August 2, 2020

**8/2 “The Grace-Fueled Turn Around”**

**Romans 14:23**

**23**But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+14%3A23&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28289a)] for whatever does not proceed from faith[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+14%3A23&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28289b)] is sin.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+14%3A23&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-28289c)]

**Hebrews 11:6**

**“**And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”.

(Show sermon title slide)

1. My Path on The Subject of Racism

Time to get off the **porch** and **into the house**!

Racism is a problem in our country.

My son, the biology major, warned me never to take a DNA test, “because you never know what that company will ultimately do with the sample you send them.”

So, as we parents sometimes do, I ignored his advice, and took the test anyway.

The outcome surprised me. I have an English last name, “White”. So, I fully expected to learn I was English, which I was, but only 30 percent. I was surprised to learn that I was more than 70 percent German!

The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. My Mom shared a story with me, not long after my Dad died.

* + Mom’s maiden name was Warner, but I’ve come to learn that it was actually “Varner”. (Ermgard, my neighbor from Berlin, says my pronunciation is off, please forgive me, I’ll work on that.)
  + My Mom was from Pittsburg where, during WW I and II steel was produced for the wars.
  + Both of those wars were against Germany.
  + My Mom told me that during that era, kids with German last names were bullied pretty badly.
  + They were followed home from school, taunted, and often beaten up.
  + Kids with good grades, however, were allowed to leave at the end of the day by the FIRE ESCAPE, a faster way of getting out of the school.
  + So my Mom studied really hard, because leaving that way gave her a head start on the bullies!
  + Changing the family name from Varner, to Warner, was not a mistake, or mispronunciation, or done by someone else when my Mom’s family entered the country.
  + They altered the name themselves—it was an intentional attempt to protect the family from prejudice— prejudice that hurt, prejudice they didn’t deserve.

I heard that story when I was about 15, a few months after the death of my father. I can’t describe how protective I was of my mother at the time. So, when she told me this, I was out of my skin furious!

It’s helpful for those of us who are white to think about times when people we loved experienced prejudice. There will be those who would disagree, but that’s my experience, and a place where my journey began.

**But, I want to be exceedingly clear that these experiences** do not in any way negate the societal privilege that white people have in the U.S. Nor, are these experiences in any way equivalent to the systematic racism that people of color experience today.

However, reflecting on our experiences, and getting in touch with our **pain** can help us become more sympathetic toward **other people’s pain**.

My Mother, and her family, in spite of being German and being targeted for prejudice, in the end, were white. They were able to take advantage of the privileges afforded to white people in the United States.

That’s not true for persons of color.

**II. This is the third installment of an 8 part series regarding essential United Methodist beliefs…**

* We’re on a journey together.
* One of our beliefs, that faith is a process and we’re called to grow, is as important as it has ever been.
* **Without it**, Christians have fallen away, fallen out, or floundered.
* **With it,** they are turned loose in the world, a positive influence for God.

**III.Repentance**

(Change to pyramid slide.)

* We began the journey by looking at Original Sin and Prevenient Grace, the block at the base of the pyramid.
* Though there is sin, there is also grace. Prevenient grace is the grace that sparks our faith and causes us to grow.
* Prevenient grace prods and propels us to “repent”.

**IV.At the outset of Jesus’s ministry, he affirmed that repenting would be foundational to his kingdom.**

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1%3A15&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24228a)] repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15)

What does repentance mean?

* There are primarily two definitions for “repentance” in the Bible.
  + An Old Testament definition of repentance is to “return to God” and away from sin and a New Testament definition of repentance is to “turn around”, again in the opposite direction of sin.
  + So you see, repentance requires turning and movement.
  + We cannot repent and stay in the same place.
* How do we know that we need to repent? It’s back to grace again, hence our title for today, “The Grace-Fueled Turn Around”
* God’s **prevenient grace** pricks our hearts, heads, and convicts us.
  + I shared the story of prejudice against my Mom. Though not the same as racism, nor a negation of privilege to afforded to white people, the pain of that experience pricked my heart and conscience. It was a starting place, prevenient grace.
  + If the way my Mom was treated made me so angry as to see red, then shouldn’t I also become sad and mad when persons of color are treated much worse?
* As I mentioned earlier in this series, John Wesley wanted Methodists to adopt a complete understanding of the Bible.
* So, when it comes to ***repentance we try to understand it completely:***
  + It is never only inward reflection, but also an outward response.
  + While personal holiness matters, we’re also supposed to work for a more just society, seek societal holiness.
  + A term we use in Wesleyan circles, is “cooperant grace”. To activate faith, we have to cooperate with grace-- Do something differently, change our behavior.

So, what does repentance look like?

In 1741, Wesley wrote a sermon in which he described what was necessary for inward/ outward repentance. It’s a long list, with 11 items. Did I tell you he wanted to be complete? I’ll have to boil them down to three.

1. Repentance requires that we be “truly sorry” for what we have done and ask God for forgiveness.
2. We’re required to “stop the sin,” and avoid it in the future.
3. And we need to “do good works” (substitute sinful behaviors for more positive ones)

While we’re focused on racism today, this process is the same for any sin.

**V. So, the starting place is always grace, but that’s never the ending place.**

* John Wesley used this word picture to describe it-- he talked about the “house of religion”.
* Repentance is the porch of the house. The porch is the “getting’ ready” place.
* Once we come into the home and are “saved/ justified”, growth in faith is possible.
* But we have to come through the porch first.
* We have to repent.

**This requires conviction on our part. In our two theme passages today, it becomes evident that…**

* The heart strings have to be plucked to begin the inward and outward change.
* Conviction pushes us to get off the porch and into the house.

We have to develop conviction regarding racism…

So, for those of us who are white, imagine what it would be like…if

* Among the top ten richest people in the world, not one of them looked like us.
* Among the people who govern, 90 percent of them did not look like us.
* 93 percent of the people who decide what we get to watch on TV; 90 percent of the people who decide what gets published for us to read; 90 percent of those who choose the music available for sale; 82 percent of our teachers; and…97 percent of the professional athletic team owners…didn’t look like us.
* But there is group that did look like us—that’s the group of people who die younger than other people for a variety of reasons. That group did look like us…

Imagine what that would feel like…if you were a person of color.

Does that pluck your heart? Does that stir you up?

And then imagine, if on top of these things, you were to…

Witness the death of George Floyd on television…

Hear about the shooting of Breonna Taylor …

Read about the “Tikki torch rally” in Charlottesville...

Wouldn’t you be furious? Wouldn’t you be “seeing red”?

Does that pluck our hearts? Does that stir us up?

And then, maybe even worse… imagine that we turned to faith for help, and we entered the church and heard the scripture where Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah…

“**18**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me…  
        to bring **good news** to the **poor**…  
 to proclaim **release to the captive…**  
        to **let the oppressed** go free…

And in that same church, the message is given that while Jesus came for the poor, captives, oppressed, that really doesn’t apply to OUR situation…

How do we feel now? That’s what people of color experience.

As a white Christians, that should pluck at our hearts and stir up our faith.

We should care. We should do something. We should get off the porch!

So how do we turn?

Robin DiAngelo is an author who coined the phrase **“The Good/Bad Binary” experienced by white people.**

* Those of us who are white, she says, are predisposed to believing we are “good people” because…
  + We refrain from telling racial jokes.
  + We don’t belong to the KKK, the Nazi party, or another extreme organization.
  + We have friends and colleagues who are people of color.
  + And, we have stories of our own, in which we ourselves, or those we love, have experienced prejudice (like the story I shared).
  + We’re Christians and good church-going “white people”.
* **So** whenever someone suggests to us that **we should do more**, our reaction is defensiveness. “How **dare you** tell me, that **I’m** racist?”
* DiAngelos book is titled, “White Fragility”…This is the reaction she’s talking about.
* **The danger is that because we believe ourselves to be good, we also believe that “no further action” is required**.
* A better outward reaction to a growing conviction, a repentant response, might be, ‘I had no idea how what I was doing impacted you. I’m sorry. I don’t want to ever do that again.”

1. **So my son who told me not to take the DNA test also told me this…**

Henrietta Lacks developed a malignant form of cervical cancer. The hospital took a sample of her tumor. They cultured it as a cell line which was used for many, many, many scientific purposes BECAUSE Henrietta’s cells were unique. Until that time, cervical cancer cells died quickly after being removed from the patient-- but not Henrietta’s. Her cells survived and replicated daily.

Henrietta’s cell line was used to develop cosmetics. It was used to test the effects of toxins and radiation. It was used to create medicines, including the polio vaccine!

Scientists were so fond of Henrietta’s cell line that they nicknamed her replicated cells as “He-La” cells. Nothing like her replicated cells existed in all the world…not even close!

* A lot of people got rich off of Henrietta. Millions and millions…Probably billions in today’s dollars.
* Henrietta helped so many people. Come to think of it, I’ve got that little round scar on my arm from the polio vaccine. Many of us do. Thanks Henrietta for the contribution you made!

Henrietta was African American.

* Sadly, she died of her cancer.
* Sadder still, Henrietta’s cells were taken from her body without her permission.
* And neither she, nor her financially struggling family, ever received a dime for the ways, her cell line was used.

I wonder, would the same thing have happened if Henrietta were white?

How is it that so few people today even know her name?

It’s time for us to stop making excuses.

* It is time for us to allow our hearts to be pricked, to gain a sense of conviction…
* It is time for we Christians to get off of the porch, so we can move into the house.
* It’s time for us to repent.