

Bishop Brooke-Davidson's Meditation for the Third Sunday in Eastertide

4/19/2021

Truth: The Beginning of Healing

Alleluia; he is risen! Or as Bishop Barbara Harris put it, hallelujah anyhow. I write this meditation as our country awaits the verdict in the Chauvin trial, as Minneapolis erupts over another killing of a young Black man by a police officer, as reports of mass shootings roll in one after the other from Indianapolis, Kenosha, Austin. I write with some trepidation, knowing that this news will likely have been overtaken by more upheaval before it is published.

There is much to say, theologically speaking, about all these events, but the first two have been churning in my heart and soul for several days, and they're more than enough for one meditation.

Hear what the Lord sayeth:

- A new command I give you: love one another, as I have loved you.
- Whatever you do to these my siblings, you do to me.
- You will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

There's plenty more where those come from. This is the foundation of all the rest, and of all that I have to say today.

Because I want to address two questions that often come up, or get swept under the rug, and my response is theological. These are the questions: Can we ever talk about anything but race? And, When can we stop talking about race all the time? A variant of this is bringing up anti-racism work with groups of church leaders and then listening to them talk about anything but that subject for an entire meeting.

Here are the answers: Yes, we can talk about things in addition to race, but not always instead of it. And we cannot stop talking about race; not in our lifetime, not in the future of the United States, probably not ever, until the whole catastrophic creation and infliction of racism is a very dim memory, which will not be for centuries.

This is why: we have not as a society faced and acknowledged the whole truth about the depth, the pervasiveness, and the ravages of racism. We don't even know our own history; white people at

least almost never really know it. We have very little understanding of how we got into the pervasive racist cultural “norms” that the killings of George Floyd and Daunte Wright focus our attention on. How can I say that so categorically? Well, I can only speak for myself, of course, and not for you. I have a fancy degree in history from a college that’s expected to know what it’s talking about. And I have learned more about the actual history of our country in the last year than I can even get my head around. More frustrating and more indicting, I have learned more about the impact of that hidden history on living people, and about the enmeshment and intractability of the sins of the past and their expression in the present. And that is a big problem, because there are so many sins, and they affect us all.

Some folks will say, “leave the past in the past. It’s time to move on. I have moved on, so should you.” The fact of the matter is that when we don’t confront the full story of the past, we cannot move past it, and we can’t see the present clearly. Until we know the whole truth, we don’t know the truth at all. And when we don’t know our history, we are doomed – damned – to keep repeating it.

Until we all know the whole truth, we are trapped in a dangerous, destructive, diabolical reality that does exactly what we have all renounced. Do you remember? And do you remember promising to do something about it?

- We have renounced evil and its deadly impact: *Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? Do you renounce the evil powers of the world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?*
- We have promised that we would repent, make amends, act like Jesus: *Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?*

Keeping those vows in these times begins with the willingness of those who are “uncomfortable” with having to focus on issues of racism to accept the discomfort of learning the whole truth (because you’re only uncomfortable when you see it as somebody else’s issue, and that tells you a whole lot). Again, this is a theological issue.

So sayeth the Lord:

Jesus told the people who had faith in him, “If you keep on obeying what I have said, you truly are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31-32

Only the truth will set us free from this madness and death.

Let me say it again: Only the whole truth will set you free. Not “them,” but you. ALL of us. People of color are exponentially disproportionately hurt by racism, but one important truth is that all of us

suffer when some of us suffer. (*There is one Body and one Spirit...*) Those who are intentionally oppressed by racism lose, among many other things, the opportunity to fully express their gifts, and the whole culture is deprived. That's just the tip of the iceberg. And those whose lives have been advantaged by a system that holds other people down are crippled, on some level, in heart and soul, even though they may not know it.

Here's what I want you to know, if you wish we could stop talking about this. The way through it is to go through it. There's no way around it, and ignoring it won't make it go away. But the journey will not kill you, or actually even hurt you. It certainly won't bore you. It is likely to bring pain – not the kind that's fatal, but the kind that saves your life, like necessary medical procedures. You will survive. Your deep sense of self, rooted in the bedrock of eternal life as a beloved child of God, will survive. You do not have to accept blame, but we must all accept responsibility for our society. No, even that isn't quite right: we must all keep the promises we made to God at our baptism. There's nothing in there about the cozy comfort of denial and separation for some people. It's all about reconciliation: seeking, serving, loving, striving, respecting. We have already declared the decision to live that way. And in our time, *at last*, we are face to face as a whole society with the spiritual forces of wickedness that treat some categories of humans as inferior to others. It comes to us in our time to renounce the evil powers that corrupt and destroy our relationships, our lives, our futures. If you don't see it as the foundational interstitial problem that infects all the other problems – study it some more.

There's much, much more to do, beyond the listening and learning phase. But it can't be skipped over. When your bishops and priests say that racism is sin, they mean that it's something that we must address for the health of our souls, individually and collectively. We may not have invented it in our generation, but we did inherit it, and it is ours to confront and eradicate.

If you don't know where to start (or you're scared), sign up for a [Sacred Ground](#) group. You will learn in a format that conveys much information without shame or blame – but with great power. If you want to venture out on your own, read *Waking Up White*, or *Stamped from the Beginning*, or another of the dozens of excellent introductions to the topic. Any of these things will make you hungry for more.

And we'll have help. Thus sayeth the Lord:

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of **truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. John 14:15-17*

When can we stop talking about racism? When nobody wants to stop talking about it, because the healing is so much better than the pain.

Blessings,

Bishop Jennifer Brooke-Davidson

-
- [News & Events](#)
 - [News Room](#)
 - [Press Release](#)
 - [National News](#)
 - [COVID-19 Resources](#)
 - [Events Calendar](#)
 - [E-Communique](#)
 - [Stories of the Diocese](#)
 - [DOV Media](#)

© 2016 – 2021 The Diocese of Virginia. All Rights Reserved.