

7-Racism—UUFVB Covenant Groups—July 2016

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading

Indeed, in the decades since the passage of momentous civil rights legislation, some things have changed and some things haven't. What has changed is the personal racial attitudes of many white Americans and the opportunities for some black Americans to enter the middle levels of society....What has not changed is the systematic and pervasive character of racism in the United States and the condition of life for the majority of black people. In fact, those conditions have gotten worse. Racism originates in domination and provides the social rationale and philosophical justification for debasing, degrading, and doing violence to people on the basis of color....Racism can be brutally overt or invisibly institutional, or both. Its scope extends to every level and area of human psychology, society, and culture. Prejudice may be a universal human sin, but racism is more than an inevitable consequence of human nature or social accident. Rather, racism is a system of oppression for a social purpose. ("America's Original Sin," *Soujourners*, Jim Wallis, editor)

Topic Exploration

Race as a construct is economic and social. To be black or brown or white or "red" says nothing about a person except in economic and social terms. Racism may be defined as prejudice plus power, power that is economic and social, not biological and not anthropological. Rev. Dr. James Cone, Charles A. Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at New York City's Union Theological Seminary since 1969, describes racism as "America's original sin and, as it is institutionalized at all levels of society, its most persistent and intractable evil." He writes as an African American and observes that: "No day passes in which blacks don't have to deal with white supremacy. It is found everywhere—in the churches, in seminaries, at publishing houses, in government, and all around the world. There is no escape. If whites get tired of talking about race, just imagine how people of color feel." (the Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull, First Parish UU, Cohasset MA)

The evil of racism is not only structural and institutional; it is also spiritual. This means that all of our analysis, no matter how sophisticated, and all of our programs, no matter how well designed, will never be sufficient by themselves to make us anti-racist. We must also be willing to do the difficult soul work necessary for spiritual transformation. (Paul Rasor in *Soul Work*)

Questions / Sharing

1. Where was your first or earliest encounter with racism—in your family household, at school, at church, in your town? How did you react? What did you feel at the time?

2. Tell a story of how your understanding of race and racism has shifted. If it hasn't, tell a story about why. (the Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull)
3. Talk about an encounter with racism that you experienced recently. How did you react? Would you react differently in a "do over"?
4. What social purpose do you see as supporting racism in our culture today? How do you, as a white, benefit from white privilege?
5. How do you see racism as a spiritual challenge for both ourselves and our Fellowship? Are there actions/changes we could make now to help reframe the issue as spiritual as well as structural?

Closing Reading

I never intend to adjust myself...to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to an economic system which takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and violence. It may be that the salvation of the world lies in the hands of the [creatively] maladjusted. (the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Check- out and reflection on today's session

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping