thrive in health, experience, and opportunity?

Learn the history of your family, culture, and community. Who are the indigenous people whose land is occupied by your community? What experiences may have caused the racism, prejudice, and bias within your personal context? What needs to be done to dismantle that?

Remember privilege and equality experienced by others does not diminish yours. Our capacity to thrive is contingent on the thriving of the most marginalized.

We are called to be a holy people, set apart from the sins of man and oriented towards God. We are called to be gracious, compassionate, hospitable, and righteous. We are called towards a life of empathy and solidarity with the marginalized. The Body of Christ is only able to thrive when all are able to experience God's abundant belovedness. We are able to achieve that wholeness as Christ's resurrected body when we embrace the diversity exhibited through God's vast and holy creation. In our adoration to God, with humility, optimism, and grace; let us journey together releasing the chains of sin and oppression and claiming the freedom afforded by love, equality, redemption, and resurrection. We can, with God's help.

- Deacon Alison Fischer