

A word from your Pastor

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely[a] on my account. (Matthew 5:3-11 NRSV)

This week’s musing is once again summarizing for you the Anti-Racism workshop I am a part of on Saturdays that is being offered through our synod. This past weekend was discussing the black church, black theology, and black worship culture. After listening this week, I could not help but think about our greater church, the ELCA, and our desire to grow into a more diversified denomination. In 1987 we merged a bunch of little Lutheran synods into one ELCA because we were so much alike and there are more possibilities in larger numbers. However, each one of those synods had very similar cultures, traditions, and histories.

One of the reasons we haven’t become more diversified over the years is because many of the other cultures in America have their own theology, church and worship and they are very different than the mainly white Caucasian churches. This is another example of systemic racism. We in a sense are asking other cultures to become assimilated. If they don’t we are afraid that we the traditional people of the church might leave if we embrace a new culture and move out of our comfort zones.

In our discussion on Saturday, we learned that the main reason this difference in the black community is because of slavery. The black community looks at their faith experience in a very unique way. In the first centuries of our nation, the white church used scripture to condone slavery. The black culture used scripture to give them hope in their bondage. It was a focus for survival. White people talk about the church as a way to personal salvation. Black folks look to scripture and the church from Jesus’ point of view and the struggle with slavery and oppression. They can relate to Jesus and the disenfranchised and used the Bible as a tool for survival. They feel Jesus has revealed Godself to the black community.

Another difference in the worship experience in cultures is the way we look at the community and family. Again, the white church focuses on the self and personal salvation. We are very individualistic. The black church focuses on the family and community. They worship, sing, and pray together as a community! Their worship is filled with call and responses, shouting, open prayer, preaching, and moving music! Spirituality is tied to their social, political, and economic outlooks. Community is where their ancestors came from. Black people even count on the spiritual presence of their ancestry to help them through their lives.

Our worship and community gatherings are quite different. The hope we have in becoming a diverse culture of Americans still lies with the relationships we build with people of color in order to get a better understanding of their culture and maybe even participate with them in their Spirituality and worship!