Lift Every Voice and Sing,
An Anti-racism Reader for Everyone

Art-In-Action | Faith-In-Action | Love-In-Action | Truth-In-Action | Witness-In-Action

TITLE: PENTECOST 2020 | Media: *Liturgical Watercolor* | Artist: Marcus A. Hong

Edited by Anita Coleman

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Lift Every Voice and Sing: Introductory Reflections

Concerns about racism at the dawn of the twentieth century in the United States have continued to afflict our body politic deep into the twenty-first. Black Emancipation, and its effects in the last century are mirrored by indomitable Black progress, ever-broadening circles of change, and dehumanizing division pervasive in this century.

One of the greatest expressions of the gift and meaning of Blackness comes from the turn of the twentieth century, the Black National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Written by brothers James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamund Johnson, this veritable praise song pays homage to a people moving through the maelstrom of the United States untrammeled, undaunted, and undimmed.

A soaring crescendo of hope, *Lift Every Voice*, gives luminous recognition to the belief of African descended peoples in the United States of America that is not yet, has never been, but one day will be. Composed with faith in the divine and human resolve, the song gives lyric declaration to the depths of Black and human struggle birthing dynamic pathways to freedom. In our own day and time, through forms of protest, policy, prayer and praise, may we to a person and in our congregations and communities be the anti-racist agents of change God seeks. In church and society, love and justice are waiting for our response. The promise of our common humanity – *whosoever* - longs for no less.

In this reader you will find strength and sustenance for the difficult journey to our familial kinship, the commonwealth of God, beloved community. I am honored to be associated with Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and the contributors to this requested resource. Together, may we dare to bear faithful witness, that we are one. Come, let us "lift every voice and sing!"

In the Presence,

Alton B. Pollard, III

Alton B. Pollard, III is President and Professor of Religion and Culture, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

From the Editor

On 5th March, 2020, the first Anti-racism display was launched in E.M. White Library. It was planned to be a permanent display, with rotating items, and highlight Anti-racism resources from our physical print collections, faculty scholarship, Black Church Studies, and the *Anti-racism Digital Library and Thesaurus*.

On 16th March, our residential school, in response to the global pandemic, decided to move to online instruction for the rest of the semester. We prayed, worshiped, worked, learned from home and closed Spring semester with our first-ever virtual Commencement ceremony on 16th May. But even during this period of social distancing, we continued to be aware of the inequities and disparities that COVID19 began to reveal starkly. Then, peaceful protests erupted around the country, triggered by the brutal death of George Floyd. Many members in our community, were already engaged in the struggle for justice. Now, they responded to the needs of the moment.

Lift Every Voice brings together art and photos, stories, prayers, reflections, and protest statements, created and produced by employees and students of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The majority of the contributions began their creative life, organically, during the last week of May, Pentecost Sunday, and June 2020. I am pleased to be able to bring them all together to showcase some of the God-honoring ways for followers of Jesus Christ to engage in anti-racism.

Marcus Hong's original watercolor reminds of God's great love for people who are suffering grave injustices as do the photos taken by Alison Stabler of the Justice for Breona Taylor Louisville protests. This is art-in-action. Stachelle Bussey, boldly, witnesses-in-action, by embodying Jesus, church, and ministering, to the protestors. Heather is faith-in-action as she breaks her silence. Debra Mumford's story of how she came out and embraced liberation is truth-in-action. Despite the pain, there is hope for joy in the Christian imagination of John Randolph. He documents his protest experiences and meditates on the meaning of Jacob's wrestling encounter with the Divine, for our modern struggle. Tyler Mayfield uses a white Jacob to reflect on the same Divine encounter. To build equity, Adrian Baker suggests shrink the oceans as an authentic approach. Alton Pollard III, Kilen Gray, Sandra Moon, Stephen Cook, Justin Reed, Shannon Craigo-Snell, and I reveal yet other ways to be active anti-racists. Ours is anti-racism theology-in-action that is grounded in the *imago Dei*, that all human beings are made in God's image. This is a liberative theology that gives life. No one is oppressed and everyone is empowered to become the people God created us to be. May *Lift Every Voice* bless you.

Anita Coleman is Associate Professor and Director of Library Services, Louisville Seminary.

Artist's Statement on the Liturgical Watercolor, *Pentecost 2020*

Marcus Hong

"You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored." - Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail."

"If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never does and it never will." - Frederick Douglass, from the "West Indian Emancipation" speech, 1857.

I recently reread the Pentecost narrative in *Acts* chapter 2. As if for the first time, I recognized how disturbing and disruptive the event must have been. There is a sound like "a VIOLENT rushing wind." (NRSV) Flame appears above the disciples. People think the disciples are drunk.

In this chaotic moment, Peter addresses the crowd, quoting the prophets:

> "In the last days it will be, God declares,
>
> that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
>
> and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
>
> and your young men shall see visions,
>
> and your old men shall dream dreams.
>
> Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
>
> in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
>
> and they shall prophesy.
>
> And I will show portents in the heaven above
>
> and signs on the earth below,
>
> blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
>
> The sun shall be turned to darkness
>
> and the moon to blood,
>
> before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
>
> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (NRSV)

Reading this, I thought about how the Spirit might be moving today, rushing passionately [violently?] through our lives. This is the year 2020, a year of vision, when people young and old across the globe are striving to see the dream of a truly just society become a reality. Peter, speaking thousands of years ago, quoting texts a thousand years even further in his past, does not excise blood and fire from the reality of prophecy. In any age, it seems, for Peter, for Frederick Douglass, for Martin Luther King, Jr., power structures must be disrupted in order for justice to take root and flourish.

In the current season of Pentecost, in the year 2020, millions around the world are participating in disruptive, sometimes even property-destroying direct action. Confederate statues are being torn down. Bricks have been thrown. Protestors are facing violent retaliation from police. This is disturbing to many. It has caught our attention. It cannot be ignored. It has forced to the level of society-wide consciousness the reality of racism and police brutality.

While scrolling through news photos of protests in my current hometown of Louisville, KY, I was struck by the image of protestors gathered in a town square. Behind them sat a church building, closed. We are facing what many have called the double pandemic of COVID19 and systemic racism. In this chaotic moment, we face both a physical and a moral struggle.

The building may be closed, but the Church, in the power of the Spirit, is still active.

Many Christians have heard that God met Elijah as a still, small voice, a whisper barely heard. Yes, God is often the still, small voice. But, *Acts* 2 reminds us, God also speaks in the rushing wind and with tongues of fire.

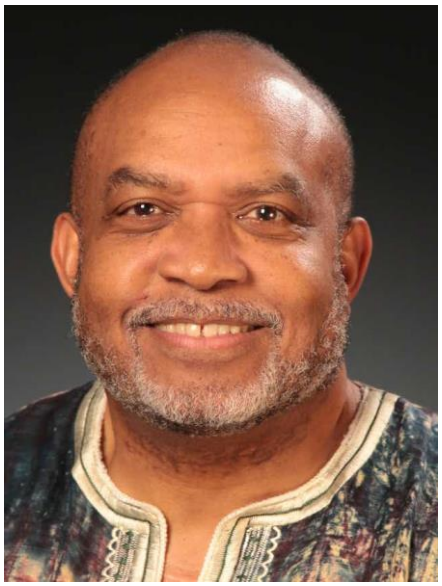
Am I listening? Will I be ready to follow where the Spirit leads? Will I risk being disruptive? Will I risk being disrupted?

Marcus A. Hong is Director of Field Education and Assistant Professor of Practical Theology Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

From the Louisville protests. Photo by Alison Stabler / Alie D Photography

When there is a knee on our necks, anger is an act of righteous resistance

Alton B. Pollard III



For 400 years and more it has been going on in the land colloquially known as America. Black life disrespected, expendable and cheap. Beaten, raped, stabbed, shot, dismembered, lynched, burned and dragged to death. The violence of it all. The brutality of it all. The protection of it all. The justification of it all. The sheer calculus of it all. The colonization of black lives continues uninterrupted and with little consequence.

There is no safe place. And we are angry.

Breonna Taylor was in the sanctuary of her own home in the early hours of night when Louisville law enforcement made their deadly raid. Another black woman was killed, never to rise again in this mortal frame. Kenneth Walker, the love of her life, was initially arrested and jailed for defending their home in the ill-fated raid before later being released. Family and friends, loved ones and allies want to know what possible pretext could exist for the continued mistreatment and killing of black lives. There is none. Multiracial community, in intersectional witness, filled downtown streets in protest.

I live in Louisville, and I am angry.

Ahmaud Arbery was jogging while black through a neighborhood in Brunswick, Georgia, when a self-proclaimed citizen's arrest turned deadly. He didn't live far from where he was followed, filmed, accosted and shot twice in the chest. It didn't matter. Another mother's son, another grieving father's child, another black life gone, in a world turned callous and cold to his dreams and possibilities. After video of the shootings emerged, arrests were made. My beloved comes from that southeast region of coastal Georgia, less than an hour away. Multiracial coalitions against murder have risen in powerful protest, and I am angry.

George Floyd is the Minneapolis man who died in police custody mere days ago. The video is harrowing. So many of them are. Still, justice is not guaranteed. What this one shows is a police officer kneeling, pressing down on the nape of Floyd's neck, the back of his head, an authority figure, oblivious to bystanders' entreaties to stop. For several agonizing minutes, handcuffed on his stomach, nose bleeding, body ground into the pavement, Floyd gasped for air, pleaded for breath, and called out to his deceased mother with his dying words. Across the nation, the people are taking to the streets.

I am a black man from Minnesota, and I am angry.

The world has not changed much since the pandemic. In some ways, perhaps, it has. Tragically, the coronavirus has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of people the world over. More lives will doubtless be lost to us. The world of pandemic has infected, impacted and decimated countless millions more. Engrained social inequities in our health care systems have especially been exposed.

We are sore distressed. We grieve for the children of God everywhere, lost to our world too soon.

Many people yearn for a “return to normal.” Others speak of a "new normal.” I am not interested in either scenario. Racism, that most common of American diseases, is the other viral strain currently ravaging our society. It is scarcely mentioned in polite company, except when the people raise their voices in protest. The convergence of pandemic and black suffering, from the denial and absence of health care to heightened rates of death and harassment on public streets, is not something many white Americans want to hear or accept. It is profoundly true.

Resistant to the winds of change, American racism continues to rear its ugly head. Differently presented in white supremacist and respectable white culture, it is no less destructive and dehumanizing. Debilitating to our national health and well-being, it powerfully resurfaces time and time again to expose our country’s self-inflicted and deep-seated wounds. In our transgressions, the obsession with hierarchy and arrogance of empire, we have made black communities especially susceptible to disease and death. We have exported our brand of racial death and social contradiction to the world.

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Originally published in The Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, 30 May 2020.

From the Louisville protests. Photo by Alison Stabler / Alie D Photography

A Pentecost prayer: Beyond acknowledging privilege, allyship, and solidarity to ending systems where “I can’t breathe” never happens again

Anita Coleman

“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.” #BlackLivesMatter

After acknowledging privilege there is often little to no discussion of power, wealth, or material resources, and very little discussion or movement towards how one can or should organize themselves to overthrow white supremacy, develop an anti-racist voice and identity, and end the oppression of racism. Some people become ‘Allies’ but very few discuss all that needs to be changed with regard to systems of power and privilege. Will you make a determination today, the Holy Day of Pentecost that you will do more?

This Sunday is when we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples, 50 days after Jesus left. The Advocate that Jesus promised was now with the disciples to guide them. The Day of Pentecost is also the day the Christian Church was founded. The Advocate is with you, me, the church. It is time now for all who acknowledge privilege to live beyond acknowledgement. Time for Allies to do more. May we step up to the task with confidence. The Spirit of God is in us, individually, collectively guiding us. May we unite in the cause of justice to end the systems that have caused so many to say “I can’t breathe.” Breath of God, help us. Amen.

Beyond praying this with me, what will you do regularly, consistently, faithfully, to end the racist systems so that not another person will ever again have to say, “I can’t breathe?”

Anita Coleman is Associate Professor of Bibliography and Research and Director, E.M. White Library. She is also the founder and curator of the Anti-racism Digital Library, endracism.info.

The long fight for justice: A freedom narrative from the Louisville Protests

John Randolph

Photo: John Randolph in the Men's March June 6, 2020, Louisville, KY.

The unseasonably hot spring day sapped our energy as we marched and protested through Downtown Louisville. This particular protest called for the sole participation of the black men from the neighborhoods and community. It was a show of force. Many of us wore our Sunday best, in recognition of our ancestors' proud civil rights lineage, or perhaps, to play the game of respectability politics for the news cameras, onlookers, and police. The caution of social distancing, due to the threatening pandemic, was ever-present, but the injustice stemming from police brutality permeated our psyche even more. There was no way we could stay home and shelter ourselves from the dangerous Coronavirus when a more dangerous adversary remained at our doorstep. There was a fight going on.

Once again, black people's fight for justice was the central topic of dispute. It was more important than even the fight against a deadly virus or sickness. On that hot spring morning, we

were there for George Floyd, the man who lay helpless as a Minneapolis officer kneeled on his neck until his life departed from his body. We were there for Breonna Taylor, the woman who was slaughtered in her own home by Louisville Metro Police in the middle of the night. We were there for David McAtee, the Louisville man recently killed by the Kentucky National Guard - who were activated after multi-night protests - acting as a hyper-menacing militarized police power. We walked through Louisville KY, in silence.

The power of our presence spoke louder than any chant or slogan. At the end of the march, we kneeled in the street for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, the length of time George Floyd's executioner tortured and snuffed out his life. The burning asphalt ripped through my thin dress pants. The sweat seeped through my dress shirt and suit jacket. The kneeling position slowly became uncomfortable. It was not as uncomfortable, though, as the suffering of black people who somehow survived for 400 years in racist America. The sun was brutal and unyielding on our bodies. Yet, it was not as unyielding as the fight against racism and white supremacy has been.

The men were told to remain silent as we kneeled for those eight minutes and forty-six seconds.

Still, out of the silence one man shouted, "I am George Floyd!"

Another man yelled, "I am David McAtee"!

"I am James Taylor"!

"I am Michael Newby"!

You probably do not know those last two names. In 2002, Mr. James Taylor a 50- year old black man shot was killed by Louisville Metro Police Department even though his arms were handcuffed behind his back. In 2004, Mr. Michael Newby, a 19-year old black man was shot in the back and killed by an undercover LMPD officer after a so-called botched drug deal. Nobody has been convicted in either case. The struggle for accountability of police brutality is a long and draining experience for the black citizens of Louisville.

Being a minister, I routinely ponder on all things theological. As I kneeled on the blazing asphalt, that day, I mediated on the *Hebrew* scriptures and Jacob's epic wrestling match in the book of *Genesis*. The *Genesis* narrative has been extensively written, preached, commented upon and parsed throughout the generations. I wondered. What does Jacob's age-old struggle have to say to our modern struggle? Undoubtedly, the Old Testament narrative helps scholars understand ancient Hebrew origin beliefs about history and culture. Might the story also give us modern inspiration and understanding about what we are facing today? Jacob wrestles with a supernatural mystery man, and later declares as going toe-to-toe with the Almighty God. The Bible hardly describes the encounter except to mention that the two men wrestled all-night long.

What does it mean to be in such a long fight? It must have been the most physically taxing encounter Jacob had ever experienced. I imagine in that fight Jacob underwent moments of determination and peril. There must have been times when he felt like he was winning and other

times when he was losing. There were surely times of hopelessness and times of invigorated faith.

Just like infamous ancient wrestling matches, the fight for freedom is a long enigmatic journey. There may not be a clear winner and loser. If you read carefully, you will see that Jacob emerged from the encounter both "blessed" and debilitated. There is no doubt in my mind that the fight for freedom in America will be won and result in a wonderful new way of living and loving one another. Yet, the Bible tells us that this struggle may also leave us scarred and in need of therapeutic healing methods for the mind, body, and spirit.

One thing is clear: Something must change. It has been 100 days since Sister Breonna Taylor was slaughtered in her home. As of today, only one of Breonna Taylor's three killers have been fired from their jobs. No one has been charged or arrested. Louisville is still in the fight. We are preparing to march on the state capital of Frankfort to demand justice. Sometimes it doesn't seem like we are winning, but we fight on. We have been beatdown and tear gassed but we fight on.

Dr. Cornel West said, "You don't know what it is to be human if you have never wrestled with despair, but never allow that despair to have the last word."

We will never give up!

After Jacob emerged from the encounter, he was given a new name. He may have looked like the same man, but he was changed. The Bible says when daybreak came, he was named Israel. Black Louisville and Black America have had to fight and struggle for every bit of justice. We fight for Sister Breonna and we will never forget. I heard the choir sing, "it will be all over in the morning". After fighting in this country for so long, morning is coming, and justice will prevail. Through our blood and tears we will continue to fight.

Joy comes in the morning and joy comes in the mourning.

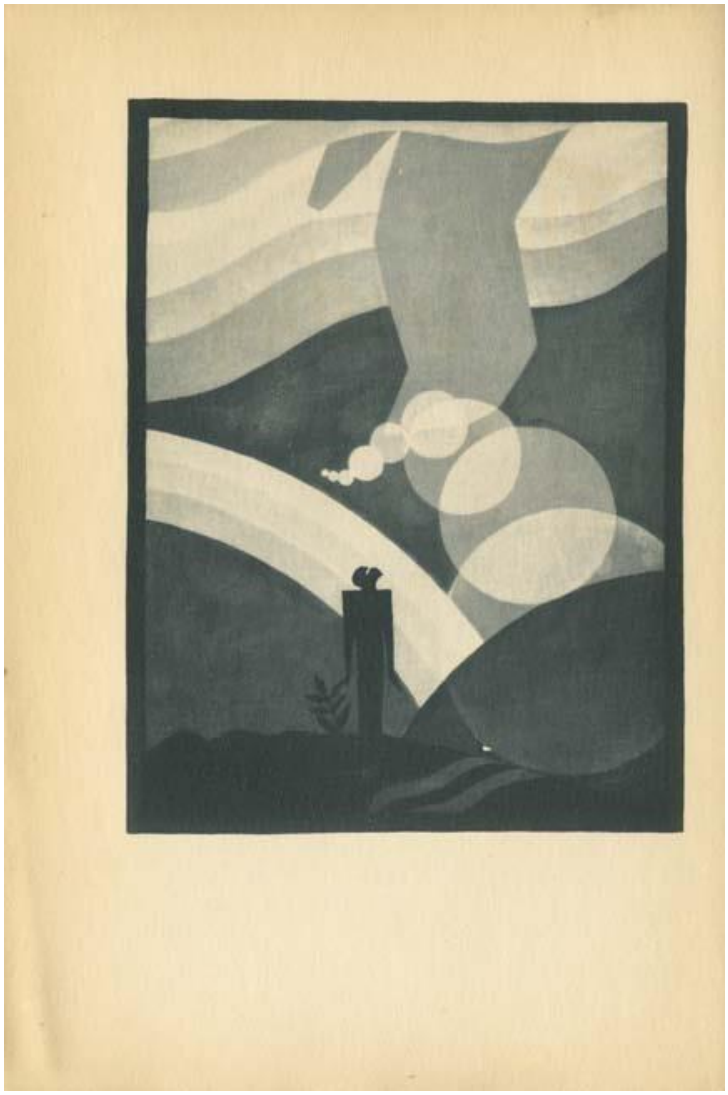
Originally written 23 June, 2020. The Men's March took place on 6 June, 2020. The March in Frankfort referenced above happened 25 June, 2020.

John Randolph was born and raised in Louisville, KY. He is a 2nd year MDiv student at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Related reading: John Randolph provided the opening prayer at the Louisville Black Lives Matter 'Healing Ceremony' event on 31 May, 2020. You can read about it from *The Courier-Journal* website. https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/2020/05/31/louisville-protests-black-lives-matter-holds-healing-ceremony-sunday/5302448002/

Reflections on Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Steve Cook



"These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created." When reading this story of creation, I like to focus on the last line as the place to start instead of where it actually starts – the "in the beginning" part. Focus on the beginning-ness of Genesis 1 has often led to coopting it for purposes it never had in mind. That Genesis 1:1 and the first half of Genesis 2:4 share the common phrase – "the heavens and the earth" – also encourages me to read the ending with the beginning. It might be helpful to know that some consider the phrase "the heavens and the earth" a poetic device by which two contrasting or complementary words designate a totality. With this phrase Genesis 1:1 and 2:4a speak of the creation not just of heaven and earth but of everything in between. What the concluding verse inserts that is not in the first is the word "generations" – a word that Genesis will continue to use often as it narrates a story of God's relationship with humans. The Hebrew word for "generations" – toledot – is a

noun based on the verb "to give birth" also used for nouns like "child" and "midwives." Toledot. Our Genesis text sets in motion a generational epic that involves everything God made.

Generations of readers have been drawn to the language of goodness that abounds in this morning's text. The word "good" appears seven times. At each stage of commanding something new, God looks, and all is good. That goodness has been inspiring to many – an affirmation of God and creation, ourselves included. For generations, questions have also been asked about how we can speak of the good in creation when so much seems bad. One of the ironies scholarship has noted about this morning's reading is that while it stands at the head of Genesis and the Bible, it was probably written later than the chapter that follows. This account of creation is often considered in light of the final production of the Hebrew Bible after Israel had been through the devastation and trauma of the Babylonian exile. As a text that looks back through generations of suffering, this Genesis text is audacious and bold to speak with assurance of God's ultimate power and goodness.

Generations of readers have drawn inspiration from Genesis 1 to affirm life, dignity, and worth when systemically oppressed. Its culmination in verse 27 with the creation of human beings in God's image has been especially important for those seeking justice. This morning, I want to share with you "The Creation" by Aaron Douglas, a painting used to illustrate James Weldon Johnson's poem of the same name in *God's Trombones* from 1927. For generations, African Americans had endured chattel slavery. With emancipation did not come full citizenship and rightful place in U.S. life. Instead, there was generations of lynching, segregation, redlining, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration. Douglas' visioning of God's created humanity as black, not white like on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, stands in a long tradition of reading the Genesis text as both affirmation and protest. For our moment, we must recognize how "The Creation" bears witness that Black Lives Matter in the cosmic order of God's creation. To name Black Lives as integral to the goodness of God's creation does not deny that all humans are made in the image of God. Rather, it recognizes the destruction to God's good creation done by generations of racist actions, policies, ideologies, and structures. Generations of white silence, ignorance, and apathy, too. To say Black Lives Matter calls us, members of the Episcopal Church, to commit to antiracist practices and the dismantling of white supremacy to honor all that God has made. May our generation be the one to celebrate finally the full and awesome goodness of God's creation. Amen.

Aaron Douglas Photo Credits: https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/johnson/johnson.html

Steve Cook is Registrar and Associate Dean of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. This reflection was used in the Zoom Worship of Episcopal Church of the Advent, Louisville, KY, Sunday after Pentecost.

Kentucky is better than recent events suggest

Kilen K. Gray

"Strange Fruit" is a song popularized by the late Billie Holiday in 1939. This song metaphorically describes the victim of lynching to a fruit hanging in a tree. The Equal Justice Initiative estimates that from 1877 to 1950, approximately 4,084 African Americans were lynched in America. The horrors of lynching in the Deep South of America did not escape Kentucky. During this same period, the number of known lynchings that took place is 169. The trauma inflicted upon generations of African Americans is such that most elders of African American families cannot bring themselves to speak about it.

On Sunday, May 24, a rally was held at the Kentucky governor's mansion to protest Gov. Andy Beshear's efforts to curb the progression of the global coronavirus pandemic among the citizens of the Commonwealth. During the rally, some of the group decided to hang Gov. Beshear in effigy on one of the trees outside of the governor's mansion.

Throughout our collective racial history, various white individuals and groups have chosen to use lynching as part of political speech or expressions of jovial jest. According to NAACP.org, once blacks were given their freedom, many people felt that freed blacks were getting away with too much freedom and felt that they needed to be controlled. Lynchings, therefore, were a popular way of resolving some of the anger that whites had in relation to the free blacks.

This practice along with slavery is a stain on America's soul! We now have an opportunity to demonstrate the love that we are all commanded as Christians to do… "love our neighbor as we love ourselves."

Lastly, in the words of Gov. Beshear, "We're better than this, Kentucky!"

Kilen K. Gray is Dean of Community Life, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Originally published in The Ledger Independent, 13 June 2020

White silence is violence. My silence is broken.

Heather Thum-Gerber

My knee is grinding into the sandpaper asphalt. It is high noon and the sun is beating down. Helicopters are buzzing overhead. Cars are diverted to a different road. I am kneeling in the center of the street in front of the Louisville police headquarters with 100 other protesters. We are silent. For 8 minutes and 46 seconds, we hold our stance; the same amount of time George Floyd's neck was forced down by an officer's knee.

On June 11, 2020, I was one of the protesters gathered with Louisville Showing Up for Racial Justice (LSURJ) to end white silence on the topic of racism. Ironically, we chose to be silent to end the silence.

Silence seemed to be the perfect place for us to start that day. Silence has been the narrative for white Americans on racism for decades. It is white silence that has allowed for perpetual income inequality for people of color. It is white silence that has allowed for police brutality to repeatedly turn to murder in black communities. It is white silence that has allowed for systemic racism to thrive in every institution. White silence has fed into it all.

The silence that day of a predominately white group reminds me of a different person's silence. Barely a blip in the Biblical story they are a character so small one might gloss over their verse entirely. It is the centurion standing silently by as Jesus died.

We know nothing of the centurion other than he was standing by watching the three men be executed. In my mind, he was an average person. He was born into a certain status in society, much like we all are, and living life in the best way he knew how. His status granted him certain privileges as well as duties. These qualities do not sound unfamiliar to white Americans today. Which is why the centurion is so relatable.

Just like the centurion stood silently watched Jesus on the cross and white Americans have stood by silently watching as people of color have been crucified.

Fortunately, the biblical story does not end in silence. The centurion proclaims, "Certainly this man was innocent." In the centurion's words, he is calling out injustice.

As I reflect on the demonstration in downtown Louisville, I am reminded of my own silence toward the suffering and oppression experienced by people of color. Much like the centurion I have stood by watching in silence. However, the centurion did not stay in his silence I cannot stay in mine. As the 8 minutes and 46 seconds came to a close it was time for me to proclaim, "Certainly this man was innocent!" It was time to stand up and it was time to be loud. No longer could I kneel idly in the center of the road. No longer could I ignore my surroundings nor block the natural flow of life. We stood up and marched down the street bellowing at the top of our lungs, "What do we want? Justice. When do we want it? Now." Our silence was broken.

My actions that day I call out to my fellow white Christians, white friends, white acquaintances, and white Americans to stand up and proclaim injustice. Remembering too that the story does not end at the proclamation for resurrection is yet to come.

Photos contributed by Heather.

Heather Thum-Gerber is a graduate student, MDiv 2022, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

From the Louisville protests. Photo by Alison Stabler / Alie D Photography

Now is not a time for silence

Sandra Moon

I live one mile from downtown Louisville. My heart is heavy because of all the chaos and violence and destruction in my own community and in communities all across the U.S. And on top of that, for the continued stress and illness and death related to COVID-19. It seems that all the negativity around us stems from the same foundation — fear. Fear of the unknown, the unfamiliar, the different-than-me, the other.

Sadly, we can't blame COVID-19 for the pervasive racism that exists and is built into the fabric of the United States. I don't mean to say this as any kind of partisan political statement. I know that some pastors shy away from talking about racism from the pulpit, but God calls us to speak against injustice. It is our responsibility as Christians to see racism for what it is — a great evil that we cannot ignore. A great evil that we must strongly condemn and fight against.

I know that many people have condemned the riots that broke out from the protests in Louisville and other cities. Like probably most of you, I don't like to see destruction in any form. For me, a quote from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., delivered during a speech on the midst of the Civil Rights Movement in 1967, provided a helpful framework: "Certain conditions continue to exist in our society, which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the negro-- poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity. And so in a real sense, our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention."

I think this quote and understanding of riot as a language particularly struck me as I was preparing my Pentecost sermon - when we remember the Holy Spirit coming down as a flame and blessing Jesus' disciples with the gift of tongues. The Pentecost story teaches us that in order to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, we can't expect others to learn our language. We have to be able to speak theirs.

The Tower of Babel story is often juxtaposed with the Pentecost story. At some point in your lives, you've probably heard of this story interpreted in this way: Because humanity, in its pride, sought to raise itself to God's level, God cursed them by confusing them with multiple languages so that they were scattered across the earth. In this understanding of the text, diverse languages are seen as a punishment from God. And often in this same vein, the Pentecost story in Acts is often understood to be a reversal of the God's curse in Genesis—being blessed with tongues is now a gift, not a curse. But what if God's language divide in this Genesis story was not done as a punishment, but as path to a blessing? And what if the Pentecost story is understood as not a reversal of what happened in Genesis, but a continuation of the blessing?

In commenting on the Tower of Babel story, biblical scholar and New Testament professor at Princeton Theological Seminary Dr. Eric Barreto describes that the building of a high tower doesn't seem to be a problem, but that the issue seems to be the motivation of these people—they say "let us build ourselves a city and a tower…otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Barreto describes that the issue seems to be the nature of the future they are trying to secure for themselves. In the Garden of Eden story, God charges humankind to "fill the earth" and "have dominion over it" meaning that we are to care for all of creation all over the earth. But the people in Babel are focused on preserving their community in isolation of this divine charge. The people of Babel are saying "who cares about the rest of the world?" So what does God do? God acts in a way so that their languages are confused. God breaks down their unification in order that the charge to "fill the earth" may be fulfilled. Barreto describes, "God will promote diversity at the expense of any form of unity that seeks to preserve itself in isolation from the rest of creation… because true unity is forged by getting beyond one's own kind on behalf of the larger world."

What are the ways that we are guilty of focusing too much on preserving our own communities or our own way of life? In what ways do we choose to remain in our safe spaces, out of fear? What are the boundaries that we create that isolate ourselves from others? What are the voices from "others" that go unheard, or that we intentionally try to not understand?

In Acts, we learn that Jesus' early followers treated the festival of Pentecost as a sort of birthday of the Church. In Acts 2:1, we learn that during the celebration, the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem in one place. And what does God do? God takes this community gathered together in one place and gives them the gift of speaking different languages so that they can go out and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those outside of their circle. The joy of the Gospel is found in being in the world with people who are different from us.

If in the Tower of Babel story God uses language to push us on the path towards blessing, the story of Pentecost is a continuation of the blessing. God blesses those who were closest to Jesus with the ability to go out into the world and to share the Good News with others in a way they can understand. This gift lets the disciples meet others where they are, and love and value them for who they are. Lutheran Pastor Rev. Amy Allen describes, "language is certainly about being understood and understanding. It's about learning and communication. But it's also about so much more than that. It's about hearing and being heard. It's about seeing another person for who they are as a unique and valued child of God."

The language that God is calling us to learn right now in this moment is the language of anti-racism. What can you do to answer this call? How can you be an ally to people of color? I don't have all the answers, but Sojourners Magazine published a piece with some helpful information on how white people can be good allies. Some advice they offered was to listen more, talk less; to educate yourself about systemic racism in this country. Read Michelle Alexander's The New Jim Crow, TaNehisi Coates' Between the World and Me, and Claudia Rankine's Citizen. Use your voice and influence to direct the folks that walk alongside you in real life toward the voice of someone that is living a marginalized/disenfranchised experience. Now is not a time for silence. We need to be vocal against racism. We are called to learn the language of anti-racism as a faithful response to the gospel. Now is the time to do the work, and I pray that we all work hard to respond to this call.

Editor's note: Rev. Sandra Moon is currently serving as guest pastor at Lebanon United Presbyterian Church. She is the director of admissions and student engagement at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

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From the Louisville protests. Photo by Alison Stabler / Alie D Photography

Coming out stories

By Debra J. Mumford

While growing up as a Missionary Baptist preacher's kid in Eastern North Carolina, I was conditioned to believe that being gay was a sin for which people are sentenced –by a good God - to burn in the eternal fires of hell. I was taught not only that sexual acts between same gender-loving people were sinful, but even having feelings of sexual attraction to people of the same gender was a sin against God. In addition to being taught this very oppressive biblical and theological perspective, I was also taught that as an African American being gay was absolutely shameful. Being black in the world and having to contend with whiteness in all of its manifestations is hard enough. Adding homosexuality into the mix not only brings shame upon LGBTQ+ people, but also upon their families both inside and outside of African American communities. This combination of forces can cause some LGBTQ+ African Americans to internalize feelings of complete and total unworthiness. White people don't like them because they are black. Black people don't like them because they are gay. Even God does not love them because they are gay (according to some oppressive theologies). Shame for some LGBTQ+ African Americans is very complex and very real.

Shame is a feeling of internal despair or disgrace brought about by one's' own actions or someone else's. In African American communities in general, and African American religious communities in particular, acting in ways that bring shame upon oneself and one's community is to be avoided at all cost. It is with avoiding shame in mind that I tried for many years to date men. I tried to deny the reality that I did not emotionally connect with men. I tried to deny that it was with women that I could breathe – truly exhale and be myself.

Therefore, it was not until I was well into my thirties, after I attended seminary, after I began working full-time at a different seminary, and after I met the woman who would become my life partner that I first came out to anyone. Learning about liberation theology in seminary helped me to begin thinking about liberating myself. Working with people at the second seminary who actually celebrated the lives and loves of LGBTQ+people helped me to make my thoughts about liberating myself a reality.

The first time I came out, I did so silently – in writing – to my parents. I thought a lot about how to come out to them without having to endure the looks of profound disappointment, words of utter condemnation, and feelings of abject shame. To put it simply, I was afraid to face them and have the conversation. So, I decided to come out via letter. I went home for a visit and left a coming out letter on the kitchen table upon leaving. Even though I believed God loved me unconditionally, I could not bring myself to have a conversation with my parents about homosexuality. My mother found the letter, read it and shared it with my father. Her prediction for my life as an out, gay person was that I would not be blessed.

One of my most delightful coming out experiences was with my coworkers at Pacific School of Religion (PSR). PSR is one of the most open and affirming seminaries in the country. Just for fun, I came out to my co-workers, not with one-on-one conversations, but with a wedding invitation. My partner and I invited some of our favorite people to a wedding at the PSR chapel. We knew that they would be a bit surprised when they received the invitation. We also knew that

they would show up for the wedding ready to celebrate our commitment to love each other for life. It was quite a party.

In one of my most consequential coming out experiences, I came out verbally and professionally. In 2006, I interviewed for the position of Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (LPTS) in Louisville, Kentucky. At the time, the Presbyterian Church USA was in turmoil over whether or not to ordain LGBT clergy. I went through the very rigorous two-and-a-half-day interview process. On the last day, in a one-on-one conversation with the dean, I came out. I told him I was gay and in a long-term committed relationship (inference being "if you hire me, she's coming with me"). I am now in my fourteenth academic year at LPTS. In July, I will assume the role of Dean of the Seminary.

I thank God that my mother's prediction of an unblessed life has not come true. Coming out was one of the best things I have ever done. For me, coming out was truth-in-action. Coming out was my declaration that I wanted to live an authentic life by not hiding who I am or whom I love. Coming out was also my declaration that as an African American woman I reject all forms of oppression including the oppression of shame. By coming out, even with a letter, I was saying I am proud (or at least on my way to being proud) of who I am. I pray that one day, all people, and especially all African Americans, have the support and affirmation they need to come out of the closet.

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Organize the Church

Stachelle Bussey

There's a serious deficiency in your theology if you believe that every change happened by prayer only. It requires prayer and action. We don't need religious punks, we need radical action. Prayer and works. #faithandaction

Jesus literally came to upset every system of oppression there is; that's our job, to be with the people.

Stachelle Bussey, entrepreneur and owner of the non-profit, The HopeBuss, is a May 2020 Master of Divinity graduate, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Race in the Prophets and Writings

Justin Reed

Race and Difference

There are many ways in which texts in the Prophets and Writings negotiate similarities and differences between people groups in order to articulate a sense of communal identities. Examples include the broader worldview expressed in the Hebrew language itself as exhibited in the application of ethnonyms (such as "the children of Israel" *bənê yiśrāʾēl* or "the Moabite" *hammôʾăbîyâ*) and key terms for groups of people (such as "kindred" *môledet*, "house of" *bêt*, "tribe" *maṭṭeh* or *šēbet*, "descendants of" *bənê*, etc.). Other examples can be drawn from the specific ways in which passages construct group identities through expressions of origins and migration (Neh 9:7-37), genealogical provenance (1 Chon 1-9), vernacular language (2 Kgs 18:26-28 || Isa 36:11-13), collective violence (Josh 11:21-23; Judg 21), cultural practices (Josh 5:2-3; 2 Sam 1:20), cultic practices (1 Kgs 13:33-34), a common destiny (Esth 4:13), and more. Although scholars can sometimes take biblical texts that relate collective identity and try to map this data onto some concept of race, this task is complicated by various factors including scholarly assertions that race is a biologically fictional trait, scholarship suggesting that race has only developed as a meaningful taxonomy in modern times, and contested definitions of the concept of race.

In modern scholarship, one frequently comes across the assertion that race is a modern social construct, by which the speaker/writer intends to point out (among other things) that theories of racial classification involve treating arbitrarily selected traits of phenotypic human diversity as if they cohere with some fundamental divisions in society even though biological evidence does not support these conclusions. Since biological sciences do not corroborate racial theories, these researchers assert that a person's racial classification is contingent upon their location in a specific social setting in terms of time and space and the politics therein. Thus, although our understandings of race tend to treat identity as fundamentally divisible into categories of essential (or fixed) biological inheritance, the fact is that this classification is not stable or even a "real" science (even though it has real social consequences for people's lived experiences) (Kidd 2006, 3-18). With this idea of race as a social construct, one might be inclined to believe that since race has been socially constructed differently in various contexts, one could find the social construction of "race" in the biblical world and/or the biblical texts. However, one obstacle to such an endeavor is a trove of scholarship that traces race as an idea that developed gradually (from earlier taxonomies of difference) to be identified as its own distinct category only in modern times (Baum 2006; Carter 2008; Fredrickson 2002; Goldenberg 2003; Goldenberg 2018; Hannaford 1996; Kidd 2006; Nash 2003; Orkin and Joubin 2019).

Even while acknowledging the novelty of racial classification (and concomitant racism) in the modern era, there are scholars like Benjamin Isaac who argue that Greco-Roman writings seem to exhibit racist or proto-racist ideas on account of how modern racism is similar to Classical concepts of environmental determinism that develops permanently unbridgeable differences, the

natural inferiority of "others," and their resultant status as natural slaves (Isaac 2004). Of course, any such argument about the presence or absence of ideas of race or racism in any cultural production is completely contingent on a contested definition of race and racism such that a scholar with a different definition could summarily discount another's analysis. However, David Goldenberg follows Isaac's definition in order to show that ideas of difference and prejudice in the Hebrew Bible do not resemble modern race and racism like Classical sources do (Goldenberg 2009). Other works have made a similar point about race and racism being absent from the Hebrew Bible even if there are rare examples of instances that resonate with later ideas of race and racism (Goldenberg 2003; Sadler 2005).

The following survey of biblical texts demonstrates how specific concepts related to modern ideas of race might be explored in relation to texts in the Prophets and Writings. In each section one can see how ideas in biblical texts intersect with some aspect of "othering" that has been important in scholarship concerning modern theories of race even if the ideas in biblical passages do not come together to form a biblical racial ideology.

Biblical Texts

Genealogies

In 1684, Francois Bernier was the first scholar to use "race" as a hierarchical classification of humanity into major divisions with a primary focus on biologically heritable physical traits (Baum 2006, 52). Even though his treatment of race is not identical to the subsequent development of scientific racism over the centuries that followed, Bernier's classification of humanity is distinct enough from what comes before it (because his treatment of the physical and biological characteristics as foundational to human classification deviated from earlier focuses on religion, morals, language, etc.) that Bernier's *Nouvelle Division de la Terre* tends to be treated as a major turning point in the subsequent development of modern racial thought (Stuurman 2000; West 1982, 154-162).

Some interpreters see the tracing of all humanity according to the three sons of Noah in 1 Chronicles 1:5-28 (which reduplicates a genealogy from Gen 10 with minor differences) as a sign that at least one tradition among the ancient Israelites conceptualized the many people groups of their world as fitting into a small number of categories somewhat akin to the racial division of the world into five types of people by Francois Bernier and others. Since the biblical writers did not explicitly label the criteria of organization for this genealogy, interpreters have offered a variety of hypotheses for the rationale behind which peoples are affixed to a specific son of Noah. The hypothesis that physical features divide Noah's sons can be found in some commentaries from a bygone era of more explicit white supremacist racial sciences (Priest 1853, 33). Other theories of division have continued to hold some currency in more recent scholarship: language families, geographic distribution, geo-political alliances, socio-cultural differences, socio-economic structures, or a combination of factors. As with the modern history of racist taxonomies, scholars often presume that there is a hierarchical stereotyping of an "othered" people group (the descendants of Ham) as exemplifying the worst characteristics including sexual deviance (Sarna 1989, 64; Steinmetz 1991, 195; Sternberg 1998, 110, 119, 144).

However, other scholars counter that close scrutiny of the biblical narratives do not corroborate any construction of difference—let alone a hierarchical differentiation based on sexual deviancy—according to the divisions of Noah's three sons (Reed 2020, 54-69). In fact, the genealogies of Noah's sons may serve the opposite purpose: to show the relatedness of all humanity as a single family (Crüsemann 2002; Mbuvi 2016).

Genocide

Texts of genocide in the Hebrew Bible might evoke comparison with modern accounts of mass violence committed against "others" based upon their presumably immutable difference, which some scholars treat as racial and racist regardless of whether the differences are framed as biological, religious, or cultural (Fredrickson 2002, 5-9). In the Former Prophets, the book of Joshua is a perpetual account of genocide (esp. 10:29-11:23) that coincides with the divine prescriptions in Deuteronomy (7:1-2; 20:16-18) to completely destroy (*ḥrm*) all living things in the cities of Canaanites whom God is dispossessing. The fear of cultic disloyalty expressed in Deuteronomy 7:4 makes the anti-Canaanite genocidal violence appear to be religious rather than racial. However, the fact that the threat of Canaanites is not understood as surmountable through a potential change to Israelite religious practices (even though the Israelites constantly change to follow the practices of others) in these texts demonstrates that the Canaanites are understood as having an innate, heritable identity as the distinguishing feature that warrants their extermination. One tradition in the Deuteronomistic History depicts Solomon as directly subjecting these same people (who the Israelites were not successful in exterminating) to forced labor (1 Kgs 9:20-21). In keeping with a command from God, the Israelites commit genocidal violence against the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15. The book of Esther also depicts a genocidal threat, but against the Jews (Esth 4:6; 7:4).

"Holy Seed"

The vehement opposition to exogamy expressed in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13 seems readily amenable to modern ideas of race. In fact, many English translations of *zeraʿ* (literally "seed" and often meaning "semen") in Ezra 9:2 use the word "race" (e.g. NIV, NASB, KJ2000). These translations seem to be utilizing "race" in a loose sense as synonymous with a nation or ethnic group (Berghe 2002). In these texts, there is no mention of physical or biological characteristics; instead, language and religion or cultic practices seem to be the primary concern as noted in Nehemiah 13:23-27. This apprehension over maintaining pure identity of the community of returnees from exile (*golah*) through the avoidance of any male intermixing with the "other woman" (*ʾiššâ zārâ*) intersects with modern racism and the ideas of the purity of races maintained through regulations against miscegenation.

According to Gale Yee, the ideological construction of the *golah* community needing to remain pure in the course of their new "exodus" into the promised land (by avoiding exogamy with both Jewish women outside of the *golah* group and the "other" non-Jewish women) emerges from a historical subtext of socioeconomic desires to keep land (ironically acquired through exogamy) within the boundaries of the *golah* community (Yee, 2003). This same subtext from the circumstances of Persian period Yehud forms the background of other texts in the Writings (cf.

Prov 1 – 9) where the "other woman" is associated with death (see Yee, 1989; Marbury, 2007). As Yee points out, looking at the historical background to these texts shows that the othering inscribed in the *ʾiššâ zārâ* emerges, as in the modern dynamics of racial discourse, to address (by annexing and/or protecting) social, historical, and material interests. In other words, like the development of modern politics of racial identification, this discourse on inclusion and exclusion of others is not a disinterested taxonomy of human diversity (cf. Harris 1993). The tension in this text between a male attraction to foreign women and categorical aversion to mixing is a peculiar element that might be worth exploring in its similarities and differences to some examples of modern intersections of race and gender (Orkin and Joubin 2019, 201-204). Finally, the history of power dynamics in the interaction of male colonizers with female people of the land is another way in which race might be explored as it relates to this text and more modern history (Kim 2006).

Physical Traits

Modern discussions of race and racism quite often involve physically distinguishable traits, especially skin color. Although there are a few unambiguous references to skin color in the Prophets and Writings, these verses do not treat skin color as a marker of communal identity.

The color *ʾedôm* ("red") and related words from the same root are applied to David (1 Sam 16:12; 17:42), the male in Song of Songs (5:10), and Nazirites of an earlier time (Lam 4:7). In each case, the skin color reference signifies health and beauty as it is coupled with describing the individual(s) as "beautiful" (*yāpeh*), "good looking" (*tôb rōʾî*), and "radiant" (*ṣaḥ* and *ṣḥḥ*). Although several English translations render the last term, *ṣaḥ*/*ṣḥḥ*, as "white," the word has to do with luminosity, clarity, and glow, which other translations and commentaries properly reflect (see Goldenberg 2003, 93). Any attempt to match the "redness" of skin mentioned in these passages to our own understanding of a shade of skin is somewhat subjective since the development of color terms in biblical Hebrew is such that they used fewer color terms than in English. Consequently, the single term *ʾedôm* ("red") indicates what English speakers would mark with a range of different terms (Brenner 1982; cf. Berlin and Kay 1969). What we might call "red"—wine (Isa 63:2), blood (2 Kgs 3:22), and rubies (Lam 4:7)—are noted with the same term to describe what we might label "red" while meaning light brown, yellow, orange, or dark brown—cooked lentils (Gen 25:30), a cow (Num 19:2), and a horse (Zech 1:8; 6:2). Thus, scholars arrive at contested human complexions potentially denoted by *ʾedôm* ranging from pinkish (Brenner 1982, 72-74) to brown or brownish red (Keel 1994, 198; Longman 2001, 170).

In some verses, darkening of skin is a sign of ill-health and suffering (*šḥr*, "to be black," in Job 30:30; *ḥšk*, "to darken" in Lam 4:8; and *kmr*, "to scorch," in Lam 5:10). In Song of Songs 1:5, scholars debate whether the phrase *šĕḥôrâ ʾănî wĕnāʾwâ* (translated "dark/black am I and beautiful" or "dark/black am I but beautiful") connotes that darkened skin is assumed to be a negative trait (associated with manual labor, unattractiveness, or low socioeconomic status) or a positive trait (enviable of onlookers) in the ancient Israelite context—particularly, according to standards of beauty set for women. Yet, a third option is to see both: darkened skin considered undesirable by the urban elite audience but embraced as beautiful by other populations including the speaker of this text (Goldenberg 2003, 79-83). Regardless of how one interprets this verse,

the immediate context makes it clear that the darkness of the speaker's skin relative to her audience is a mutable trait of this individual and not an indicator of any group identity. Thus, any cultural preference or dislike for changeably dark-skin of an individual within the community of ancient Israelite authors should not automatically be equated with their potential sentiments concerning the skin color inherent to a population. The same is true for the complexion *ʾedôm* denoting attractiveness and health as well as the darkening of skin as a sign of ill-health.

Although the verses above concern individual physiognomy, there are a couple of references to (presumably) heritable physical features that are associated with a particular people group. The Amorites (Amos 9:2) (like the Anakim, cf. Num 13:33) are described with exaggerated height as a distinguishing feature, but these verses seem to describe a people from a mythic past rather than any people with whom the ancient authors and their contemporaries interact. The height of Sabeans might be referenced by the prhase *ʾanšê middâ*, "men of stature" or this might indicate their lofty status (Isa 45:14). In addition, the Kushites might be distinguished for their height when described as *mĕmušŝak* (literally, "drawn out"), but this also might denote their geographical distance from Israel rather than their appearance (Isa 18:2, 7). These same verses also describe Kushites as *môrāṭ*, which denotes polished metal (1 Kgs 7:45; Ezek 21:14-16, 33 [21:8-11, 28]) or baldness (Lev 13:40; Ezra 9:3; Neh 13:25) elsewhere, thus yielding the common translation "smooth-skinned." Alongside the spots of leopards, Jeremiah 13:23 implies that the skin of Kushites is a distinguishing feature without an explicit indication what quality of their skin is notable. Is it their dark skin color or are modern readers projecting our assumptions? Is the smoothness of Kushite skin notable here like how it is mentioned above? Or is there another quality that the author of Jeremiah presumed the audience would have in mind?

Language

Differences in native language as well as the distinctive pronunciation of a shared language have often been treated as a marker of racial and ethnic difference in the dynamics of navigating race in modern societies. A notorious biblical analogue to the latter can be found when the men of Gilead slaughter Ephraimites whom they distinguish from themselves through a test of their pronunciation of *šibbolet* as *sibbolet* (Judg 12:4-6).

Akin to Animals

Racialization of an "othered" people often comes hand-in-hand with rhetoric that justifies prejudiced thinking by reducing their humanity through comparing or equating them with animals (Isaac 2004, 194-195). In the books of Samuel, a comparison with the lowly state of a dog is used in a self-deprecating expression (2 Sam 9:8), while a contrast with a dog allows one to exalt himself (1 Sam 17:43). Neither of these examples from the Former Prophets denigrate a collective group. However, Exodus 1:19 describes Hebrew women as *ḥāyôt*, which is often translated as "vigorous" or "lively" and is related to *ḥayyôt*, "animals." The point of this stereotype seems to be to treat the ease with which Hebrew women give birth before a midwife arrives as an animal-like quality different from a typical Egyptian (as in fully human) woman.

Conclusion

Any assertion of the presence of a concept of race in the Hebrew Bible involves the mapping of a concept that developed in a radically different socio-historical context onto a collection of literary productions from a much earlier and very different context. For the researcher that finds this work fruitful, there are a handful of aspects of racial thought that might be investigated in terms of how they appear or do not appear in the Prophets and Writings. Physical appearance, one of the most noticeable aspects of modern racial categorization, is largely overlooked in terms of depictions of group identity in the Hebrew Bible even though there are a few references to skin color. Other elements of racial othering (such as its function in securing privileges, the use of language to mark racial differences, the idea that some humans are closer to animals than others, and the threat of genocidal violence) might be more auxiliary features of modern categorizations of race that have biblical analogues. Finally, the biblical organization of humanity into a genealogical system with three major branches might appear to match modern ideas of racial distinctiveness, but it might also be understood as illustrating human connections in a large-scale family.

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White Jacob: an imaginative, biblical approach

Tyler Mayfield

Some of you know the incredibly compelling story in *Genesis* 32-33 of the "reconciliation" of brothers Jacob and Esau. I wonder if it might be helpful to "think with" this story as we seek a faithful approach to the evil of racism today. It's an imperfect analogy for sure, but *Genesis* is raising some pertinent topics. Bear with me as I use Jacob to depict "whiteness."

Jacob's Appeasement.
After stealing the birthright and the blessing from his sibling, Jacob leaves for 20 years. What is he doing during this time? He is prospering by accumulating wealth. Then, God tells Jacob that it is time to return home, and this command immediately brings up the question of Esau. To go back is to deal with Esau, whom he has wronged. So Jacob sends messengers to Esau to test the waters about a possible return. Jacob's motives here are not clear, but he certainly does not mention reconciliation or an apology or a giving back of the stolen birthright. Jacob wants to be sure that Esau knows about his wealth foremost (32:3-5). Does Jacob want healing and a relationship with his sibling, or does Jacob want to go home safely and live the status quo?

The messengers come back to Jacob and say, "We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and 400 men are with him." Yikes! Jacob freaks out; he assumes the worst about Esau. Esau wants a war! He seeks to kill me! Jacob divides his camp into two groups because surely Esau can't defeat two dispersed camps. Jacob seems concerned about keeping as much wealth as possible. Listen to Jacob's thoughts: "If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company that is left will escape" (Gen 32:8). Jacob prays although it is questionable how sincere his prayer is. One interpreter calls it a "foxhole" prayer. His actions relate solely to his wealth, to his property. He prepares an appeasement gift for Esau. There is no talk of apology or reparations, no discussion of previous bad behaviors, no talk of stolen birthright and blessing.

Jacob's Wrestling.
The previous story is the context for Jacob's wrestling with the "man" at the Jabbok. Many interpreters see Jacob wrestling with God here, but it is also possible that Jacob is wrestling with his past, with Esau, with his actions. Maybe it is not a spiritual wrestling but an ethical one? What will happen when he meets his brother again? It is painful wrestling that leaves him disjointed. It is a conversion. It is face-to-face with the Divine. This type of transformation requires a name change! And what is this blessing? Jacob wants a blessing, perhaps some riches and possessions. But perhaps the blessing is a new perspective and new identity.

Esau's Demonstration of Grace and the Brothers' Reunion.
What happens when the brothers finally meet? Jacob divides his four wives and children into groups and places them in line in order of importance. He goes to meet Esau and bows before him. What does this action mean? Is he only scared? Or does he have guilt from stealing the blessing? Or has he become humble?

"But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept." (Genesis 33:4 NRSV)

The Masoretic (Hebrew) text places a dot over each Hebrew letter in the word for “kiss,” so that we pause there in wonder. The one who has every reason to seek revenge does not. Esau offers grace. Esau acts like a brother. Jacob does not deserve this type of blessing. The supposedly “unchosen” brother becomes the bearer of grace to the “chosen” one.

The problem, of course, with the reconciliation paradigm is that Jacob is never held accountable for his previous actions. The embrace of the two brothers is a beautiful moment at the end of the story. But one of the reasons the story can conclude in this manner lies in the fact that Esau has also accumulated wealth and raised a family. He has not been a victim of Jacob’s behaviors for over two decades now. He is Jacob’s equal. We might even say that Esau holds power.

Yet, the brothers are not able to talk much after their reunion. They are not able to discuss their past, their hurts, their behaviors. So, despite a passionate meeting, despite Esau’s expressed wish to journey alongside Jacob, and despite Jacob’s promise to come to Esau in Seir, Jacob ends up going elsewhere. They separate to live in different lands. Reconciliation is only reunion.

(Image: W4B19-4b Capital - Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau
Aosta (Piemonte) chiostro Sant'Orso, cloister
W3EB18-9b Kapitell Jakob bei Laban - Rahel & Lea mit Tierherde 25a
Detailed information on the capitals of this cloister Sant'Orso in a common project by Kunsthistorisches Institut Florenz and other Institutions on cenobium.isti.cnr.it/aosta)

Tyler Mayfield is the A.B. Rhodes Professor of Old Testament & Faculty Director of the Grawemeyer Award in Religion, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

A statement of support of Black Lives Matter

As librarians, staff, administrators, directors, and lovers of libraries in theological schools and in college and university settings supporting religion and theology programs, we condemn racism in its many and varied forms.

We are aware that racism, particularly against Black people, is pervasive in our society and even our institutions. There are systemic issues that perpetuate inequalities and injustices for people of color in the United States. These issues are also present in other parts of the world where inequities persist, often exacerbated by the United States' export of anti-black racism.

The differences of culture, ethnicity, and other identity markers, all point to a truth: We are one human race, created imago Dei. Racist behavior and rhetoric interferes with the pursuit of religious and theological knowledge and is incompatible with the ethics of librarianship.

We grieve the murder of George Floyd. We lament the death of Breonna Taylor. We mourn the passing of Ahmaud Arbury. We affirm:

Black Lives Matter

The Right to Protest Matters

The Bible Matters

We stand in solidarity with our colleagues in the Black Caucus American Library Association and join their call "to take proactive and preventive measures in the fight against racism" (special statement on bcala.org, accessed 2 June 2020). We commend the Society of Biblical Literature for "A Statement on Black Lives Matter, Right to Protest, and Bible as a Prop" (on sbl-site.org, accessed 3 June 2020) and are honored to endorse it as well.

Signed,

Anita Coleman, Louisville Seminary

Myka Kennedy Stephens, Lancashire Theological Seminary

To view a list of all who have signed this statement: https://tinyurl.com/theolibsupportblm

Note: Anita founded and curates the Anti-racism Digital Library. LPTS' E.M. White Library also has an inclusive collection development policy and Black Church Studies Collection. Subsequent, to this statement, Anita and Myka, are also committed to using 10% of their library collection development budgets to support African American publishing.

Statement from leaders of Greater Louisville/Kentuckiana higher education institutions

James Baldwin said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." The harsh truth that must be faced is that Black Americans still face obstacles that leave them, in far too many cases, lagging behind their white counterparts on important indicators of education, income, health, and wealth. Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd are just the latest names on our collective dishonor roll of Black lives that were taken casually and, all too often, without consequence. The very real racial inequities of today are the result of a legacy of systemic racism.

We, as leaders of higher education institutions in greater Louisville and Kentuckiana, are aware both of the promise of higher education as a transformative force in society, and of the problematic history of these very institutions in perpetuating racial inequity.

As leaders of these institutions, we, too, are complicit in maintaining the status quo and it is therefore incumbent upon us to take real and meaningful action to achieve the ideals of equity that our institutions espouse.

We believe that by working together we can do more and do better as agents of positive change.

1. We pledge to educate ourselves and our own college and university communities to recognize and work against structural racism.
2. We pledge to work together to improve access to higher education for our African-American and other students of color.
3. We pledge to create pathways for African-American and other students of color to meaningful and high-demand jobs and careers and acknowledge the need for more Black professionals in healthcare and education and engineering and law as in many other spheres.
4. We pledge to engage fully and meaningfully in the life of West Louisville.
5. With our institutional privileges of knowledge, reach, resources, legacy, and more, we pledge to consistently demonstrate our commitment to the objective fact that **Black Lives Matter**.

Neeli Bendapudi, University of Louisville
Susan Donovan, Bellarmine University
Travis Haire, Ivy Tech, Sellersburg
Ty Handy, Jefferson Community and Technical College
Jay Marr, Sullivan University, Louisville
Tori Murden McClure, Spalding University
Alton B. Pollard, III, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Ray Wallace, IU Southeast

LETTER OF INVITATION TO JOIN THE PROTEST

Alton B. Pollard, III

Dear Louisville Seminary Community:

This afternoon (June 3, 2020), at 4:30 p.m., leaders of higher education institutions in greater Louisville and Kentuckiana will join protesters in Jefferson Square to stand in solidarity against racism and the social injustices that have caused much pain throughout our community and throughout our country.

The Louisville Seminary Community is invited to join. ***Please attend ONLY if you are comfortable doing so.*** Otherwise, please keep all advocates for justice in our community in your prayers. And continue to pray and advocate for victims of racism, police brutality, and all forms of systemic oppression.

I, along with my colleagues in higher education, have endorsed the following statement. Again, my thanks to our students, faculty, employees, alums, and friends who continue to advocate for justice and healing in our broken world.

In the Presence,
Alton

LPTS President Alton Pollard, III, and LPTS Student Body President, 20-21, Adrian Baker at Jefferson Square Park Protest. Photo by Alison Stabler / Alie D Photography

AN INTERFAITH CALL: FAITH LEADERS DEMAND JUSTICE FOR BREONNA TAYLOR

Call on Louisville Mayor, Louisville Metro Council, and Kentucky Attorney General to Meet Community Demands

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, June 22, 2020—Breonna Taylor should be alive today. David McAtee should be alive today. George Floyd, Tony McDade, and Sean Reed should all be alive today. Yet they are all recent victims of police violence against Black people on a list already far too long. Their lives are irreplaceable and they were stolen away. These Black siblings are victims of the racism, white supremacy, and police brutality embedded in the fabric of this country and our city.

These tragic deaths occur in the midst of a pandemic where Black people, only 13 percent of the population, account for 23 percent of COVID-19 deaths, pointing to a larger systemic disregard for Black bodies.

We are 344 Black, White and People of Color representing many faiths and congregations in our city who believe that racism and police brutality is against the will of God.

As faith leaders in Louisville, we call on the Mayor, Metro Council and the Attorney General to heed the calls for justice that have echoed in our streets in these recent days and for decades. We will never have peace without justice, and we call on you to meet the demands of the Movement for Black Lives, Breonna Taylor's family, and local leaders:

First, to fire, charge and prosecute the three police who killed Breonna Taylor.

Second, to establish an independent civilian oversight board with subpoena power to investigate all cases of alleged police abuses.

Third, to roll back the Fraternal Order of Police's ability to unduly shield police from criminal prosecution.

Finally, to divest a significant portion of the $190 million police budget and invest those funds in health, education, transportation, housing, food security, and living wage jobs to benefit Black communities.

We call on residents to join in pushing for these demands and ask everyone to contact their Metro Council person at louisvilleky.gov/government/metro-council/email-council-member, the Mayor at greg.fischer@louisvilleky.gov, and the Attorney General at ag.ky.gov/Contact-Us.

We see the fulfillment of these demands as a first and critical step in a community-driven, comprehensive process of truth telling, justice, and repair for our city and society.

Partial list of signers:

- Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Reverend Dr. Diane Givens Moffett, President, Presbyterian Mission Agency
- Reverend Dr. Alton B. Pollard III, President, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
- Reverend Dr. Donald K. Gillett II, Executive Director, Kentucky Council of Churches
- Reverend David L. Snardon, Joshua Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
- Dr. Kumar Rashad, Sowers of Justice and Jefferson County Teachers Association
- Reverend Dr. Derek Penwell, Senior Ministry, Douglass Boulevard Christian Church
- Sister Sangeeta SCN, Sisters of Charity of Nazareth
- Very Reverend Matthew Bradley, Dean, Christ Church Cathedral
- The Reverend Kelly Kirby, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
- Dr. Paul M. Pearson, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University
- Reverend Karen Barth, Kentuckiana Assoc. of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference, United Church of Christ
- Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., PhD, African Methodist Episcopal
- Rabbi Robert B. Slosberg, Congregation Adath Jeshurun
- Grace Hope Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Sowers of Justice Network, Multifaith
- Clifton Universalist Unitarian Church, Universalist Unitarian
- National Black Presbyterian Caucus - Louisville Area Chapter
- Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province Leadership
- Louisville Showing Up for Racial Justice Faith (LSURJ Faith)

Full list of 344 signers at bit.ly/justice4bre-faith

WHOSOEVER: A DIVINE INVITATION

Alton B. Pollard, III

…all manner of human atrocity and injustice notwithstanding, the divine invitation is to goodness, generosity, justice and joy. It is a sacred truth. We are made for each other.

David Cassidy's painting of "*Whosoever,"* ubiquitous on our campus and beyond this week, has long moved me. It speaks to my soul. The original hangs in Nashville's Metropolitan Interdenominational Church where Edwin Sanders is the Senior Servant. Look closely. It is distinctive for there being no facial recognition. The features recede into shadows that tell no demographic tale, that reveal not the faintest clue about hair texture or length, fullness of lips or nose, eye tint or shape. The face is everyone and no one and it is you and me. The body is draped in a brilliant rainbow garment of violet, orange, yellow, indigo and green. set against a bold chromatic backdrop, perhaps a stained glass window or prism of refracted light. The figure in the forefront stands out. Larger than life itself. Watching. Waiting. Expectant. Inviting us. Calling us. With arms outstretched. With hands held out. With heart open wide. With holes the size of nails visible in each palm. And writ large across the portrait in a spectrum of colors is that single word – "WHOSOEVER."

The word comes from that most famous and beloved of texts in the Christian New Testament. Many of us have memorized John 3:16 from the traditional King James Version: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Today, no critical biblical scholar would call this the best translation. No matter, the passage is so deeply engrained and familiar to us that we are recite it as if we are on default mode, we're sure what it means before we ever read it or hear it. For some, John 3:16 has become Christian shorthand, religious cliché, a cultural catchphrase on display at sporting events. For others it is the essential distillation of the gospel, the Christian's inheritance, and the believer's creed.

I have long asked myself, what is it that I hope to accomplish as a student of religion and life, as a theological educator and leader, and as a minister of the gospel. To plumb the depths of the divine and our humanity found in a single text and more, a single word, may be enough. It may be enough. In the third chapter of the sixteenth verse of the Gospel of John there is such a word for me – it is altogether subversive, dangerous, disturbing, sublime and undistinguished in biblical scholarship. The word receives little attention in a text that is a favorite of traditionalists but finds few post-modern takers. Yet if we have the courage to attend to the core of the heart of

this well-known verse there is a word to fire the human imagination and leads us into the radical depths. Whosoever. Whoever. Everyone. Everybody. "Whosever," Jesus says it to Nicodemus, to us all.

In African American churches, for countless years, with cultural license, we too have said it: "Whosoever will let her or him come." Without respect of person or denomination, our glad practice is to "open the doors of the church" after the sermon, to extend the divine invitation to whosoever to become part of the communion of saints. Jesus says there is no test of eligibility, no grandfather or grandmother clause here; there are no qualifications for fitness and no pre-existing condition in health or life can possibly put you at risk. Everyone has equal access to the divine source; no one lies beyond the pale. In the words of the old Negro spiritual, "I've got a right, you've got a right, we've all got a right to the tree of life."

Alton B. Pollard, III is President and Professor of Religion and Culture. This is an excerpt from his Installation, Caldwell Chapel, Fall 2018.

From the Louisville protests. Photo by Alison Stabler / Alie D Photography

Real change takes community organizing: Mobilizing for action

By Frances Wattman Rosenau | Presbyterians Today | June 20, 2020

The congregation of Ark and Dove Presbyterian Church in Odenton, Md., works with ACT (Arundel Connecting Together), a faith- and community-based organization that provides housing assistance, education reform, drug counseling and more for its neighbors. Courtesy of Ark and Dove Presbyterian Church

The seniors were the first to notice the neighborhood changing as working-class homes slowly transformed into pricier real estate. Many found it hard to stay in homes that were filled with decades of memories. Some even found themselves being evicted. It wasn't just seniors being affected by the neighborhood's evolution. Parents with young children were displaced next.

Gentrification was coming to Inglewood, California, and it was not pretty. Some people saw the change as a renaissance for a city that had been economically challenged. Three local congregations, however, saw the devastating change gentrification was having on the long-term fabric of residents in the neighborhood and knew it was time to do something — together.

The Rev. Dr. Harold E. Kidd, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Inglewood, joined the pastors of the local Methodist and Episcopal churches who brought their congregations together

in worship at Advent, Easter and Pentecost. Each service focused on listening to the community through story and testimony. After months of worshiping together, the congregations built enough trust and momentum to mobilize for change and stand up for their displaced neighbors. Through their efforts to organize with city leaders, Inglewood adopted dramatic protections for the roughly 60% of residents who rent, helping them stay in their homes.

When the Rev. Dr. Angela Cowser began tutoring in a neighborhood school in Nashville in the late '90s, she noticed just how much the children were lacking in resources. She soon discovered the school wasn't alone in being under-resourced. Several others were struggling as well. Cowser, who at the time was also heading a community organizing group called Tying Nashville Together, developed an audit for the schools to understand the extent of the needs. The community organizing group got parents together and sent them out on a fact-finding mission to 70 schools. The mission resulted in a long list of problems that needed to be addressed. With the findings in hand, 20 faith leaders met with the mayor. The result was $250,000 being committed to improve the school system, Cowser says.

Real change is a community effort

Inglewood and Nashville are just two examples of how churches working closely with other congregations and community organizations can make a difference. This desire to fix what is broken grows more urgent these days as the COVID-19 virus has put the spotlight on the many injustices that have lingered in the shadows for too long. But as churches begin talking about what can be done to bring about change, one thing is for sure: Dramatic change doesn't happen overnight, nor does it happen with one congregation working alone. It takes mobilized action known as "community organizing," which involves getting out into one's neighborhood to listen closely to the problems, talk to those on the front lines, work closely with those being impacted by injustices, and team up with other agencies that can help.

According to Cowser, it took 75 congregations working together to get resourcing for the Nashville-area schools. "It was not the tutoring from 75 congregations individually or the bake sales of 75 congregations, but the power of 75 congregations applying nonviolent pressure on a political system to change things," she said.

Cowser, now associate dean of Black Church Studies and Doctor of Ministry programs and associate professor of Black Church Studies at Louisville Seminary, explains that community organizing is the mental shift between treating the symptoms and treating the source.

"Community organizing is the best work that I've seen at the macro-level of social change. Most churches focus on micro-level work," she said. "When one congregation works on its own, what it does is almost always charity, and almost never justice. For example, organizations like Habitat for Humanity, while good, are likely insufficient to meet a community's needs for supportive housing."

The Rev. Andrew Foster Connors, pastor of Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, adds that community organizing is not the same as advocacy. "There are big things that are part of our national conversation right now: gender inequality, racism and the fall of the

middle class. Short-term activism is not going to stand in the way of these forces. The only way to stand against them is with organized power," he said.

Mobilizing for action

Almost a decade ago, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) created the guide "Congregation-Based Community Organizing: Building Vibrant Congregations, Building Just Communities" to help congregations better understand what "organized power" is. The guide defines community organizing as "a method of working with faith communities to address the problems and concerns of their communities, and in turn, vitalize and strengthen the life of congregations."

That often means partnering with other faith congregations and using specific tools to build relationships and increase capacity for change. Some of those techniques are:

One-to-One Conversations: Also known as "relational meetings," these are meetings between two people in which they share their personal stories and reflect on their values, hopes and concerns.

House Meetings: House meetings give an opportunity for those gathered to share what is important to them and find common ground on what energizes them for change.

Listening Campaigns: A listening campaign is an organized series of one-to-one and house meetings to hear from a congregation or targeted community partners. Listening campaigns are designed to bring to the surface the issues that are relevant to a large group of people.

Through relational meetings, house meetings and listening campaigns, a clearer picture of what the issues are emerges and the most mentioned problems by the group then become concrete action points.

For congregations who might have differing viewpoints as to what a church should or should not get involved with, the techniques involved in community organizing help because they bring the issues of a community inside to a faith group that may or may not be isolated from realities outside the sanctuary walls.

The Rev. Denise Anderson, coordinator for racial and intercultural justice at the Presbyterian Mission Agency, points out that there is always the danger of advocating for self-interests, but that community organizing is a way to listen and hear from others.

"Unless we join circles of people with other experiences, how would we know the depth of what is going on? How would we feel the urgency for change?" she asked.

The heart of the gospel

According to Cowser, community organizing is important for congregations because it "gets at the heart of the gospel." Anderson agrees, citing that unlike previous generations, a lot of large-

scale movements for social change are now happening outside of the faith community. For example, Black Lives Matter was not a movement that initiated in the church, she says.

“Where the church may see itself on the outskirts of movements for justice in the 21st century, community organizing is a way to stay in that space and stay connected to that work,” said Anderson.

The Rev. Jessica Tate, director of NEXT Church — a network of church members and leaders fostering conversations about how to follow Christ — says that through community organizing the church has an opportunity to make a positive name for itself. “People don’t sign up to support institutions just for their value. We have to make the case for an organization in a different way than we did in past generations,” she said, adding, “The church now has to earn a positive reputation as an organization that cares about the world.”

Foster Connors also sees a similar trend at Brown Memorial. New people coming to church “don’t want to waste their time coming to worship that doesn’t connect them to actual transformation in their lives and in their community,” he said.

Community organizing also focuses on local issues that make a visible impact. The Rev. Jonathan Nelson, associate pastor at Ark and Dove Presbyterian Church in Odenton, Maryland, sees organizing as a way to get involved without entering into the partisan debates that dominate the national political scene. “I don’t know that a lot of churches have talked to their neighbors about the stuff that bothers them,” he said. “Organizing for something that matters to the neighbors, like quality education, is not necessarily partisan but can be political.”

The lessons and tools of community organizing can also be used within the life of a congregation. “Pretty much anything major we do at Brown Memorial starts with active listening,” said Foster Connors, describing how the congregation incorporates organizing methods in ministry.

They recently noticed several new young families in the congregation. The church reached out to have one-to-one and house meetings to hear from them. Instead of church leaders deciding what program to offer families, they started asking questions like, “What are the biggest pressures in your family right now?”

While a process like this may result in new programs, the real benefit is deeper relationships. “We now look at congregational events, like an annual meeting, as an opportunity to engage people,” said Foster Connors. “We listen and then reorganize the life of the church around those things that drive our people.”

Frances Wattman Rosenau is the pastor of Culver City Presbyterian Church in greater Los Angeles.

Community Organizing 101: How to get started

Pastors shared the following tips for congregations interested in how to become more involved in community organizing.

Check the ego. The first step is to enter into the work with humility and awareness. The "biggest temptation to avoid for someone with privilege entering a new space is saviorism" or "coming in with all the answers," says the Rev. Denise Anderson. "Organizations are built and sustained through relationships. Building those relationships requires a lot of listening without agenda assumptions or prejudice."

Find a community organizing affiliate. A few of the national, faith-based, community organizing groups might be available in your area. Among these organizations are the Industrial Areas Foundation, Gamaliel Foundation, Direct Action and Research Training Center and Faith in Action. There may already be a group organizing in your area.

Hold conversations with a congregation. If there is not a local affiliate near you, all is not lost. The Rev. Jonathan Nelson suggests starting in the congregation, saying, "Here are my interests; here are some of the stories about ways I've felt alive and connected in the church. Tell me about yours." Gather together a small group in the church, train them in active listening, then go and begin talking to neighbors outside of the church. Begin listening to them and caring about the things they care about.

Remember it won't be easy. The shift from providing answers to listening is not an easy one. Church has often been the place people look to for solutions. The work of community organizing calls for a fundamental shift to active and intentional listening.

Learn more

Read more about community organizing by downloading the resource guide "Congregation-Based Community Organizing: Building Vibrant Congregations Building Just Communities"

Angela Cowser, mentioned in this article, is Associate Dean of Black Church Studies and Doctor of Ministry programs and Associate Professor of Black Church Studies at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

The liturgy of a black lives matter protest

Last week in Louisville, I went to church.

Shannon Craigo-Snell

While the valiant online efforts of my local congregation have been a lifeline to me during COVID-19, the other day I had church for the first time since the start of the pandemic. That worship service was a black lives matter protest.

There was confession, in a sense, as a white schoolteacher talked about implicit bias, prejudice, and genocide. And then there was the most ridiculous forgiveness. A young black woman thanked all the white people who came out to protest.

It was strange to realize that all of this was free of charge. In today's world, almost everything is commodified. You could make money selling cold water on a hot day. Yet somehow this protest space was set apart from the marketplace. It held an entirely different economy.

My home congregation has been celebrating virtual communion. …

At the protest, the familiar words came back to me: "on the night before he was betrayed." The protesters out in the street would be betrayed again that night. The police sworn to protect them would turn against them. The deal had already been worked out—a bag of silver and an FOP endorsement had already exchanged hands. "This is my body, broken for you."

The organizers offered instruction: everyone take a baggie filled with bandages. "This is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

This is true Eucharist, the kind that remembers crucifixion and threatens empires.

Originally published in The Christian Century (Blog), First Person, 8 June 2020.

Shannon Craigo-Snell is Professor of Theology at Louisville Seminary.

Photo: From the Louisville protests. Photo by Alison Stabler / Alie D Photography

Shrink the Ocean

Adrian M. Baker

"Let us build a bridge!" Many of us have heard this provocative catchphrase time and time again at "conversations" about race relations between various leaders and the communities that they serve. Many embraced the first notion of "building a bridge" with eyes wide open and hope welled within. The nobility associated with such actions of building has found its function turned off and hijacked. Such building has delayed freedom agendas and distracted from needed interventions. Building has proven to be a pacifying agent for "good" white folks who have taken their time to "talk" to black people about the black experience in America. It has been just talk. No building. No bridges. All talk.

So, lets talk.

Why use a metaphorical bridge as a reconciling agent for racial justice in America?

Can there exist two safe points on the racial river that anyone can traverse?

In the words of Bassist Randy Jackson… "It's a no for me, dawg!"

I declare that the nature of a bridge as a racial remedy is central to the acceptance of distance between white and black persons in America.

Months ago, feeling alienated, disenchanted, and disheartened by silence of my white "friends" as it relates to the repetitious assault on unarmed black bodies, I wept. Like Jesus of Nazareth, I wept. Often, I still weep, without tears. On a morning that seemed as ordinary as the day before, I was awakened by a phrase that kept resounding in my soul. "Shrink the Ocean! Shrink the Ocean! Shrink the Ocean!" This proverbial playlist beat in my heart as a drum. A vision was born.

Forget the notion of building bridges. Bridges are too long. Bridges are too stationary. Bridges take too long to build. Bridges are intended to keep the distance. We, on the other hand, are called to shrink the oceans that divide us, the oceans of disparity, decay, and degradation.

I protest, I resist, I invest, I support, I lead, I inspire, I teach, and I preach. Now, I do this to shrink the ocean in the world around me. I aim to shrink oceans to the point that they become mere puddles that we can joyfully jump over together.

I need to abandon the existential metaphor for a moment and become clear on the how-to-guide for shrinking an ocean.

To shrink an ocean, we must be intentional on building equity.

Inequity in the education system, the healthcare system, the housing mix and market, employment, and the financial sectors abound. Each sector was deliberately designed to empower and endow a certain segment of America, "White America." "Black America" was to remain divested and disassociated from the American Dream. This is unacceptable and I plead for a commitment from White America to go beyond the talk, go beyond the bridge, and be

about the business of Shrinking Oceans in all facets of American Society. The winds of history and herstory are crying out to you to shorten the bridge, repair the breach and shrink the ocean.

Adrian Baker is the Student Body President ‘20-21, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

From the Louisville protests. Photo by Alison Stabler / Alie D Photography

The Tapestry: My anti-racism story

Anita Coleman

Seeing a gap in the way racial issues are categorized

An Invitation to a Christian Anti-racist Imagination

The Anti-racism Digital Library is a protest library

My eyes opened to another perfect California day. The usual cool, foggy marine layer that coastal California tends to get in June was missing but my day soon turned cloudy anyway. That was the morning, Thursday June 18, 2015 many of us in the United States woke up to the news of a shooting the previous evening at the Emanuel AME church in Charleston, South Carolina. Nine people were killed because a stranger, who said he was a Christian, had been welcomed into their Bible study. He had returned death for the love he received.

I became frustrated when friends, some from the same Christian faith as the killer claimed to be, couldn't empathize. They rationalized: *"He was just a crazy person, Anita, not racist. The African American church did the right thing to forgive him so quickly."*

The inability to empathize triggered my intellectual curiosity. These were good people who loved and followed Jesus. Where was Christian belief in action negating, invalidating, and transforming racist systems?

I searched library catalogs, electronic databases in academic disciplines, news, and other popular information resources on the web. In the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (*LCSH*), I found answers. There was only one subject heading for Anti-racism but hundreds of sub-headings for Race, Race discrimination, Race relations, Racism, and more. Similarly, most people I spoke to did not know what anti-racism meant. They equated it with color-blindness and often said: *"I don't see race. I treat all people alike."*

I began to study, teach, talk about anti-racism, and to develop the *Anti-racism Digital Library and Thesaurus*, an open access clearinghouse for online materials about anti-racism and related ideas. It is also a protest library to inspire our Christian voice, imagination, and anti-racism.

On Friday June 17, 2016, one year after the shooting, I shared my ideas in a talk on Theology, Race, and Libraries at the Annual Conference of the American Theological Librarians Association. I invited participation and I described the communities behind the *Anti-racism Digital Library / Thesaurus*. My story is a tapestry that was weaved and continues to be weaved by all who came before me and now stand alongside me.

The tapestry traces my inter-lacings with people locally, regionally, and globally. In a nutshell, I was able to come to the United States, get a graduate school education, and establish a good life

because of one of the most successful reforms that came out of the Civil Rights movement. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act allowed people from non-European countries – like mine, India - to come and become citizens. Thus, I feel a great gratitude to all who marched and engaged in Civil Rights and who continue to fight today for first-class citizenship. Engaged in anti-racism for decades, if not life-long, they are striving to see with Christ's eyes, give life with a new language, and shape a fair society for all people created "imago dei" (God's image).

Now, my professional expertise is being used to curate visions and experiences, tools and a vocabulary in the *Anti-racism Digital Library*. Many collections in the ADL showcase people, places, and groups. They are a microcosm of our larger world representing different geographical origins and culture, language and faith traditions. Thematic collections are meant to fuel our imagination, reject hierarchies, confront privilege, decenter whiteness, expose colorism and end racism. There is a glossary and a thesaurus in progress to help create a new world based on a theology that gives life, not death to millions like so much of Western Christianity has done.

Racism is not just about individual bias or prejudice. Racism is a Church failure to grasp the essential nature of the Trinity – God in community, hoarding nothing, sharing power, serving all. Anti-racism is the Spirit's remedy, tandem knitting us, transcending our tendencies to nativism, tribalism, and the fears that skin color, phenotypic variations and other differences, invoke.

Anti-racism is a form of focused and sustained action, which includes inter-cultural, inter-faith, multi-lingual and inter-abled (i.e. differently abled) communities with the intent to change a system or an institutional policy, practice, or procedure which has racist effects.

The extravagant, enigmatic tapestry teaches me that an identity in Jesus Christ is an anti-racist one: Seeing and loving God in everyone means freedom and fairness for all.

"I want you woven into a tapestry of love, in touch with everything there is to know of God. Then you will have minds confident and at rest, focused on Christ, God's great mystery." Colossians 2: 2 (The Message)

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Anita Coleman was a stay-at-home wife, mother, and church volunteer in 2015. Now, in 2020, she continues her work with the *Anti-racism Digital* Library and Thesaurus as Associate Professor of Bibliography and Research, and Director of Library Services, E.M. White Library, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Dedication of the Anti-racism Digital Library: "Libraries are always inclusive, never exclusive." - Cynthia Hurd, a 31-year library employee who died in the Emanuel AME church shooting in June 2015. The Anti-racism Digital Library and International Anti-racism Thesaurus is dedicated to the 9 victims of Emmanuel AME Charleston 2015 shooting: Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Cynthia Hurd, Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Rev. Daniel Simmons Sr., Myra Thompson, Tywanza Sanders, Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance.

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