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Broadway Christian Church
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Say, "When"
Mark 2:23-3:6

On Friday night in our fellowship hall we came to the table for dinner to celebrate the work we have done together while considering Jim Wallis' book, **America's Original Sin**. Attending were guests and representatives from the 120 count who participated small groups formed from fourteen churches since January to hold important and difficult conversations about racism.

The program was supported through a Reconciliation grant from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Broadway's Mission and Outreach Ministries and spearheaded by our own Don Day.

One of the small group spokespersons stood Friday night to thank Don, and lifted this vision and mission up as holiness. He said that Don's humble and understated way had sent out waves of influence pouring Faith across the nation aided by conversations that are actual and virtual

through Facebook. The resulting action is that this vision has brought Protestant, Catholic, Unitarians, and Buddhists together to talk about a way forward in the persistent pain and sin of racism in America.

I know that many of us are fighting the exhale of exasperation in the mention of this because we know ourselves to not be racist and frankly, we may be tired of the conversation and even aggravated that in the continuance of bringing it up, we are making it worse.

Reverend and Friend Jay Dudley was in the same small group for these conversations as me. Early on I asked Jay what he was thinking about the group so far. He told me (and has given me permission to tell you) that he was fearful about what it might stir up in him. He, like many of us, wasn't sure the conversation was necessary or could be helpful.

Jay's mother raised him, his two brothers and four sisters to love everybody and never said color made a difference. He didn't use color of a person as a descriptor. His friends were white, Chinese, Mexican, and

they were his brothers and his preference for people.

Most of his friends growing up were those from school and not black. One of his white friends still calls his mother, "Mama." John is a brother.

It wasn't until his teenage years, when he had more autonomy when leaving the house, that he made friends with the kids in his neighborhood. Jay and Betty have raised their children in this way.

I asked Jay again this week as we finished our book study, how that fearfulness worked out for him. "I'm doing fine." He said that when he felt the tension of the conversations and realities rising up, he overcame the fear by realizing that it would only take over **if he allowed it to** and by keeping his mind in neutral, he could keep a sameness of heart. He said that racism is not about *together* but about division.

I had to smile at the **God Nod** this week when the at the National Spelling Bee, 14 year old , Karthik Nemmani from McKinney, Texas won spelling out the Greek word "koinonia" (koy-nuh-NEE-uh).

It is defined as "intimate spiritual communion and participative sharing in a common religious commitment and spiritual community."

Friday night at the Continuing the Conversation Potluck dinner, Marcus Brown stood to speak to his group's experience in the study, and I paraphrase:

" We became like a family around the table, in the Word of God . The antithesis to racism is relationship ("koinonia"). Even with sharp banter and discussion, the people of God have to be in the forefront of this issue as the **DISTINCTIVE** voice, of **FAITH**."



Martha Jolly spoke to the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciling, Justice Ministries that formed within the Disciples of Christ Denomination and their work and opportunities for further study. Nick and I attended their workshop this spring. There we were asked a series of questions that might

illustrate an advantage that whites have over our black and brown brothers and sisters.

So for a minute I want you to place your hands on your lap. I'm going to ask just ten of these many questions. If the answer for you to any one is "No", tuck down a finger.

- Schools in my community teach about my race and heritage and present it in positive ways throughout the year.
- Students in my high school looked mostly like me.
- Most of my teachers looked like people of my race.
- I can achieve or excel without being called a credit to my race.
- My parents and grandparents could purchase housing in any neighborhood they could afford.
- I can look at the mainstream media and find people of my race represented fairly and in a wide range of roles.
- I never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs.
- I'm pretty sure that if I go to a business and ask to speak to the person in charge I will be speaking to someone of my race.

- I can easily find the kinds of hair products I want and/or cosmetics or band aids that match my skin color.
- I can take a job with an employer who believes in Affirmative Action without people thinking I got my job because of my race.

Count your fingers.

At the workshop, we did this exercise lined up on our feet and took a step forward when the answer was **yes** and a step backward when the answer was **no**. At the end of the exercise, we who were white were steps ahead and when I turned around, the people of color were far behind.

This is an illustration of what has come to be a rather explosive coining of a term I had resented called "White Privilege". It is volatile.

Some of us have said they we are sick of this term because they have never known ourselves as privileged. We have worked hard for everything we had and did not eat our cereal from a silver spoon, and if we did, our families worked hard for it.

So I've not used this phrase and have replaced privilege with the acknowledgement of the **advantage** I have known being white in America.

To our family and our children the police are trusted. We have had them load our kids into the squad car to hear the siren and see the lights. The police have come to our neighborhood watch block parties and brought McGruff the Mascot dog to take a bite out of crime in our backyards.

I became aware for the first time that this was not the same experience for Joanie and Rachel's family. When they moved into a home in Chicago, they could see the people across the street dealing drugs. The previous tenets of their new home came back for drugs that were left hidden there. Joanie boldly went across the street and told the dealers to leave their kids alone. In exchange, she made a moral compromise in tell them that they would not call the police to report the things they see. As she crossed back over the street, a police car was passing. Joanie went up to the police officer and told him to leave their kids alone. "The talk" was given to her kids as to how to behave when being questioned by the police to keep themselves safe. This was not the

conversation I felt the need to have with our kids.

The time for zero tolerance of racialized policing has come. It's time for white citizens and parents to join with black citizens and parents to right an unacceptable wrong, (Wallis p.32)

We are all God's children.

Whites can be defensive. Most do not feel themselves to be racists. We are indeed genuinely opposed to the overt expressions of racism we still see and hear.

Many of us begin with a starting point defense of never having owned slaves, and maybe your ancestors never did either. We were not involved in the displacement and the massacre of the Native Americans, and maybe our ancestors weren't either. Yet we stand in a land where just a few blocks from here is a protected burial mound where a neighborhood is going up and the indigenous peoples will not be living there. And we live in a nation whose wealth was established on the backs of slave labor. And we may have inherited ancestral memory that rises up and keeps us self-righteous, defensive and afraid.

To benefit from oppression is to be responsible for changing it. Not to make us feel guilty and defensive about the past but to free all of us to take responsibility for a new and better future-especially for our children.. (Wallis p.35)

We have some shared history that we are not proud of and that would be illegal in this land today.

Sometimes the laws that protect and privilege us become outlawed.

Feasting on the Gospels said in the context of today's word from Mark, *"Make a list of all the things everyone used to know were wrong: dancing, shopping on Sunday, going to the movies, playing cards, tight jeans, short skirts, drinking alcohol, sexual activity, divorce....now make a list of all the things everyone used to know were right: Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation, male only suffrage, prohibition of unions, McCarthyism, dictatorships,*

For Jesus in today's Gospel, he is being tailed by the Pharisees as a community or sect of "separatists" that were known for their self-righteous religion and pride and they want to trap, arrest and

ultimately kill Jesus for his authority and teachings that don't line up with their religious law and power."

Here's a spoiler, they are going to win, well in the skin.

They are not going to win in the spirit of the law and not for the future of the children of God.

Jesus has not come to abolish their Mosaic laws, but to fulfill or perfect them. (Matthew 5:17) Perfect them with life giving renewal and love.

The Pharisees say, "Look, your disciples are breaking the **Sabbath law**, pulling tassels from the corn on the Holy Day of rest." Jesus says, "Yes and even the renowned king David, when hungry, went into the House of God and gave the sacred bread of the Presence, that was reserved for the priests, to his hungry companions in need of food."

"The Sabbath is made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath."

Jesus' starting point is not the law, but humanity.

Ah, but another trap was laid for Jesus in this scripture. Some say that the man with the withered hand was a plant to trap Jesus into

breaking the law and that tassel pulling comment was just the set up.

We never hear anything, not even an exclamation of awe or thank you, from the man who is healed. Perhaps he was ashamed of being used and for being willing to be used for his own healing sake. This could be supported in the fact that once they enter the synagogue, the Pharisee's don't speak, they watch to see if Jesus will cure him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him. Jesus says it to all of us when he asks: *"Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?"*

Silence...

Then Jesus looks at them with anger and then, a semicolon later, is grieved at their hardness of heart.

"Stretch out your hand," he says as the man's hand is restored.

Can't you see the Pharisees tripping over each other as they go to the state officials to conspire against him and destroy him?

This week our news was filled with actions that said **hardness of heart** will be met with anger and intolerance.

With information at the speed of tweet, racism was called out for what it was, and the side effect it wasn't. Bigotry is no longer acceptable.

Jim Wallis names three arenas that are the fields for sowing justice because of their level and diverse ground: Schools, Sports and Church.

Children of God, the church is the field.

The power of the Holy Spirit will embolden us to have the eyes of Jesus that see with anger and then the broken heart.

We come around a table in "koinonia".

In this moment is the opportunity for movement.
(Wallis p.219)

In his last book, Martin Luther King wrote, "We are faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now."

When? *Now.*

Say, When...When your cup is so full, and your satisfaction so complete that you could not possibly take another good thing. Stop the pour. Give it to

another. **When, I've had plenty.**

Say, When...When means please stop, I've had enough, you don't need to hurt me any more to prove that you are stronger, I am weaker, or that you are in control. **When** my arm is wrenched behind my own back. I'm tapping out, I'm crying, "Uncle." *When* signals the surrender of pride, martyrdom and maybe even retaliation and the rising of humility and forgiveness. **When, I've had enough.**

Say, When...When you are pinning down an action or even dreading one. The answer of *When*, binds a decision in time to now.

Or suspends it in a sigh, as in, *when* will they ever learn... or hangs it in hope or dread has a foreseeable beginning or end. **When, I'm calling it.**

At the close of the potluck on Friday night we sang together Carrie Newcomer's song. Repeat after me.

If not now...Tell me when... When... Amen...