Lenten Study 2021

Understanding and Responding to Racism

Week Three ~ White Fragility and Black Lives Matter

~ In this week’s reading assignment, Austin Channing Brown describes numerous instances in which white persons have expected her to shoulder their guilt for racist things they or their family members have said or done. She also calls attention to the expectation that black persons have a responsibility to understand the pain of white persons, even though the reverse tends not to be true. Black persons are expected to go out of their way to make sure their behavior does not cause white people to feel uncomfortable. Austin writes, “Our only chance at dismantling racial injustice is being more curious about its origins than we are worried about our comfort.” Does acknowledging racism that you have been a part of cause you to feel uncomfortable? Have you ever engaged in any of the “white” behaviors Austin describes?

~ The statement “Black Lives Matter” triggers a multitude of emotions and responses among people who are not black, the most common response being, “All Lives Matter.” Many wonder why we need to single out black people or why this movement ~ which arose in the aftermath of the acquittal of George Zimmerman following his killing of Travon Martin in 2013 ~ gained such momentum, not only in the United States, but around the world. Consider these explanations:

*~ If my wife comes to me in obvious pain and asks, “Do you love me?” an answer of “I love everyone” would be truthful, but also hurtful and cruel in the moment. If a co-worker comes to me upset and says, “My father just died,” a response of “Everyone’s parents die,” would be truthful, but hurtful and cruel in the moment. So, when a friend speaks up in a time of obvious pain and hurt and says, “Black lives matter,” a response of “All lives matter” is truthful, but it is hurtful and cruel in the moment. (Doug Williford)*

*~ For my “All Lives Matter” Friends: When the Boston marathon was bombed, and everybody’s profile picture changed to “Boston Strong,” nobody said, “All cities are strong.” When the Las Vegas shooting happened, people changed their profile* to *“Stand with Vegas;” nobody said, “Stand with Everywhere.” Have you ever seen someone counter a breast cancer post with “Wait, what about colon cancer?” But for some reason, if someone says, “Black lives matter,” it turns into an all-inclusive “All lives matter.” This is not an either/or proclamation. When there is a crisis, we have always rallied around that particular group/city/cause. It does not diminish any other group/city/cause. It just brings awareness and support where it is needed. Nobody is saying all lives do not matter, but right now our black friends, families, colleagues, neighbors and strangers need our support.*

~ Throughout her book, Austin Channing Brown capitalizes the word “Black” when referring to her ethnicity and that of others having her same skin color. This is not uncommon in books about racism written by both white and black authors. How is capitalizing “Black” similar in nature to making the statement “Black lives matter?”

~ Dante Stewart writes: “Can we please stop implying that an affirmation of blackness means that you hate white people? So many wrongly dismiss affirming blackness, criticism of white supremacy, and Black rage that fights for Black dignity and Black futures, as being ungodly, unloving and hatred.” How does Dante’s statement strike you?

~ “Do not stand idly by if you witness injustice. You must intervene. You must interfere.” Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor

~ “There comes a point when we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they are falling in.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu

**\*\*\*\*Homework Assignment for March 17: Read chapters 9-11 of *I’m Still Here* by Austin Channing Brown**