Lenten Study 2021

Understanding and Responding to Racism

Week One ~ Setting the Stage and Defining the Terms

~ As we prepare to be in conversation about racism, get comfortable saying: *1) Thanks for correcting me. I did not realize that. 2) I had not thought of it like that. I understand now. 3) I was wrong about that and I have changed my mind. 4) I should do some more research before I argue this point.* Remember, there is no shame in being wrong, only in refusing to learn.

~ “The United States was founded on the principle that all people are created equal. Yet the nation began with the attempted genocide of Indigenous people and the theft of their land. American wealth was built on the labor of kidnapped and enslaved Africans and their descendants. Women were denied the right to vote until 1920, and black women were denied access to that right until 1965 . . .” Do you believe we live in a country in which all people have an equal opportunity to experience life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? How far have we come in the past 250 years?

~ White progressive Christians (which is what many members of the UCC view themselves as being) cause the most daily damage to people of color because we think we are not racist, or that we are less racist than other people. We can be especially difficult for people of color because, to the degree that we think we have arrived, we will put our energy into making sure that others see us as having arrived. Common statements made by white progressive Christians: *I don’t see color. I was taught to treat everyone the same. Some of my best friends are Black. If people are respectful to me, I am respectful to them, regardless of race.*

~ A working definition of racism: Racism is a system of advantage based on race (i.e., on observable physical qualities such as skin color, hair texture, eye shape, etc.) These advantages are referred to as white privilege, a sociological concept referring to advantages that are taken for granted by whites and that cannot be similarly enjoyed by people of color in the same context. Note: Stating that racism grants white people privilege does not mean that individual white people do not struggle or face barriers. What it does mean is that white people do not face the particular barriers of racism. (from *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo)

~ Racism is far more than intentional acts of racial discrimination committed by immoral or “bad” people. Racism is a structure, a system, not an event. It is deeply embedded in the fabric of our society. People of color may hold prejudices and discriminate against white people, but they lack the social and institutional power that transforms their prejudice and discrimination into racism.

~ Acknowledging we are racist does not mean we are bad human beings or that we are just like those who lynched Black people or engaged in other violent acts against people of color. Acknowledging that we benefit from racist systems and policies challenges us to daily ask the question: Am I actively seeking to interrupt racism in a particular context, and how do I know?

~ When and where have you experienced racism firsthand? How did you respond?

~ Many of us grew up singing, “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world: red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.” Throughout the centuries, how well do you think the church has done in demonstrating a Christ-like love for all the children of the world, regardless of their color?

**\*\*\*\* Homework Assignment for March 3: Read chapters 3-5 of *I’m Still Here* by Austin Channing Brown**