



RESTORATION

Life in the Spirit Amidst Racism

A Series Booklet by Bethany Community Church

Introduction

At Bethany, we have defined reconciliation as the journey of joining Jesus in restoring broken relationships and systems through truth-telling, repentance, and forgiveness to reveal God's kingdom. This sermon series is a step in our commitment to reconciliation. We invite you to engage racial justice and reconciliation as part of discipleship formation—participating with the Holy Spirit towards restoring the brokenness of racism with God's wholeness.

This booklet is a resource to deepen your engagement with the sermon series through Scripture and prayer. We hope that in each week's content and next step invitations, you'll find conversation partners for individual and group dialogue, prayer, and growth. We trust the Spirit's presence as we take these steps together.

Teylar Greer
Teylar Greer

A Note About the Artwork:

There is an ancient Japanese art form known as Kintsugi, where broken pottery is mended with gold lacquer. The fractured seams are glued back together, revealing where there was brokenness while making the pottery more beautiful and stronger than it was in its original form. Only a master can apply the gold, ensuring that no other breaks occur in the process. Although originally beautiful when unbroken, the restored work has a special beauty and intention.

For this sermon series, the recognition of desolation needed to remain apparent, yet it was important that the healing of that desolation could be awe-inspiring. We live in a fractured environment due to past and present racism. A cracked and barren tree cannot bring life, yet if the Master is at work to heal those wounds, we can expect extraordinary life to come.

The typography in this image happens to be called "New Spirit." We hope these graphics offer an invitation to accept the newness God has in store as we step further towards reconciliation.

Abigail Platter
Abigail Platter

Week 1

Jesus' Reconciling and Recentering Work of Racial Justice

And one of them, a lawyer, asked Jesus a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.' Matthew 22:35-40 (NRSV)

After hundreds of years of racism in our shared history, we have inherited a tangled web of relationships, experiences, ideas, values, and perspectives around race that is profoundly difficult to unravel. This is evident in how difficult it is for many to even talk about racial injustice, as in multiple contexts it has become too big or painful to contemplate. The associated emotions can quickly become overwhelming.

Thankfully, God is in control, and we have been tasked only with being obedient in allowing God to heal what is broken in our own hearts and— from there—allowing God to move us to faithfully love our neighbors. Jesus' words in Matthew 22 are a reminder that love is difficult and complex—and the most important thing we are called to do.

As a white man, one of the most powerful ways I have seen God heal what is broken and empower me to love my neighbors is through the difficult, complex, and important work of racial justice and reconciliation. The process of learning to understand the harm of racism with my mind—to conceptualize—has laid the foundation for me to be able to understand with my heart—to empathize—and respond in love.

To really love someone, you have to understand and empathize with them, something I have seen in my relationship with my wife. If she falls down the stairs, she wants me to come running to check and see if she is ok; this helps her feel my love for her. On the other hand, if I fall down the stairs, I want her to pretend nothing happened so that I can quickly pick myself up and recover from the embarrassment. It was not intuitive for us to know what the other person wanted—and in ignorance, we hurt each other's feelings as we mistakenly did what we thought was loving but was, in fact, the exact opposite of what the other wanted or needed.

With some open dialogue, we developed an understanding of how the other person felt and what they wanted. We were then able to treat each other in a way that made both of us feel loved and respected.

But, what would happen if we didn't take the time to understand the other person and continued in our ignorance to treat them however we saw fit? What if we communicated how we felt and were dismissively ignored? Failing to understand and respond to another's perspective can leave us meaning well but repeatedly hurting others, leading to growing harm and resentment. However, a sensitive word delivered with understanding can make someone feel loved in ways they never even knew were possible.

Love is difficult and complex—and love is the most important thing Jesus calls us to.

I cannot end racism, nor right all the wrongs that have accumulated throughout history. But by God's grace, I can allow God to change my heart. By God's grace, I can learn to understand the experiences and perspectives of those that have and continue to be harmed by the injustice of racism, creating the necessary foundation to faithfully center the love of God in a broken world.

Andrew Parkins
Andrew Parkins

Questions

1. Have you ever been hurt because someone else did not understand you?
2. What happened and what did it bring up for you?
3. Have you ever felt the impact of love that is empowered from an understanding of your unique place in life?
4. What happened and what did it bring up for you?
5. There is effort and intentionality involved in learning to understand and love our neighbor as ourselves. What motivates you to learn about racial justice and reconciliation in the context of faith to better understand and respond to your neighbor? What barriers or resistance may be holding you back?

Invitation

Without judgment, write down the feelings and thoughts that come up for you as you reflect on your motivations, barriers, and resistance to loving your neighbor as yourself through the work of racial justice and reconciliation—perhaps anxiety, fear, pain, shame, longing, hope, excitement, peace. Invite God into what comes up for you. God receives you with full and perfect love, and you can trust God with your heart as you embrace humility and patience in this growth process.

With whom will you share the challenges and opportunities of racial justice and reconciliation that we unpack through this sermon series (and beyond)? This is a road we walk together. Who will be your people as you let Jesus' words about the centrality of love saturate your relationships and mindset—particularly around understanding, empathizing, and responding to people with different racial experiences than your own? Write down the names of these people and pray about how and when to connect in the coming days.

If you have trouble thinking of a specific person or group of people to join with (especially if the topic of racial justice and reconciliation is new to you), reach out and ask for help. There are people and groups at Bethany that would be happy to share in the journey with you.

Email mrjr@churchbcc.org.

Prayer

God, thank You that You know us and respond to us through Your perfect love. We confess our assumptions about and missteps toward our neighbors that have caused heartache and harm. Show us how to receive Your love so that we can love our neighbors well. Jesus, we want to be part of Your restorative work in the world. Amen.

Week 2

Participating in Christ’s Unifying Work with the Spirit

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak. There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native language. Acts 2:4-6 (NIV)

“Could I speak to someone who doesn’t have an accent?” This is what my mom, a native-Spanish speaker who immigrated to the U.S, was asked by a charity donor who she was trying to help as part of her job. When people in the dominant culture of society speak, they expect to be understood—and they expect those in the minority culture to either conform to their culture or leave.

This is true both in our current United States context, as well as in the first century context when God poured out God’s Spirit on the early believers. But this is what makes the Pentecost miracle so surprising: the crowd of Jews from every nation heard the believers speak in their own languages. Rather than making everyone in the diverse crowd understand the Aramaic the believers spoke, the Spirit enabled the listeners to understand in their own language. In this way, the Spirit provides a resounding “No!” to any movement that encourages all Christians to think, speak, and behave alike.

As part of the new covenant of Jesus, the Spirit provides unity in the midst of our diversity, holding us together in the Body of Jesus while simultaneously honoring our distinct cultural backgrounds.

This kind of unity-in-diversity provides a vision for racial reconciliation that compels us to reconsider how we relate with those whose accents, culture, and ethnicity have been marginalized by the dominant culture.

Jonathan Nolasco
Jonathan Nolasco

Questions

1. In the context of racial reconciliation, why does it matter that the Spirit enabled the believers to speak the languages of the crowd rather than

making the crowd understand the common language of the believers?

2. How does the Spirit's unity-in-diversity, as illustrated in Acts 2, help us think about ideas such as "colorblind" society and cultural melting pot? How does it shape our understanding of God's vision for racial justice and reconciliation?

3. How might you have seen or experienced cultural marginalization? How does the work of the Spirit in Acts 2 inform your understanding of what you've seen or experienced? How you might respond moving forward?

Invitation

Watch this two-minute video of a multilingual reading of Acts 2:1-12: *Voices at Pentecost - Acts 2:1-12 in Many Languages*



Reflect on how God may be speaking through God's Word read in multiple languages. Write down what comes up for you as you watch and listen. What feelings, thoughts, and emotions do you experience?

Consider how these feelings, thoughts, and emotions reveal what God may be trying to tell you about your heart, God's Spirit, and your call to be a part of God's reconciling mission.

Prayer

God of unity-in-diversity, thank You for the complexity and beauty of Your diverse creation. We want to honor You in the way that we honor one another, and we confess the ways that we have judged or required others to be like us. Help us to see, hear, and respond to our cultural and ethnic differences with holy expectation for how You will move among us, Holy Spirit. Jesus, we want to be part of Your restorative work in the world. Amen.

Lined writing area for notes and reflections.

Week 3

Continually Evaluating Our Relationships with Others in Light of Christ's Vision for Humanity

While others were preparing the meal, [Peter] had a visionary experience...The voice spoke, 'Never consider unclean what God has made pure'...Peter said, 'I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him.' Acts 10:10b, 15, 34-35 (CEB)

In 2008, I was invited to play bass for a gospel band called "Standard." It is common in my experience to be the only Mexican in a group of mostly Caucasian Americans. But, in this case, I was the only Mexican in a band of all African American men and women leading worship at Pentecostal churches in South Seattle.

The feel and technique of gospel music make it the most difficult style for me to play. Not only was I out of my depth musically, but also culturally. Based on my seminary education, I had presumed that Pentecostal Christians primarily valued having religious experiences at the expense of solid theology. Since I believed I had a solid grasp of theology, I was not open to learning in these communities. I believe God brought me –like God brought Peter in Acts 10–into this reversed context so He could humble and correct me, which happened through a child at one of the concerts.

We were playing a long and technical set of music. Because the people were deep in praise, we kept playing. Right up front was a little boy who was dancing and singing his heart out for Jesus. He was the first to notice I was beginning to struggle and sweat. I did not see him leave the room, but I did see him return with a paper tower for my head and a cup of water for my heart.

To me, that little boy was Jesus saying, "Don't consider unclean what God has made pure."

That little boy–through observing the ways of his community, his elders, and his church–noticed my need and took the initiative to meet it. He served me like Jesus served him. Through that, he was worshipping and doing

what is right in God's eyes–not just by singing but by acting. He didn't need a deeply articulated theology to know how to share the love of Christ.

It was this act that caused me to be repentant for my presumptions and arrogance. It taught me that I need to always be open and curious about the culture of others, especially my brothers and sisters in Christ. It showed me that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another, but favors all who worship and serve Him everywhere–in every culture and nation on earth.



Raoul Perez

Questions

1. How often do you change your mind? Reflect and share/journal about a time you changed your mind about another person or significant belief.
2. Has there been a time where God has worked powerfully through a group you felt negatively or critically towards? What has been your process of reconciling your feelings about the group and God's presence with them?

Invitation

We invite you to reflect on this religious painting from Ukrainian artist, Ivanka Demchuk. It is a depiction of the parable contrasting a Pharisee and tax collector who went to temple to pray, which Jesus told "to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust" (Luke 18:9-14). Ivanka Demchuk's full portfolio can be seen at her website, en.ivankademchuk.com.

As you reflect on the artwork, what stands out to you as you consider the perspective of the Pharisee? Of the tax collector? What do the postures, colors, and textures bring up for you?

Prayer

Holy God, thank You that You are present among Your people and delight in the diversity of the Church. We confess the ways we have not seen others the way You do but have held judgment and comparison in our hearts. Open us up to receive Your unifying and restorative work, Holy Spirit, so that we can receive one another with curiosity and grace. Jesus, we want to be part of Your restorative work in the world. Amen.

Week 4

Following Jesus as He transfigures our Relationships and Structures through the Power of the Spirit.

“For He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” Ephesians 2:14

“But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:24-27

Almost at once when I logged into the Zoom meeting, I could feel something heavy hanging in the air. Something was wrong, but I didn't understand what. As our leader gathered us and led us in prayer, I realized that—once again—a tragedy had taken place affecting the African American community, and I had no idea.

I felt a lot of things in that moment: despair, overwhelming sadness, and another familiar feeling—discomforted guilt. My friends of color knew this had happened—were deeply affected by its happening—and yet until that moment I was unaware, unaffected, and unable to help.

It was a reminder of my privilege to be able to “tune things out”—to not check the news regularly, or to temporarily step away from current events with relatively little risk that I would miss something that deeply impacted my own culture or racial identity.

I was reminded that I will often fall short in my love and affection for my friends who are different from me; there will be many times that I can only sincerely apologize and strive to do better. This can feel overwhelming, and yet: Jesus is our peace. This truth comes to mind when the issues seem too big and it feels like there is so much to learn—when there are so many ways to make mistakes, and I wonder how I could possibly make a difference. I know that Jesus has already broken down the dividing walls—between God and us, between you and me. It is Jesus who demonstrated barrier-breaking love to us and it is God who has put us together in one body so that we can learn to sit alongside and suffer with our brothers and sisters who are suffering.

What does one-body living look like when we are all broken people who have experienced and been affected by the brokenness of racism in our country?

What does one-body living look like when the church body has been fractured by biases and injustice?

Though each of us was born into a broken system and we all will make mistakes or let each other down at times, Jesus is our peace. He will show us the way when we feel lost and overwhelmed, or when we feel familiar, discomforted guilt. Jesus invites us into closeness—not backing away—when we find we've fallen short or lost our way.



Karen Foxley

Questions

1. Read Galatians 2:11-21. How do you think Peter felt when he was confronted by Paul about his inconsistency of welcoming Gentile Christians in table fellowship?

What might have contributed to Peter's behavior?

Can you relate to the experience of Paul or Peter in this story? How?

2. Ephesians 2:14 says of Jesus that “He himself is our peace.” How does this comfort you as you wrestle with a wide topic such as racism?

Can you think of a time when you relied on your own knowledge, goodness, or strength in this area, and came up short?

What did you learn?

3. Even when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, “one-body living” was counter-cultural. Think about the person or people in our church who are the most different from yourself. What makes them different?

Are those differences important? Why?

What would it look like to embrace them as part of the body of Christ together with you?

What would it look like to suffer when they suffer? To rejoice when they are honored?

Week 5

Engaging in the Process of Restorative Justice

[After the response of the early church to see and respond to the Hellenistic widows' experience of inequity in their community,] the word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7 (NRSV)

In community, it is important to be seen. I was seen when the Sunday morning greeter remembered my name, said he was glad to see me, and followed up with a question about something we'd talked about the previous week. I was seen when a preschooler sought me out, ran up to give me a hug, and showed me what he made at Sunday School. They saw me as an individual and made space for me in their lives.

It is also important to be responded to. I was responded to when my friend celebrated with me after I returned from a beautiful trip to Grand Canyon National Park—listening to my stories, asking questions, and looking at pictures. I was responded to when I voiced frustration and hurt about a painful experience at work, and a friend sat with me, reflected back to me, and received my anger and grief with grace. They knew and cared about me, and were with me and for me in significant ways.

As a biracial woman growing in my identity of belonging in the Body of Christ, the way the church sees and responds to ethnicity, culture, and race is particularly close to my heart. Being seen in a way that includes my story and experiences of race is a depth of discipleship I'd never known until seminary. This integration of my racial, ethnic, and cultural particularities—into myself, the church community, the journey of following Jesus—has been restorative and life-changing.

The story in Acts 6 is about seeing and responding. A huge miss was taking place in the early church as the cultural “other” and vulnerable among them weren't getting what they needed. A group of people spoke up to bring attention to it and the whole group responded in an intentional, prayerful, and timely way. Their response contributed to the growth of the community as they witnessed towards who Jesus is and to His gospel of restoration for all people. This is an example of restorative justice.

Restorative justice is a combination of seeing and responding. Both come with challenges. Seeing people and experiences outside ourselves takes

intentionality and presence. Responding to others' joys and pains means giving others space in our lives, including receiving the truth about others' experiences and the impact of our actions and inactions in humility and courage. Both come with beautiful Spirit-fruit as we hold the tension of the unity-in-diversity of the Body, address experiences of heartache and harm, and receive God's grace in the process.

Teylar Greer
Teylar Greer

Questions

1. When was a time that you felt especially seen? Write/share about the experience, noting who was there and what it felt like.
2. When was a time you felt especially responded to? Write/share about the experience, noting who was there and what it felt like.
3. What do you think it would look like for our community to see and respond to one another regarding racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences in increasingly intentional, prayerful, and timely ways like the early church did?

Invitation

This week, pay attention to opportunities to intentionally and prayerfully see and respond. This awareness builds your capacity as a participant in God's restorative justice.

Who is around you?

What do you see them do and hear them say?

How can you participate in God's hospitality and care in your response to their presence and experiences?

This week, pay attention to opportunities to receive being seen and responded to. It takes courage to let others know your story and experience.

Who shows you that you are seen?

What do they do, and what does this look like, sound like, feel like?

Glossary of Terms

Imago Dei

The image of God. God created humanity in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27); humanity, in its diversity of culture and ethnicity, bears the Imago Dei. Jesus shows us what it is to be human.

Ethnicity

A common cultural heritage that is maintained by a group of people that distinguishes them from others through language, social views, common history, rituals, characteristics, customs, and beliefs. This includes shared physical characteristics.

Culture

The customs, beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a particular ethnic, racial, religious, or social group.

Race

A socially constructed and socially empowered term used to identify a people-group based on shared physical characteristics such as hair, eyes, skin color, body shape, etc. The concept of race is not biologically supported but was adopted for social reasons to systematically stigmatize certain people groups as inferior, thus justifying racial slavery, injustice and inequality.

Whiteness

The cultural priority that elevates the ideas, practices and perspectives of people with white pigmentation to become a standardized norm.

Privilege

Systemic favoring, enriching, valuing, validating, and including of certain social identities over others. Individuals cannot "opt out" of systems of privilege; rather these systems are inherent to the society in which we live.¹

White privilege

A system of unearned benefits afforded to people classified as white [or for those whose behavior presents in accordance to the standards of whiteness]. These advantages are personal, cultural and institutional and provide greater access to resources and systemic power.²

Racialized Society

A society where race matters profoundly in regard to differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.³

Racism

A person's or group's negative/harmful beliefs, words, and/or actions towards another person or group because of the person/group's race.

Systemic Racism

Racism becomes systemic when beliefs about a racial group's worth/status is built into laws, like slavery, Native American removal acts, Japanese internment, black codes post-Reconstruction, citizenship requirements, Jim Crow, red lining, etc. Systemic racism leads to injustice, because a racial group or groups are kept from having access to the things they need in the society – dignity, agency, education, jobs, housing, medical care, etc.

Harm

Placing an obstacle in the path of [someone's] pursuit of Christ, the path of human flourishing.⁴

Lament

An individual and corporate expression of sorrow or regret at the reality of our individual and corporate sin and suffering that draws us to repentance, petition, hope, and redemption as we seek God as comforter, healer, restorer, and redeemer.⁵

Justice

Setting things right according to God's righteousness and vision, embodied in Jesus Christ and the whole story of Scripture, fulfilled in the flourishing of all God's creation.⁶

Restorative Practices

Normalizing church cultures of restorative dialogue, apology and forgiveness so that communal expressions of peacemaking can spread into missional peacemaking.⁷

Reconciliation

The journey of joining Jesus in restoring broken relationships and systems through truth-telling, repentance, and forgiveness to reveal God's kingdom.⁸



**For Upcoming Ministry of Racial Justice and
Reconciliation Opportunities, Visit:**

churchbcc.org/mrjrevents

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