A black metal hand pump stands in a garden setting. A bucket is being filled with water from the pump's spout. The background shows a gravel path and various plants.

# Journeys to the Well: An Ecumenical Devotional Towards Anti-Racism



THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
CHRIST · COMMUNITY · COMPASSION

LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES ÉGLISES  
CHRIST · COMMUNAUTÉ · COMPASSION

**Journeys to the Well:  
An Ecumenical Devotional Towards Anti-Racism**

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# Introduction

## ***Why a devotional on anti-racism?***

That's the question that is sometimes posed when people hear about this project. Devotionals are meant to help deepen faith practice and worship (worship being a form of devotion to God). Having a topical focus on antiracism for a devotional may feel counter-intuitive.

The group of people who worked on planning this devotional—all members or staff of a subcommittee focused on racism and reconciliation that is part of the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches—decided to work on an antiracism devotional having come to the understanding that racism is not a surface issue

unconnected to one's faith, but rather is among the central issues the church is called to address today.

This collection is grounded in our shared belief that the Bible has something vital to say about racism, which Christians can and should draw on when working to address and end it. We all agreed that Christians are called to work against racism. We could have worked on a statement, a study guide, or a collection of essays, but we felt that a devotional was needed because our faith commitments should be reflected in the antiracism work we do. We are also operating from an understanding that it is important for Christians, in spite of the many differences among denominations and faith expressions,

to really wrestle with Scripture, to learn from it, and to pray. Action is needed, of course, and we hope this devotional will motivate people to action, but we believed and continue to believe that building deeper connections with our faith is the wellspring from which action flows and will produce better and more sustainable anti-racism fruit.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

When we set out to ask for authors for this collection, we wanted an ecumenical approach, with people writing from their particular background, perspective and experiences, and drawing together people from different denominations so that many

perspectives would be present. We wanted to give more weight to authors with lived experience of racism, and so the majority of the authors in this collection are Indigenous, Black, and/or People of Colour. We wanted to have authors at many different points in their life—young, old, in that in-between age; people from across what is now known as Canada, and with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds; a mix of lay people and clergy.

We asked authors to reflect on a scripture they chose themselves (we did not assign verses) and on whatever they felt called to include from their lives. We opted for a very minimal approach to editing on the conviction that it is important to allow authors to speak in their own voices on this topic. We hope and believe that this framing, and the authors' dedicated reflections, have produced a rich collection.

When we sent out the invitations, we asked only that the authors adhere to a consistent structure. Accordingly, the devotions include a combination of the following components:

- One or more scripture passages
- A reflection on a scripture passage
- Reflection questions

- Suggested resources for deeper engagement

As submissions came in, themes emerged that the planning team grouped into the following four sections:

- **SECTION 1:** Honouring Identity in Christ
- **SECTION 2:** Giving Context: Personal Experiences of Racism, Discrimination, and Silence
- **SECTION 3:** Tackling Texts that Cause Harm
- **SECTION 4:** Calling Forward

We encourage you to use the collection as seems best to you. That may look like reading the collection in the order it appears, it may look like reading one from each section and then going through the sections again, or it may look like dipping in and out as you are drawn to particular reflections. We trust the Spirit's guidance in how people engage with the reflections here.

Lastly, devotion is a way of being that feels as though it should come naturally to people of faith—but in the intense, busy, sometimes violent and frequently distracting world of today, it is often the reality that finding the time and space for

concerted devotional practice can feel overwhelming. Nevertheless, devotional practice can ground us as we each work to live out the faith to which we are called. That is another reason why a group of us at the Commission on Justice and Peace gathered to plan this ecumenical devotional. We hope this collection helps you as you reflect more on what it means to live as a follower of Jesus, giving faithful witness in the world today.

*The Commission on Justice and Peace is an ecumenical commission of The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) with members of Christian denominations and associated groups. It gathers to discuss issues of justice and peace in the world, drawing on the group's shared identity as followers of Jesus as well as on the group's differences of Christian belief and expression.*

*The group from the Commission that worked on planning this devotional includes Allyson Carr (Presbyterian Church in Canada), Richard Chau (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops), Paul Gehrs (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada), Boston Laferté (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada & CCC), Estee Lau (Salvation Army), Karen Orlandi (United Church of Canada), Roshney Kurian (CCC), and Karen Puddicombe (CCC).*

# Foreword

From 2021-2024, while I was serving as one of the Vice Presidents of The Canadian Council of Churches, I was privileged to accompany the CCC's Commission on Justice and Peace, attending their meetings and participating in the dialogue on anti-racism that has been a priority over the last several years.

As a white woman and church leader, I have been slowly waking up to the colonial history of Canada and the ways that the churches have participated in colonial programs. I know that we actively contributed to the harm perpetrated against Indigenous people, failed to speak or act against systemic racism in our society and churches, and that we are called to do better as we

strive to address the ongoing racism that continues to operate in our communities.

I am grateful for the leadership of The Commission on Justice and Peace with regard to anti-racism, and for the church representatives who bring their expertise and experience of working for justice from their various churches and contexts. I am also grateful for the Spirit that inspired the idea of putting together a devotional on this topic.

This devotional is a gift for the churches and all who want to follow Jesus in building just, intercultural communities of faith. It represents the generosity, courage, and wisdom of a wide variety of individuals who share their experiences,

perspectives, and reflections in these pages.

When I first read the draft of the devotional, I skimmed the reflections fairly quickly. I was struck by the diversity of voices, by the vulnerability of the authors, and by the pervasive experiences of racism that continue to impact my colleagues and friends within the churches today.

After reading it, I committed myself to two things: First, I will choose a season and use this devotional each day for more careful reflection and prayer. Second, I will share this devotional with my congregation, my denomination, and my ecumenical friends. I hope that you will do the same.

As an ecumenist, one of my favourite passages is 1 Corinthians 12, in which the Church is compared to a human body with all its diverse members connected and coordinated, with each member contributing its unique qualities and gifts to the work of the Body of Christ. Perhaps you remember the part where Paul writes: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"

I am convinced that the church needs all of its diverse members to fully embody Christ's presence in the world, and that the church needs to listen to the voices of those who have been marginalized in order to grow into the church we are called to be. This devotional provides a significant opportunity for that kind of listening, learning, and growing together.

Prayer: Help your churches, Lord Jesus, to overcome the true divisions

that disfigure your one Church; may the churches re-learn, wisely and courageously, the way of genuine unity-in-diversity, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Taken from *In God's Reconciling Grace*, by Bernard De Margerie, 2014, p. 63)

**Rev. Amanda Currie**

PRESIDENT, THE CANADIAN  
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES



**SECTION 1**

**Honouring Identity in Christ**

# Keeping Taste as a Form of Resistance

*Rev. Min-Goo Kang*

**Scripture: Luke 24:28–32**

## REFLECTION

My journey as a racialized immigrant has made me acutely aware of my cultural heritage. I give thanks to God for all the things that make me uniquely me—the way of life I inherited, my accent, communication styles including body language, skin colour, appearance, and my sense of taste. I cannot and should not change these qualities, for without them, I can't be fully who I am. It's true that our body contains the wisdom we need. My embodied experiences become a stepping stone for me to deepen my relationship with my ancestors, the land I came from (the Korean Peninsula), and the Divine Nature in everyone and everything.

Living in a predominantly white culture requires mindful practices to not conform to the dominant culture, but rather honour my roots. Keeping my taste, for example, is a form of my resistance to the dominant culture. Whenever I feel homesick, which has a spiritual connotation as a sign of longing for God, I crave comfort food. However, finding the right ingredients for my cultural food has been a challenge. That sense of scarcity is shared among many newcomers to Canada. A newcomer from Peru told me about her challenge finding certain ingredients in Victoria to cook her cultural food, which is an essential part of maintaining her Peruvian identity. We must ask why maintaining certain tastes is costly. What do

the small aisles in our grocery stores designated for international food tell us about the power imbalance in food? The implication is that newcomers are expected to assimilate their tastes just as they are expected to learn the Canadian accent. Food, it turns out, is a deeply personal, political, and spiritual issue.

Scarcity makes us struggle, but it also makes us long for a deeper connection. My father died during the COVID-19 pandemic. It happened during one of the waves when travel restrictions were in place, so I could not travel to say goodbye to him and to be with my grieving family in Korea. I was desperate to find a way to grieve the loss and to honour my father. I remembered a particular

dish he and I shared. He had been knowledgeable about the food and showed me how to eat it. I could recall the taste and my memory of him attached to it as I began to cook the dish. Once I made it, I invited my immediate family to sit around the table. We lit some candles and shared the food in memory of my father. It was very comforting. Food became the source of my healing process. When no other resources were available, I could still access my sense of taste which connects to my memories.

Luke tells a story of the two disciples who encountered the risen Christ on their way home. They were talking about their traumatic experiences of losing their beloved one, who was their teacher, prophet, and friend. While walking, they were expressing their anger, sadness, and disappointment. Jesus came along and joined the conversation, but they did not recognize him. It was only after sharing the bread that they were able to recognize the risen Christ in their midst. It's not clear when exactly their eyes were open, whether it was after seeing the action – take, bless and break it – or after tasting the bread. The point is that what they did together at the table reminded the disciples of the presence of someone they longed for. Sharing the meal helped them access their memory, which brought them in the presence of Jesus in no time.

All of us can experience a great sense of community whenever we share a meal together—the invisible community, made of both the living and the dead. As a source of nourishment for body and soul, food can connect us deeply beyond any existing boundaries. Our ancestors—including our spiritual ancestor, Jesus—may join us at the table, blessing, comforting, and supporting us as invisible guests, as companions (those who break bread together) on our journey.

## PRAYER

Stay with us, Jesus, for we are tired of the ongoing legacy of colonialism—racism, discrimination, and assimilation. Empower us with our senses so we can resist the system which tries to disconnect us from the land and from one another. Help us embrace our bodily experiences as the source of deeper connections. Bless our diverse tastes and our memories attached to them so we can participate in your work of regeneration—cultural, economic, and spiritual renewal for all. Amen.

## QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you honour your cultural identity and why is the method you choose important to you?
- If your local grocer store has an international food section, take time to notice how it is displayed and what food items it contains. What can you learn about food and systemic racism from this experience?
- Is there a particular dish that reminds you of someone you miss? If so, I invite you to consider cooking the dish and sharing it with others, along with a story about the person and the dish. Perhaps you can also invite others to share their own stories about food.

## RESOURCES

To learn more about engaging in intercultural ministry with food, please visit the following websites:

- *Taste of Home: A Photo-Documentary Cookbook* (Broad View United Church, 2023), <https://broadviewunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Taste-of-Home-online-v2.0.pdf>.

This is an intercultural celebration that invites newcomers to share their family recipes.

- “Cook, taste, connect: the power of food in supporting student well-being,” *University of Victoria* website, <https://www.uvic.ca/support-uvic/impact-stories/all-stories/belonging-dinner.php>

This food program on the University of Victoria campus invites students to care for whole embodied self by cooking culturally relevant foods together.

- “Friendship Kitchen, Taste of Home, Belonging Dinners by Ha Na Park and Min-Goo Kang” *Around the Table* podcast episode, <https://aroundthetabledialogues.ca/episode-7-friendship-kitchen-taste-of-home-belonging-dinners-ha-na-park-min-goo-kang/>

This community-engaged research project and podcast is hosted by Cindy Holmes, Fiona Chong, and Leslie Williams. It explores the relationship between food, belonging, spirituality, and social justice through dinner dialogues.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

With a strong sense of place, I appreciate how diverse landscapes shape my identity and lifestyle, each with its own unique beauty. In my ministry, I praise the Creator by fostering a welcoming environment where the transformative power of love can be shared. Influenced by Daoism and Buddhism, my spirituality promotes harmony with all creation. Currently, I serve as a United Church Campus Minister at the University of Victoria and as Intercultural Program Minister at Broad View United, joyfully engaging with diverse cultures.

# Transplant – A Pilgrimage in Between Homes

*Rev. David Tin*

**Scripture: Acts 2:1–11 (NIV)**

## REFLECTION

How does the Holy Spirit enable the nations to hear the wonders of God? Is there an elected group who are enlightened with the knowledge and experience of the wonders of God? Is there an enlightened ethnic group gifted and commissioned by the Holy Spirit to declare the wonders of God to all nations?

Thanks be to God. Coming from ancestor worship, Buddhism, and Confucius background, I am blessed with reading the scripture in my own language (Cantonese).

I came to Canada in pursuit of postsecondary education. Living

in the western world was a dream come true for a colonized Hong Kong citizen. Leaving home for the first time, life was lonely and challenging. Through a Cantonese-speaking church, I find a safe harbour in many ways. Hearing Christian students, teachers, and pastors declaring the wonders of God in a Cantonese context, it was empowering. With the support of this community, I have entered into a relationship with Jesus.

Years later, through careful discernment, I entered the seminary in a smaller town and pursued ordained ministry. It was hard. I was not well versed with western philosophy, western history, western sociology, and western ethics. I tried hard to fit in with the European community

life. It was painful. I find myself doing things I was not comfortable with. I find myself alienated. Yet I pretended to fit in and enjoyed it. My upbringing has conditioned me to be submissive to westerners. My social and political conditioning has led me to covet what the western world has to offer. If I do well in the western world, I will surely do well in my world, Chinese Cantonese community. Throughout the years of seminarian education, I was told, “We are training you to be a pastor for all congregations, not just Chinese ones.” During my first year of study, I deemed myself “not competent.” On the other hand, I wondered, “Can I ever be? Do I need to be? Is equipping to serve a Cantonese congregation not good enough to be a Lutheran pastor in Canada?”

As I entered my second year, I have encountered a message on my history professor's voicemail, it went something like this:

If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

—Lilla Watson

It is about the liberation we may find in Christ, not upon the proclaimer. None can claim, "I've got it, follow me." We can only claim, look upon Jesus, let's walk together and support each other. Let's speak in our own language, live faithful, discern the call, carry one's own cross, and build up the body of Christ together.

Thanks to my history professor, contextual education supervisor, principal dean, and my bishop, I was encouraged and supported to explore my faith, and my ministry in Cantonese context. They have been the pillars in my vocation and faith journey.

A language is more than a language. Taking away the language, we take away the culture. Disregard the culture, we disregard the people. No pastor can be pastor for "all congregations." I am ill-equipped to serve German, Swedish, Danish, Latvian, and Anglo congregations. I am willing to walk with you and grow together.

"What is your experience of racism?" Everywhere, systematic racism and white supremacist culture are visible through the disproportionate ethnic representation on antiracism work, anti-white supremacist work, and ethnic specific work. Facing racism, oppression, and disrespect, we don't get to choose how people treat us. We get to choose if we allow that treatment to define us or not. I give that power over to God. God treats



TOP: Marker on a church building on the property of Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary

BOTTOM: A church building on the property of Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary

me with love, having Jesus died on the cross defines me.

I am a beloved Cantonese child of God.

### PRAYER

Heavenly creator. Thank you for loving ALL nations. May we learn to liberate messengers to declare in all tongues. May we learn to hear from whom we declare Your wonder. In Your precious holy name, amen.

### QUESTIONS

- Are I the enlightened one? Am I in authority to enlighten others?

- What is the golden rule that I hold dearly as I teach, serve, minister and guide others?
- Would my golden rule put others not speaking my tongue in chain, pain, alienation, and unworthy?
- Am I part of the systematic racism and white supremacist culture?
- Lord, help me to see three faces that are suffering in this!
- Lord, speak to me, how may I bind my liberation in You with the liberation of others?

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Born and raised in Hong Kong. Migrated to Canada in 1979. Studied in Aerospace Engineering and Biomedical Engineering. Ordained in 1992 Eastern Synod. Currently serving Rhenish Church in Markham, Dean of Central Toronto, Chairperson of Chinese Ministry Conference ELCIC (Evangelic Lutheran Church in Canada).

# Amnesia & Apostasy: An Orthodox Christian Meditation on Ethnic Chauvinism as Racism

*Colin Justin Grimmond*

## Scripture I: Acts 2:1–11

This event of the visitation of the Holy Spirit on all those gathered on the Day of Pentecost is reminiscent of and the reversal of another event at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9), where people were dispersed due to an inability to understand one another as punishment for their overweening ambition & hubris.

Prior to Jesus's ascension, he promised that his disciples would "receive power after . . . the Holy Ghost has come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In the ministry of Christ, we see intimations of the inchoate faith of non-Jews, Romans, Greeks, Samaritans, Ethiopians, Cyrenians, and others through their divine encounters with the Son of God, thus divine grace was expanded beyond the chosen people of Israel. This was confirmed to all the disciples with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thus, showing that God is no respecter of people, that all who earnestly seek after him & obey his will are acceptable to him. Conversely, the spiritual dimensions of ethnocentrism/racism within Christ's mystical body, the Christian ecclesia, and within the broader civil society is a radical inversion and a satanic repudiation of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

I was born & raised in Toronto within a predominantly Caribbean émigré community of a Wesleyan/Methodist Protestant affiliation and with Church of the Nazarene/Holiness members as well. Growing up, I saw & experienced a profound demarcation between the nurturing 'Black' Christian environment and the broader secular 'Euro' Canadian society, which was often blind to its own 'white supremacist' cultural heritage & institutional practices. After spending close to ten years within the Anglican Church, I was received into the Orthodox Church over twenty years ago. Now, one of things I noticed within both 'mainline' & 'evangelical' Protestant communities, was how many 'Euro' Canadian

Christians racialized as 'White', were able to divorce their Christian religious devotion from their abusive ethical behaviour towards other negatively racialized & marginalized people – 'Black' & Brown folk like myself.

Nevertheless, I was buoyed up with a fundamental & optimistic belief that all Christians, irrespective of their confessional tradition, would strive to live out this 'Pentecost' faith especially so in our multicultural, multiethnic Canadian society—affirming that in Christ, there is neither Jew or Greek (Gal. 3:28-29). It was this outlook that accompanied me throughout my life!

## QUESTIONS

- Why is it difficult for Christians to establish ecclesial communities that reflect the ethnic diversity of the surrounding society?
- Do ecclesial communities that intentionally & primarily serve the pastoral needs of a single ethnic group inevitably foster racial prejudice towards 'outsiders' or others outside that group?
- As Christians, do we believe that unity manifested on the Day of Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit is normative for the Church?

### Scripture II: Mark 9:42–50 (RSV)

I have experienced many scandals within the historic, official Orthodox churches. Orthodox Christian people—laity & clergy have both made comments about the darkness of my skin, about my not belonging in their midst since I am not Greek or Russian, etc. Or positively, after engaging me & discerning my theological knowledge, appreciating my Orthodox faith ethnocentrically,

'you are a true Hellene' or 'you are more Russian than some Russians!' I have attended a number of churches where the dominant focus is on the cultivation of ethnic-cultural activities, i.e. language classes, ethnic dancing, to the exclusion of Bible study, study of the Holy Fathers, and other forms of catechesis instruction.

A number of years ago, I attended the memorial service for the son of a Russian work colleague who had suddenly passed away. I optimistically hoped that the Russian Orthodox service would be conducted in English since it was taking place at a local funeral home. However, I was deeply disappointed. Not only was the service conducted in Church Slavonic, a language that no one from my work place remotely understood, but on both sides of the casket of my work colleague's son were symbolic emblems of Russian nationality & not the Orthodox Christian faith – a larger-than-life size photo of Russian President Vladimir Putin & a large Russian flag. A witness not to our Christian hope in the resurrection but to the glory of the so-called 'Holy Rus'.

Now we face Orthodox Christian patriarchs, that are essentially, 'ethnarchs', who are advancing 'ethnotheologies' or other ethno-territorial heteropraxic notions, of which *Russkiy Mir* & *Omogeneia* are the most conspicuous & egregious examples.

The foundational Gospel message of salvation intended for all is being eclipsed by this pseudo-Orthodox 'ethnophyletistic' ethos which is omnipresent in all ethnic Orthodox churches in the so-called 'diaspora'. The 'little ones' – converts, second generation 'cradle Orthodox' youth,

who don't know their own ethnic languages eventually leave these historic Orthodox churches in search of spiritual nourishment elsewhere or abandon the Christian faith in its entirety. *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi*. As we worship, So we believe, So we live. This racialist situation is emblematic of a lack of *nepsis* and a failure to acquire the actual *paradosis* of the Church. For many, there has been a desire to assimilate, to imitate, to take pride in their race, their ethnic-nationality, and to be modern, which in fact means, to align with Western Colonial modernity, even to become racialized as white, if possible.

By embarking on this aberrant path, which is the abandonment of the kenosis of their own righteous & holy ancestors who are glorified as saints, it then becomes impossible to be a witness to the suffering peoples—those marginalized and racialized peoples, such as the

Aboriginal, Indigenous people of this continent & the descendants of African slaves who were brought to this continent against their will. Orthodox Christianity is at a crossroads!

## QUESTIONS

- How and why do we replace our worship of the triune God with false idols?
- In these dark times, how do we persevere in our faith?
- How do we as Christians grow amidst adversity, even within the Church itself?

### Scripture III: Matthew 23:2–4, 13–14, 24–25, 29–31 (RSV)

There are many 'churches', and church movements throughout our recent

modern history that, because of their unfaithfulness, have apostatized from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A priest mentor of mine, upon graduating from an Orthodox Christian seminary, arrived at an Orthodox Cathedral in Toronto, whereupon, the parish rector, asked him, 'what kind of priest are you since you do not know Russian?' and then later, the rector was overheard saying, 'I do not want English within 30 miles of my parish!' Tragically, or providentially, this priest found his ministry by establishing an Orthodox Christian chaplaincy at the University of Toronto.

Concerning this darkening of the nous, once when our beloved Fr. Thomas Hopko, was in Toronto visiting, a parishioner asked him this question, 'how is it & why are some people in Church, after attending services all their lives, don't seem to make progress spiritually, don't seem to become more Christ-like but rather the opposite?'; Fr. Thomas responded that there are many people who are part of the Church institution—laity, clergy, bishops—who attend the Divine Liturgy week in week out, month in month out, year in year out, and the words of Holy Scripture, from the Psalter, the pre-communion & post-communion prayers fail to penetrate into their hearts. And this is because, above their devotion to Christ, they have placed an idol, of the sacred language, the beautiful and exact musical composition, the sublime aesthetic of the icon, and the ethnic community gathering, etc. So instead of the softening of the heart receptive to the gentle stirrings of the Holy Spirit, we see over time, the hardening of the heart unmoved to repentance. Thus, instead of sanctification/divinization, we have in fact, demonization! As such, these people may even continue to

memorialize the Saints of old, but their lives are far from the way of holy imitation.

## MY SPIRITUAL RESPONSE

This kenotic journey within various (Eastern) Orthodox churches has often caused me to experience further marginalization. Nevertheless, it has produced a greater appreciation that I am indeed a sojourner on the way to my eschatological destination. Thus even schisms & heresies can produce spiritual benefit (1 Cor. 11:19 KJV). Purification through righteous struggle, from criticisms, including even from racial microaggressions, produces illumination, which in turn, leads to sanctification/divinization/theosis.

## PRAYER

*The Jesus Prayer*

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy On Me, A Sinner!

## RESOURCES

- [Ethnophyletism, Phyletism, and the Pan-Orthodox Council](#)  
— Fr. Cyril Hovorun (academia.edu)
- [Ethno-phyletism and the \[so-called\] Ecclesial "Diaspora"](#)  
—Fr. Grigorios Papatomas (academia.edu)
- [Orthodox Theology Challenged by Balkan and East European Ethnotheologies](#)—Pantelis Kalaitzidis (academia.edu)
- ["Ordinary Fascism," or The Russian World of Patriarch Kirill](#)  
—Serhii Shumylo
- [The March on Selma: Orthodoxy and the Civil Rights Movement](#)  
—GOAA Department of Inter-

Orthodox Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

- [Toward a Multicultural Symphonia: Orthodox Solidarity in an Age of Diversity](#)  
—Chris Durante, September 28, 2016

A full list of Orthodox Christian Resources is available by contacting [info@councilofchurches.ca](mailto:info@councilofchurches.ca)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colin Grimmond resides in Windsor, Ontario, on the traditional territories of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, the Ojibwe, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi. He has belonged to various jurisdictions within the Eastern Orthodox Church since 2000. He currently works as a Senior Project Coordinator within the community economic development sector assisting Black small business owners & entrepreneurs throughout southwestern Ontario.

Colin has extensive volunteer experience serving within various Christian social justice organizations & activities over a 20-year span including the Canadian Council of Churches - Commission on Justice & Peace as a representative of the Canadian Archdiocese of the Orthodox Church in America, Orthodox Peace Fellowship, Citizens for Public Justice, Community Peacemakers Teams, & most recently, the Canadian Friends of Sabeel.

# A Deparochial Parish

*Quinton V. Peralta-Greenough*

**Scripture: Galatians 3:27–28**

## REFLECTION

I am a man from nowhere in particular. I am Canadian, but everyone knows that to be Canadian is never descriptive enough. This country's origins reveal a contested landscape that is continually evolving. For millennia, the lands of Canada belonged to various Indigenous Peoples such as the Anishinaabeg, Haida, Cree, and many others. The arrival of various English and French Settlers some centuries ago then led to new and often disputed claims about what these lands were to be, which was further complicated by the addition of great many other nationalities: Nigerian

Canadians, Indian Canadians, Chinese Canadians—the list goes on. In my case, there is a smattering of English, French, Spanish, Italian, and Maltese. But, like so many families that came to Canada, my ancestors came here to start new lives. They wished to leave behind the lives they had in their respective 'old countries,' as they wanted a fresh start. For those of us who came after them on this continent, this has often left us without a sense of lineage.

In my early twenties, however, this sense of lacking substantive identity came to a head. The necessary recognition of my own identity became a dire need, but there was nothing to which I could 'turn back.' I therefore sought out

religious traditions—several of which I was studying in university—for these seemed to offer a way of understanding oneself in the cosmos without any need for a heritage; in some sense, conversion requires only a sense of the future. This soulful journey was not a direct one; it began with reading texts, philosophical and theological, from a variety of traditions and bouncing between them. Eventually, however, I realised that merely *thinking* something was insufficient: I had to do something.

Living where I was, there were many churches in my vicinity to explore. This journey lasted a little over eighteen months. It was a process of perpetually feeling a sense of exclusion; I was not yet immersed

enough in the tradition of the churchgoers, nor did I have anything more to identify with the parishioners. I became a spiritual drifter. In time, I realized that this was an unsustainable practice. I knew I would have to make up my mind about where I wished to go and simply stick to it. In that moment, however, as Providence is so apt to have it, a friend asked me if I knew anything about a strange looking building with big, gold domes on its roof that sat just across a small river from the university we were attending. I said I did not; he said "Let's go."

"St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Shrine" read the sign in front of the building. Neither my friend nor I understood what that set of words meant. What is a Greek-Catholic? What is distinct about a 'Shrine'? We both thought, however, that questions were typically a good place to start. Attending the next Divine Liturgy was booked into both our calendars.

The following Sunday, I was enraptured by the vibrancy of the liturgical community: the singing abounded throughout the service with prayer in English, French, Greek, and what I would come to recognize as Ukrainian. Taken by this little unknown world, I approached the front of the church upon the liturgy's conclusion. The deacon greeted me and asked me what I was doing there. I said I did not know; he said he could tell me.

"Look up there. Do you see those Cyrillic letters along this arch that helps separate the sanctuary? They say, 'Sviat, Sviat, Sviat,' or, as we would say, 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' That is what we are doing here. We are encountering the Holy, the Divine."

I responded: "What language is that?"

"Ukrainian."

"Are you Ukrainian?"

He smiled. "No, no. I am of Scottish stock. Our tradition was, indeed, transmitted to us via Ukrainians, but there is something much beyond that here. You will note that many of our parishioners are hardly Ukrainian, though several still have that connection; we have all, Ukrainian or not, been given this gift of how to pray from the Ukrainians of prior generations. Now, will you join us downstairs for lunch?"

I then proceeded to the basement with him and enjoyed a meal of various curries prepared by the Goan subdeacon—a man whom I did not yet know would become my father-in-law. Later, I would meet his daughter, whose mother is Korean, and we would marry a few years later. As I returned to this church weekly, I continually noticed more diverse practices among the regular parishioners. One Sunday morning, I encountered a man reading from his Tamil Bible in preparation for Liturgy. Another Sunday afternoon, I sat in the church hall with a Chinese-French Canadian, Mr. Yu, who explained to me how he wound up at St. John's in a way quite similar to my own. What was the secret? How was this little, eclectic, "national" church able to gather such diversity?

"We believe—whoever we are—in a man who likely spoke Aramaic and other Semitic languages, whose story we learn of through a text originally written in Greek, joyfully transmitted to us here by a Slavic and Ukrainian tradition. How is this possible?"

The deacon paused in his homily to let the peculiarity of his question sink in.

"It is only possible because of the truth that sits underneath all those specific, contextual, diverse human

circumstances. What is this? It is the truth of a self-sacrificial love, epitomized by Our Lord on the Cross; the love that always understands oneself as needing to become less for the sake of the other; a love that can find joy in anyone made in the image of God, which is to say every human person in the fullness of his or her dignity."

This, I believe, was and is the secret. This little church held and holds on to the love that Our Lord, Christ Jesus, came to preach and give to the world. I encountered a great diversity of people—including their cultures, traditions, and languages—and we could find one another in the love that was beneath our more contingent realities. And, when our contingencies are anchored to the Spirit that undergirds all, anyone who knows His love will delight in the ethnic and cultural peculiarities of others who also have found this Spirit revealed fully in Christ. To know and love God—He Who is both most familiar and most other from ourselves, more than anyone else—is to know how to dispose one's heart to anyone, no matter how "other" they may seem, with a divine openness and joy.

## PRAYER

O Lord, Who gives us all we are to be,

Do cleanse our souls from lies told by the eyes:

Forgive the stains of hatred held in me.

Make whole this broken heart with newer ties.

Then we may see diversity as *One*,

The Spirit holding all who seek Thy Son.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Quinton Peralta-Greenough is the husband of Jasmine, by whom he is a father to Thomas. They are a Byzantine Catholic family living in Toronto, Ontario, while Quinton pursues his doctoral studies in Political Theory; his main area of focus is theorizing moderation in modern statecraft via twentieth-century French and English intellectuals. The Peralta-Greenough Family serves at a Byzantine Catholic chapel, St. Sophia's, within St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto and seeks to continually share the Good News.

# Cloaked in Christ

*Rev. Chung Yan Lam*

**Scripture: Galatians 3:27–28**

## REFLECTION

Have you ever experienced the awkwardness of wearing an identical outfit as to another person at a social gathering? Even identical twins choose to establish distinguishing characteristics to maintain uniqueness between themselves. It speaks to our yearning for self-expression and diversity. Having worn school uniforms during my younger days in Hong Kong, it helped me to appreciate especially their efficacy in simplifying morning routines. I did not love my uniforms, but I respected the intentionality of creating visible equality among my colleagues. The illusion of equality

was shattered when wealthier students bullied fellow students based on whose uniforms were fresher and better laundered. Our school accessories identified those who had larger budgets. When teachers joined in on the bullying and ridiculed students for less shiny shoes or less-than-perfect sneakers, disillusionment with uniforms settled even deeper. Uniforms can indeed offer visible unity and ease in identifying one's role and office. However, uniformity can give a false sense of equality when it doesn't address the underlying prejudices that create divisive attitudes and behaviours.

The Apostle Paul proposed that being clothed with Christ can

create equality much like wearing a uniform, because as we encounter one another, we first encounter Christ. This way, our social and cultural differences are prevented from causing prejudice and division in the faith community. Ideally, this posture would deem the Church to be without racial discrimination or prejudice. However, the colonial project distorted this concept by imposing the Eurocentric image of Christ as the status quo. Being Christian became synonymous as being European and North American, dependent on where the missionary came from. In China, the missionaries persuaded new Christians to abandon cultural ways such as dress and hairstyle, which

were representative to the people, and to begin imitating the ways of the missionaries. Most importantly, families were divided when individuals took on Western influence of the individual over the communal. In this way, when we experience being clothed with Christ, it is a covering up our authenticity by conforming to the ways of the white socialized. Being Christian, then, is to seek to become something and someone I can never achieve authenticity.

“I don’t see colour.”

“My parents raised me to accept everyone. We had people of all colours come over to our house. I treat everyone the same.”

On many occasions, some self-declared allies would try and persuade me that they are colour-blind. Being colour-blind when it comes to racial discrimination is a way for these individuals to justify that they are not participants in racism or racist systems. They do not have privilege, never mind white privilege. To deal with racism is not an option for the racialized, and to insist on not seeing race is to silence our voices and stories. To reject the reality of seeing visible differences minimizes my experience of prejudice, denouncing the truth of my story. In one statement of not seeing colour, my humanity is negated and so is my story. No one can avoid seeing colour, even individuals who are physiologically limited in vision can still see the differentiation of shades. Through this lens, being clothed in Christ—or more specifically in the Eurocentric Christ—is a challenge for me as it suggests to cover up the very gifts that God has given me—culture, community, identity, and roots.

I do want to be clothed with Christ—a Christ that looks like me. More impactfully, I prefer to hold Christ at my core, with all of my diversity out on display. God has created everything distinguishing and unique about me—language, skin colour, hair, facial features. Each of us engages authentically through language, music, wisdom, and art when we reclaim our rightful place around the circle. We don’t need masking or hiding our differences, but—like the diversity of threads in a tapestry—we can create beauty when we each find an equal place in Creation.

## PRAYER

Creator and lover of diversity, open our eyes to see all creation through God’s eyes beyond our limitations; open our ears to hear with God’s compassion; open our hearts to love as tenderly as Jesus Christ who walks with us, laughs with us, and weeps with us. Grant us a softness in our encounters, O God, that we journey with each other meaningfully and authentically. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

## QUESTIONS

- Where are we colour-blind when it comes to our church traditions and our approaches to reading Scripture?
- Take a moment to look at the lyrics of your favourite hymns or your favourite prayers. Whose perspective is the prominent voice in the hymn or prayer? Whose perspective is missing or silenced in the text? Who would be marginalized or hurt potentially by the way the texts are written?
- Creative option: endeavour to rewrite the hymn and prayer. What would you change and why?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Chung Yan Lam 林頌恩 is passionate about creating worship where all experience an intentional welcome. She is an ordained pastor of the ELCIC, serving at All Saints’ Anglican Church Westboro in the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa. Her studies include Master of Theology at Emmanuel College, Master of Advanced Ecumenical Studies at The Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, and Master of Divinity at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary (now Martin Luther University College). She has served on the Commission on Faith and Witness, Governing Board of The Canadian Council of Churches, and recently as one of the Vice-Presidents of CCC.

# All One in Christ

*Rev. Joon-Ki Kim*

**Scripture: Galatians 3:27–29**

## REFLECTION

A poem entitled “Things Unbearable,” by a Korean writer Park Kyong Ri (translated by Kim Hyun Kyuk), enumerates various physical pains that tortuously damaged her:

Since I moved into the  
Dankoodong village  
I was pricked by a thorned larva  
on the arm  
To be swollen red and hot ...  
My pain did not stop there ...  
The day I pulled along those cut  
branches of Jujube trees  
By chance, I was hit on the calf  
to be bled by them.

Despite the bitter brutality of the scars, the poet “tried not to mind

much.” What will never be made bearable to her is not a bodily hurt:

What I can never bear at all  
Is the eyes of those people  
Because they are poorer than I  
Or richer than I  
Or more handsome than I  
Or uglier than I  
Those eyes turned into swords  
and arrows.

In the words of Paul from 1 Corinthians, it is engendered by “a human point of view” (1 Corinthians 5:16) to perceive others with objectifying judgment and preconceived bias. That point of view contrasts with the viewpoint based on the love of God revealed through the cross, and has nothing to do with God’s new creation. Also,

it constantly persuades people to measure themselves in comparison with others to decide the matter of superiority or inferiority. The power of dividing and disjoining prejudice can permeate and grasp, both openly and clandestinely, individual minds and societal cultures, piercing countless human hearts as its victims— as if swords and arrows. Tragically, the dehumanizing human point of view is the steady main viewpoint in “the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4), from which Christ is entirely committed to saving all of us, as that point of view breeds incessantly alienation, disjunction, and discrimination.

Galatians 3:27–29 disrupts the fundamental premise of the human

point of view in the present evil age. “All of you are one in Christ” (Gal 3:27). From the viewpoint of the Gospel of Christ, each person is not simply a separate entity, “entire of oneself.” As John Donne puts it, we are all “parts of the main” and comprise equally the body of Christ, who is the head of the church. When someone looks at others with one’s discriminatory eyes, the basic assumption regarding the perspective is that there is an obvious, independent self or a discrete being of himself or herself, that can be clearly differentiated from the others evaluated, judged, or shunned. A radically enlightening word of the Gospel of Christ refutes the prevalent assumption as a beguiling, persuasive illusion. The truth that we are connected to one another far more closely than we can ever imagine often remains unnoticed or even buried in oblivion. The crucified and risen One tears down the basis of all the racially biased actions, words, emotions, and in fact, every form of unjust, toxic discrimination. The Lord of eternal truth exposes the falsity of dominating but inhumane perspectives of the present sinful age and overthrows it with the powerful, indiscriminatory love of God.

In the world built on the encompassing love, “there is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female.” The tenacious, stratified barriers between Jews and Gentiles, causing intense hostility are no more. All the ideas of one’s superiority or inferiority attached to one’s racial, cultural, or socio-economic backgrounds lose their validity for good when God reigns for all through Christ. In the new world of God, the matters that once were the reason for the creation of

factions turns out to be the reason for live, dynamic, and transforming interactions and celebrations as they are diverse assets enriching the life of all in God’s ever-enlarging community. The Gospel we have received is certainly revolutionary. By challenging human history from its bottom, it leads us to live a new era as a new humanity through the love of the Lord “older than the world can be, and younger than the life in us,” (from the hymn “One More Step Along the World I Go.”

### PRAYER

Gracious God, you set us free from the sinful powers of the world by giving yourself to us entirely. Empower us to share your non-discriminatory love freely through Christ the Lord.

### QUESTIONS

- Share your thoughts about the statement “You are all one in Christ.” Can you give your complete consent to it? What do you think makes it hard for us to recognize fully the truth of the statement of the Gospel?
- Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination in which someone’s hateful eyes or intentionally distancing attitudes felt hurtful? Or have you known the story of another person’s experience related to wounding prejudice and discrimination? How would you contrast those harmful images and messages with the messages that we find from Galatians 3:27–29 or the Gospel of Christ in general?
- When you have such a troubling experience, how would you let your faith community know about it and ask for their support?

When you know someone in your faith community struggling with the challenge, how would you express your support for him or her?

- There are those who say, “I or my communities have not committed any offensive error related to racism. For that reason, we have nothing to reflect on or repent about the topic. It is someone else’s problem.” But the challenging messages of the Gospel urge all of us to see clearly what happens in the realities of the current world and learn how we may have been involved—knowingly or unknowingly—in the devastating, unjust influence, that is pervasive like the air that we breathe. How would you want to start a conversation with them and help them to have a deeper understanding of the nature of the issues of racism?

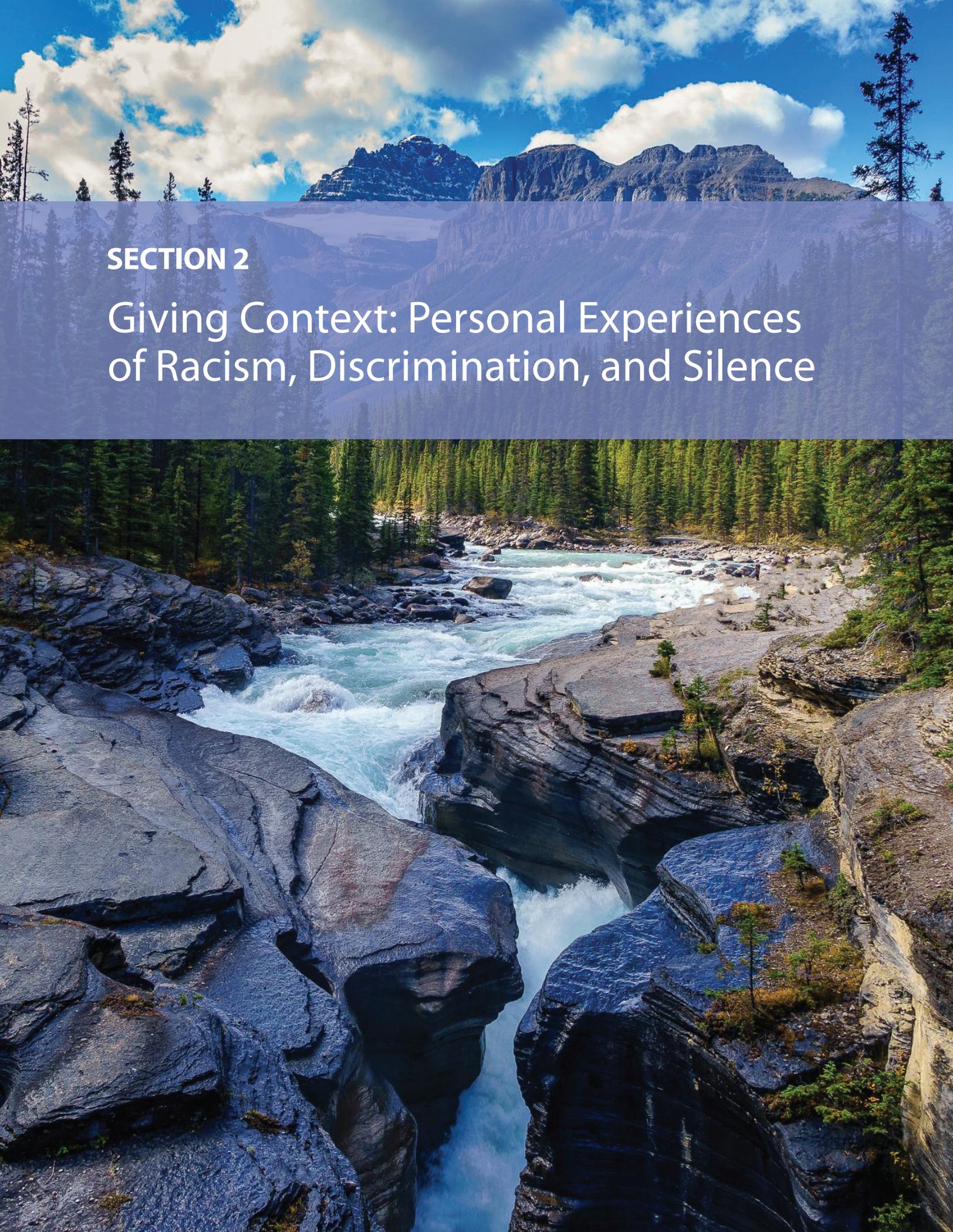
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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

My family and I came to Canada from Korea in 2004 for my studies in the doctoral program at Knox College, University of Toronto, finishing them and graduating in November, 2011. I was the minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in New Glasgow, NS, between January 2015 and August 2022. Since September 2023, I have been the minister of the pastoral charge of St. Andrew's and Little Harbour Presbyterian Church. My family and I are deeply thankful for the joyful love and friendship that we receive abundantly from the two congregations. My wife Ji Hye and I have two children, Sophia and Timothy, who are both university students.

The image is a composite of two landscape photographs. The top portion shows a wide view of a mountain range with a prominent peak, partially covered in snow, under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The bottom portion shows a close-up of a river with white-water rapids flowing through a narrow, rocky canyon. The rocks are dark and layered, and the surrounding forest is dense with evergreen trees.

## SECTION 2

# Giving Context: Personal Experiences of Racism, Discrimination, and Silence

# An Invitation to the Noonday Well

*Rev. Janaki Bandara*

**Scripture: John 4:1–14**

## REFLECTION

At 2018 Eastern Synod (pre-pandemic) Assembly, the practice of a learning event involved an exercise called “the Race Number Line.” Our Synod had a group of people who came together to encourage our Synod to talk about racial justice. The group modified this exercise to fit the large banquet hall we use for our assembly hall. Numbers were placed along two walls ranging from zero to one hundred, if I remember correctly. Questionnaires were distributed: designed to demonstrate, numerically, the ways in which racially diverse people tend to be disadvantaged. We were each

invited to fill out a questionnaire and take a score at the end.

A relative silence descended on the expansive meeting room, as heads bowed diligently over questions, and scores were tallied up. We were then instructed to stand along the walls of the assembly hall in groups, according to where our scores had fallen.

Remember, numbers were placed along the two walls.

Synod Assembly is an opportunity to catch up with friends we haven’t seen in a long time. Every coffee break and mealtime is a chance to visit—an occasion for celebrating community. Where people gather together without a business agenda, there is, invariably, friendly visiting. It gets loud.

In our Race Number Line exercise, as people moved to the numbered segment of wall representing the tally from their questionnaire, the area with higher numbers on the wall became a gathering for the majority of the assembly: white, mostly lifelong Lutherans were gathering there in a big crowd. They were talking and laughing and enjoying the chance to be together and visit. As I said, groups gather, friendly visiting happens, it gets loud.

I ended up against the other wall. In the area with the lower numbers: digits which articulated those disadvantaged by race. There was a small handful of people with me—mostly non-white, first-generation immigrants. If I remember correctly,

Rev. Conrad Plummer, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana and his wife were against that wall with me. It wasn't loud against our segment of wall. In fact, there was a pained and awkward silence between us, broken only by a few uncomfortable comments. Our skin tones represented the global south.

It was a stark display of the racial disparity in our church, just by the sheer numbers. It also demonstrated the unwillful blindness of those with racial privilege towards those who do not have that same privilege. There was no malice in the blindness. The bigger, privileged group, for the most part, simply failed to notice what had happened.

When I think back on it, the feelings I had help me to identify with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–14). She goes there in the noonday heat, not early in the morning with the other women, who regularly go together to get water in this communal and basic domestic chore. The majority make it an opportunity for fellowship in the context of that reading. The woman at the well in the noonday sun knows that she is different. She knows that her difference is a disadvantage. She knows that her difference draws an unseen barrier between herself and the wider community. So she goes to the well all alone – for that basic, necessary, essential for life: water.

At the Assembly, those in my area each knew what it was to go to the well alone. We did not need to explain to each other what we were feeling. I remember holding the hands of two other women who were there. I remember crying because I realized that so many of my Eastern Synod friends were in the big group across the assembly hall, completely oblivious to how this exercise of observing

racial privilege had separated us: the different from the similar.

From the big group, a small handful of my colleagues realized what was going on, and made their way towards us. In awkwardness, broken by apologies, we stood together: stronger. Over the remaining time of the Assembly, more colleagues came and spoke with me, making awkward apology for what the exercise had shown them—and acknowledging the work that needed yet to be done in our Synod family. The following day, the Eastern Synod's Racial Justice Advisory Committee (RJAC) was born.<sup>1</sup>

The ones who recognized their former blindness, and reached out to us in our small, vulnerable, huddle, they were the Christ, reaching out – intentionally – to be in relationship with the isolated woman at the well in the noonday sun. They realized that we—the marginalized—could draw water to share with them, too. They realized that they bore the Living Water which would quench all of our thirst in the kin-dom of God – the kin-dom we are here to realize together.

It takes intention and courage to respond to our observations of those on the margins. It takes pulling ourselves away from the comfortable groups in which we find easy, companionship, and friendship. It takes a willingness to venture into the discomfort of the noonday sun, to be with someone others may not even notice or see. It takes actions of friendship and love which defy injustice, which say to systemic evils: we beg to differ. It takes the Christ in you, the Christ in each of us to bring the water that quenches the thirst for justice.

## PRAYER

May God empower us with such intentions, such courage: to be the bearers of life-giving water.

## QUESTIONS

Read John 4:1–14, then read the above reflection again.

- In your experiences of being in a large group, what makes friendship possible? How does friendship depend on the things you share in common with others?
- What experiences have you had that allow you to identify with the woman at the well in the noonday sun? How could others be friends to you in those situations of isolation and marginalization?
- What actions of friendship and love could you take, to bring living water to those who are isolated and thirsting for community and belonging?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Janaki Bandara is a first generation settler in Canada, serving under Anglican appointment to a five-point charge on the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula in Ontario. Life in the Global South prior to moving to Canada informs her experience: Sri Lanka (where she was born, influenced by British and Portuguese colonization), Jamaica (where she grew up, influenced by Spanish and British colonization, the slave trade and emancipation in the 1900's), and Turtle Island (where she has now lived for about half her life, in close relationship with Indigenous people living on and off reserve). As a brown woman ordained in the ELCIC, Eastern Synod, she hopes we may together continue the work of decolonizing the church.

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<sup>1</sup> I am thankful to Rev Joanna Miller and those who were part of the initial group which became RJAC, for their courage in coming to the well, to meet us in the noonday sun.

# Tearing Down Walls: Overcoming Prejudice Through Faith and Understanding

*Lt. Tharwat Eskander (Pastor)*

**Scripture: Acts 10:1–2**

## REFLECTION

As an Egyptian Christian moving to North America at the age of seventeen years old, I was looked at by Western Christians with suspicion. I always felt that I was not as accepted as the others, but I didn't have any way to prove it. I remember when I was nineteen and was a part of an Arabic worship gathering that met at a Nazarene church, we used to have people come to see us worship in Arabic. One of them was a young woman close to my age who wanted to learn Arabic, and she liked me and told me that. I wasn't on the same page, but out of nowhere, the pastor of the Nazarene church asked to meet

me for lunch, and during lunch, he started questioning me about my legal status in the country, my religious background, and why I am I talking to this young woman from his church.

The meeting left me feeling like a criminal; although it wasn't me who initiated talking to this young woman, I was seen as dangerous, a liar, and illegal, but none of that was true.

In the same way, Jews in the New Testament always looked at Gentiles with suspicion, they didn't believe that a gentile would be righteous in the sight of God, or as the book of Acts called him a "God-fearing man." They thought that this was only possible from someone who is from God's people, perhaps this is why

God planned the vision of unclean animals so that Peter would agree to preach the gospel to Cornelius and accept that a Gentile would be also a child of God.

We also have prejudice and suspicion of people who aren't like us, and sometimes we may think that "foreigners"—people who don't look like us, worship like us, or acknowledge God the same way we do—are not as worthy of God's love and favour as we are. See Peter would have never believed that a Roman soldier could have a relationship with God and be righteous in God's eyes. Today, the Western church sometimes forgets that they were Gentiles and foreigners from God's family too. I wanted to tell this Pastor that I can

trace my Christian heritage to St. Mark the writer of the Gospel when he came to Alexandria in the first century bringing the message of the Gospel to the Egyptians, which many believed and got baptized, later in the third century the School of Alexandria introduced us to some of the most important early church fathers, like Origen of Alexandria and Athanasius, who fought the Arian heresy.

If we can understand that God has people all over the world, from every tribe, nation and tongue who follow Him from all their hearts, we will approach one another with respect, and a learning approach rather than a judgment approach.

What happened to me after this conversation with the Nazarene pastor, I stopped going to his church and the Arabic worship services that were held there. Jesus welcomed

people from all walks of life and didn't make others feel inferior, he even was engaged in a theological conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. We can learn from everyone we meet and approach people with the attitude of trying to understand that I know more than thou.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank you for seeing our hearts beyond our skin colour, country of origin, denominational or church association. We're loved deeply by you, and we all bring wealth to the kingdom of God. Lord, help us approach one another with understanding and willingness to learn. And that the church would walk humbly with you and lay down any prejudice or prejudgment against others.

I pray that in the wonderful name of Jesus...Amen.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Born in Cairo, Egypt, Tharwat is a visionary leader who planted an Arabic-speaking church in Dallas, Texas. With extensive ministry experience, Tharwat has taken on diverse responsibilities, particularly working with youth and young adults. An advocate for social justice, Tharwat is driven by a deep desire to see people from all nations embrace the transformative love of Jesus. Tharwat lives in Mississauga with his wife, Mirna and four children, co-leading the Outreach and Evangelism ministry in Mississauga Community Church.

# “Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?”

*Deacon Pawlos Teckle*

**Scripture: John 1:46**

## REFLECTION

*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* This is the honest comment of Nathanael when Philip shared the excitement he experienced after he met Jesus – the Messiah. In our language today we may blame Nathanael as politically incorrect, inasmuch as he does not take into consideration the negative impact of the words used.

There is a prejudice in his mind that nothing good can come from certain places, certain people of a given skin colour, language, background, etc. The list is long! The evangelist Matthew also tells us that some did not accept the Messianic mission of

Jesus, because they knew his parents – that he was of a carpenter’s family, unlikely to produce a royal king.

I make the same mistake in my daily life in that I tend to categorize people I come to know as geniuses in mathematics (if they are from Asian background), hard workers (African background), and rich and educated (Caucasian background). I don’t know how this mentality came to be installed in my hard disk – my brain. These are false assumptions and prejudices that I share with my brother in Christ, Nathanael.

Jesus died for all races and reconciled the creation with its Creator. He stretched his hands on the cross to indicate that he embraces all humanity and all nature.

One day I was coming back home from my business-related trip to Europe. I was very tired but was happy to arrive home. When I was waiting to clear customs, one of the staff came straight to me. There were about ten passengers before me. He loudly told me that I would be searched again, even after I passed the customs. His accent told me that he was French-speaking and the way he approached me was embarrassing and unprofessional. What I have learned from my frequent travels is to remain calm and cooperative, and not show my feelings. After I passed the customs check, the officer started to interrogate me. His tone and approach were patronizing. I patiently answered all his questions.

Later I asked him how I was selected for such search. He said that I was selected “randomly.” Pretending that I do not know the word, I asked him what “random” means and who was the person “randomly” selected before me.

His response was “Random is random. I don’t have time to answer.”

In another similar trip coming back to Canada, the border officer asked my name. I said, “I am Paul,” and the officer asked me if I was a Muslim.

What I have done to others and what others reflect onto me shows that we humans have assumptions (mostly wrong) or prejudices that influence our choices and decisions.

I hope and pray that the Resurrected Jesus may work on me and my brethren to overcome our visual prejudices that do not reflect the love and longing we experience in our hearts.

## QUESTIONS

- Do you have friends outside of your circle? Outside of your culture, language, race, etc.?
- Are you scared to sit (in a bus, or in a movie, etc.) next to the people who look different from you? Have you asked yourself where this fear is coming from? Or if such fear is hindering you from giving and receiving love?

- The flight of the Holy Family to Egypt was to save their son, Jesus. The family was welcomed in Egypt. All those who look different from you are coming close to you like Jesus who went to Egypt for safety. Will you accommodate Jesus (or the people who come to you) today?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deacon Pawlos Teckle is a Permanent Deacon at the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver.

# Reflections on an Encounter with Police

*Rev. Dr. Das Sydney*

**Scripture: Psalm 13:1–2a**

## REFLECTION

Walking to church on a dark November evening, I was stopped by two police officers not far from my home. One of them asked me, “What are you doing here?”

“I live here,” I declared and turned and pointed to my house about four or five houses back, “and I am on my way to my church, where I am the pastor.”

I pointed ahead, to the church, with its floodlit white pillars.

One officer asked for my identification. I dutifully pulled out my wallet and handed him my

driver’s licence. The second officer asked me to empty my pockets. He sat me in the cruiser and examined a little diskette case I was carrying. He emptied it and smelled its contents. After a few minutes he said tersely that they had received a call about a prowler in the area, and that I was free to go.

Perhaps it was inconceivable to them that this dark racialized person would be walking on the sidewalk of a wealthy white neighbourhood. I was amused at the time, but perhaps it was my shock and embarrassment. How do you deal with the lingering malaise that something happened that night that was not quite right? I am no expert on race and racism or police practice and ethics. The police

have at times been of great help, and at other times, their actions have suggested malice and an aggressive hunt for any transgression.

In the spectrum of police actions and outcomes, which are often responses to complex and sometimes dangerous situations, my dark night encounter of SQS (Stop, Question, Search) did not result in any physical harm. I was fully cooperative and polite. I suppose one could say I was a “model minority,” the phrase used to describe racialized people who keep their nose to the grindstone, don’t complain or cause a ruckus, and may achieve a high level of “success.” But some others have not been so fortunate, and they have quite rightly been indignant that

their rights were violated. Their anger has resulted in a confirmation bias, that their emotional response only points to their guilt, inferiority, or unworthiness.

[The Ontario Human Rights Commission Report, released in July 2023](#) is both disturbing to read for its candour and hopeful in calling out what needs to change. It confirms the existence of anti-Black racism, and states, “when there was use of force, the outcomes for Black people were more likely, than for the white population, to result in injury or death.” This report also records a comment from a Black officer about police culture: “...if you are pro diversity, equity and inclusion—it means you are anti-White. ... Our biggest problem is our culture. There’s no sense of urgency for the culture to be different.”

It could well be that harmful attitudes within the ranks of the police represent the prejudices endemic in the wider population. Perhaps that growling voice I once heard from the back of the bus, “Go home where you came from,” was not just a one-off, but represented a white-supremacist attitude which prevails in a sizable number of the general population, an attitude that is often masked by our politeness.

Such negative attitudes can infect a police culture.

Such attitudes within the police services are dangerous for racialized minorities, especially since police officers possess considerable discretionary power. They can excuse a minor infraction, or can resort to overzealous policing, excessive use of force, or unwarranted lethal force. Too often we have seen tragic outcomes for those experiencing a mental health crisis. We might add

that for such crises, it would be better to seek the help of social services or crisis intervention teams where available.

Issues with law enforcement are not limited to Ontario. The very broad [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls \(MMIWG\)](#) investigated the inordinately high rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. A Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) review cited in the above Inquiry confirmed a staggering 1,181 cases of “police-recorded incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal females” between 1980 and 2012 (p. 54). The report placed part of the blame on colonial structures such as, “the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights” (p. 50). It also noted that the police too often made assumptions that Indigenous victims were “drunks,” “runaways out partying,” or “prostitutes unworthy of follow-up.” This kind of dismissal of people in crisis, stereotyping, or Victim Blaming has contributed to an ongoing decay of trust in the police and related agencies (p. 648).

As a society, we have come a long way, but there is a trust to be restored and more progress to be made in the areas of authority and power, and the targeting of racialized minorities. We hope that police forces will continue on that long and arduous journey that builds the confidence that they are here for the welfare of all people without exception. It would also be illogical and unfair to scapegoat the police for our race-based societal problems and cultivate a spirit of animosity towards law enforcement and cast them into a stereotypical negative mould. In a personal

emergency, for example, I have experienced police responses which are respectful, kind, thoughtful. They are not the enemy. Indeed, some of them are my friends and they are outstanding people. All of them need our prayers for good judgement, and for safety when they are in harm’s way.

For those who have suffered unjustly, we pray for the grace to forgive and the fortitude to start afresh. Unjust events can motivate us to work towards a better future. For those who are victims or “allies,” there is ample space for lament. Biblical lament is a complaint directed towards God which cries out, as in Psalm 13, “For how long must we bear this burden?” It is an appeal for God’s divine intervention and a humble acceptance that we may be the very instruments God uses to bring about change.

## PRAYER

Gracious God, we give thanks for our beautiful country, Turtle Island, which is both a land of opportunity and of peace. But we know that peace is never to be taken for granted. We give thanks for all those who keep the peace in small homogeneous communities and in our large cosmopolitan cities. In all those contexts, we pray for our police services, from whom we expect good judgement and fairness, strength and skill, good training and poise. When they are in harm’s way, keep them safe. When they are faced with complex and difficult situations, give them wisdom. When faced with strange new customs and cultures, grant them patience and understanding. Where there are biases and prejudices, grant to them the willingness to learn a new way of seeing. May the motto “To Serve

And Protect” be their guide in how they treat the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the white, the Indigenous, the racialized, and every other kind of minority.

And be with all of us, who may be of any shade of colour under the sun. Where we have been wronged, help us to forgive. Where we have experienced injustice, guard us from despair. Where we have been apathetic, help us to stand up for what is right and true. Move us beyond scapegoating or stereotyping, that we may see the police officers as those in whom we have confidence and trust, so that together, we can build an even better land of peace and promise. Amen.

## QUESTIONS

- Reflect on your experiences with the police. Can you recall any experiences which stand out as particularly positive or negative? How have these interactions shaped your perception of the police?

- Consider the personal narrative shared in the article. Would you consider the encounter described as an instance of racial profiling? In what ways does it reflect common experiences in racially marginalized communities? How would this encounter be perceived differently if the individual were white?
- How do you respond to the assertion that individuals from all backgrounds, including white people, can also fall victim to police overreach? Do you think this acknowledgment of diverse experiences strengthens or detracts from conversations about systemic racism and injustice within various police services?
- As a society, we have come a long way, but there is trust to be restored and more progress to be made in their exercise of authority and power. We hope that police forces will continue on that long and arduous journey that builds the confidence that they are here

for the welfare of all people without exception. All of them need our prayers for good judgement, and for safety when they are in harm’s way.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Das Sydney was born in India, grew up in Africa, and had his university education in Ghana, Canada and the U.S. He is the Past-President of the Canadian Council of Churches, a past president of the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec and presently the Moderator of a regional Association of Baptist churches. He has served as an adjunct at Acadia Divinity College, McMaster University and Emmanuel Bible College. He is the Minister Emeritus at Highland Baptist Church, serves on the Leadership Commission of the Baptist World Alliance and on the Board of Indwell which offers supportive housing for vulnerable populations. He is married to Angela, and they have three adult children and six grandchildren.

# All of God's Children: A Reflection on Racism in the Church and the Systems that Reinforce It

*Kathleen Pandian*

## Scripture: Micah 6:8

### REFLECTION

Growing up in the church, I was taught many values and lessons grounded in scripture that often confused and contradicted my own experience as a racialized child. Having been raised in predominantly white communities with minimal exposure to people of different ethnicities in the stories, media, and spaces I inhabited, I internalized the belief that I was somehow of lesser value and worth compared to my white peers. This belief was reinforced in various ways: when my

kindergarten classmates prohibited me from playing the mother in 'house' because of my brown skin; when I was dubbed the 'double brownie' in my Brownies group at church; or when, as a preschooler, I puzzled over why God seemed "tricky" because my mother had white skin while I had brown skin, a concept I couldn't grasp or find reflected in other families.

Growing up as a Pastor's daughter, I understood that while my father held a leadership role in the church and connected with people from all backgrounds, his outreach extended

beyond the church walls. It wasn't solely due to his benevolence or gentle spirit, but I believe his actions, whether conscious or unconscious, worked to disarm and create a sense of safety for those who might otherwise treat his darker skin with suspicion.

While the church preached values of acceptance and love for all of God's children, it became clear to me that this love was not evenly distributed. Not only did I internalize the image of Jesus as a white, blue-eyed man, but I also observed through mission bulletin boards in the church that it was often darker-skinned people

who were portrayed as in need of charity, salvation, and the expertise of those with material wealth, intelligence, and good-heartedness to assist those deemed unable to help themselves.

This service was framed simply as helping “the poor or the poor in spirit,” without critical analysis of the historical realities and impacts of colonialism, racism, patriarchy, imperialism, white supremacy, climate change, and empire. These forces have historically and continue to make life significantly more difficult, if not outright threatening, for many communities from the global south.

Having lived and worked in various communities since my childhood and studied social work with a focus on diversity and equity, I have gained a deeper understanding of frameworks and language that I did not understand growing up. Perhaps if Jesus had been more accurately portrayed as a darker-skinned Middle Eastern man, it might have helped me see my own value and worthiness as a child. And perhaps learning about helping others with greater historical and political context would have enabled me and others to understand that many wealthy countries and communities have acquired their wealth not through expertise or superiority, but through the subjugation and exploitation of people and resources that were not theirs to take.

There is no shortage of need in a world currently witnessing multiple genocides, hunger, poverty, and corrupt political agendas. However, there is a unique opportunity that I hope the church will seize by advocating for and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities who may lack the platform, audience,

or social and political power that more privileged individuals and communities possess.

My hope is that the church will not delay when called to account for its role, whether active or complicit, in systems of harm such as the residential school systems in Canada or other colonial projects, both domestically and abroad. I believe the church has a responsibility to deeply examine its role in perpetuating systems of inequality, dismantle paternalistic patterns of charity and mission work, and instead listen to the people most impacted by structural and systemic violence and inequality. The church must also accept the leadership of communities calling for liberation and justice as allies and accomplices, and understand that those impacted by various forms of injustice are without a doubt the experts in their own lives.

While my own experience of racism is small and insignificant compared to the massive needs that many individuals and communities across the globe are currently facing, it has instilled in me a desire for justice and a commitment to continue learning about myself and my connection to others within a much broader community.

In times of great moral conflict and uncertainty, it can feel paralyzing to take a stand against more powerful systems that depend on our complicity and silence, but we have been called to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly” (Mic 6:8). I pray that we will all work towards living out that call as individuals and communities.

## PRAYER

O God, we confess that too often, we have been complicit in systems that

perpetuate inequalities and injustice. Help us to see beyond stereotypes and prejudices and to embrace what is diverse and beautiful in this world.

Amplify the work of our hands towards a more just and equitable society, and guide us towards courageous action that disrupts systems of domination and oppression. May all that we do, reflect your deep love and peace. Amen.

## QUESTIONS

- Have you ever experienced discrimination based on your race or ethnicity? How did it affect you?
- Reflect on your image of Jesus. Does it align with the Renaissance portrayal or have you considered different representations of Jesus?
- In what ways does the mission work of the church reinforce stereotypes and inequalities? How might the church better advocate for marginalized communities and address systemic inequalities?
- How has your own upbringing and environment shaped your understanding of race, privilege, and justice?
- What steps can individuals and communities take to ensure that all children feel valued, accepted and supported within their church and wider society? How might you contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for children in your church and community? What steps can you take to continue learning about issues of diversity, equity, and justice, both personally and within your faith community?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathleen is a Social Worker and Mental Health Therapist working in Toronto's downtown east side. She is the mother of two young children and currently on a maternity leave.

Kathleen has experience working with individuals and communities from a variety of backgrounds and experiences in Ontario and the Northwest Territories. She works from anti-oppressive, anti-racist, trauma-informed, feminist and LGBT2SQ+ inclusive frameworks and has a passion for community-building.



**SECTION 3**

**Tackling Texts that Cause Harm**

# In the Service of a Sister

*Rev. Aneeta Devi Saroop*

## Scripture: Genesis 16:1–10

### REFLECTION

Born and raised in Canada, I learned very little about the country from which my parents immigrated in 1967. Trinidad and Tobago seemed to me this exotic, faraway land where my parents, aunties, and uncles cultivated their singsong voices and ribald laughter that was on full display at social gatherings in our family home. Usually around delicious food and drink and lively music.

My father had a box of souvenirs that my siblings and I would use as object lessons whenever we did a presentation at school for Multicultural Days. A cocoa pod, a Trinidadian flag, a tiny toy

steel drum, some dried up sugar cane, and a picture book with the country's history. These were remnants of my parent's life before they had kids. I once found my mother's sari in the back of her dresser. "Please don't play with that," she said. "It's my wedding sari." I never saw her wear it. I never saw her wear any sari.

It wasn't until long after they both had died, that I became interested in the history of my ancestors' arrival to Trinidad from India. I had no idea about the story of the Indentured Servants that were "recruited" from the subcontinent of India by British Colonizers to rebuild a cheap labour force after the abolition of African slavery.

Recruited on a five-year contract, desperate Indian males were paid next to nothing to get on a boat destined for the West Indies. If you were a female, it was a different story. Females were oftentimes sold by their families into indentureship or kidnapped by recruiters hoping to sweeten the deal for prospective men by offering them wives as chattel.

Generations of Indian women would work in the homes of the British landowners and plantation bosses. They were set at odds with emancipated women of African descent competing for work in British households, and both being treated poorly. They would look after the young, white British children to the

neglect and detriment of their own brown Indian children. Their stories were rarely documented in the West Indian history books.

When I read about Hagar, I hear the echoes of my own ancestors. Aunties, Grandmas, Mothers, Sisters. Daughters. Here is a piece I wrote reflecting on Genesis 16:1–10 for the 2017 ELCIC/ACC National Worship Conference in Victoria, British Columbia.

*There is life growing within me. I am ripe with life! Is this who God wants me to be? If this is God's will, then yes, God. Yes! I wish to have this feeling of joy always! Why would Sarai treat me like I was less than she is if God sees me as valuable?*

*My eyes were opened by hope that filled my belly. Sarai was a woman who could not bear her own child and so she wanted mine. I would not let that happen. Surely God would not let that happen. I could see her for what she was. In fact, I could not stop seeing her this way.*

*She grew angry at me as my child grew inside of me and my skin shone bright, and I held my head and shoulders with pride. But my Mistress didn't like my pride. It threatened her. She started to yell at me and hit me every chance she got. She reminded me that I was her slave, and she was my mistress. I feared for my baby. I feared for myself.*

*I ran away from the house, not knowing where I was going, my legs running, faster and faster until I could no longer recognize my surroundings. I looked around and turned again quickly. Everything was unfamiliar. It was in the silence that I heard the sound of running water. I walked towards the sound and found a spring and completely consumed by exhaustion and sadness, I fell to my knees and sobbed and sobbed for the agony of my life.*

*I could feel its presence before I heard the Angel's voice who called me by my name "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" I have come from slavery. I have come from poverty, I have come from violence and oppression, I have come from so many tears that have blinded my eyes and I cannot see where a slave like me could possibly go. I told the Angel, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." Then the Angel of the Lord said to me "return to your mistress and submit to her."*

*That day by the spring the Angel of the Lord had told me that the Lord had given heed to my affliction and that I would bear a son and would name him Ishmael. The Angel was correct, and as Abram entered his eighty-sixth year, his son Ishmael was born to him of my womb.*

*I had returned to my Mistress' house. What else could I do? Where else could I go? There were no heavy chains to shackle my ankles, but my heart and my soul knew they were there. It was the hope of freedom that my baby gave me that was the illusion. And so, I raised my son in the house of his Father while I tended to the needs of my Mistress.*

*Sarah's contempt towards me lessened when in her old age she became pregnant and bore Abraham a son and legitimate heir and they named him Isaac. Oh, how happy Abraham was and how much joy he and Sarah had together! I could see that Sarah's joy kept her from finding fault with my work and contempt for our presence in her household.*

*Or so I thought. Ismael was fond of his new brother and his brother of him, but Sarah did not want them to see themselves as brothers. She was angry when she saw them playing together. I was worried that she would do something drastic, and she did.*

*Early one morning, Abraham woke us up and told us we were to go from his house and never return. He gave us some bread and a skin of water. That was it. That was all of the inheritance Sarah would allow be taken from her own son. And we wandered in silence and in grief into the wilderness of Beer-sheba.*

## PRAYER

For the Word of God in Scripture,  
For the Word of God among us,  
For the Word of God within us,

Thanks be to God.

## QUESTIONS

- Does it startle or surprise you to think of the story of Sarai and Hagar from Hagar's perspective? How so?
- "Why would Sarai treat me like I was less than she is if God sees me as valuable?" Imagine an answer to Hagar's question if you were part of the narrative. What would you say?
- It is a common social phenomenon for minority groups under oppressive circumstances to view one another as adversaries. How did Hagar and Sarai see each other as adversaries? How were they each oppressed? How were they both privileged? Can you recall stories of adversaries from your own historical ancestry? Who benefited? Who suffered? Do remnants of historical adversarial attitudes live true in your family or communities today?
- Where is God in this text from Genesis for Hagar? For Sarai? Where do you see God healing the intergenerational trauma of Colonial White Supremacy in the world and in your congregation?

What is God speaking to you through this text in your own communities?

## RESOURCES

- Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (C. Hurst and Company, 2016)
- David Chariandy, *Brother* (McClelland and Stewart, 2017)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Aneeta Devi Saroop (She/Her) serves as pastor alongside the people

of Spirit of Life Lutheran Church on the ancestral, unceded, territory of the Coast Salish People. Specifically the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations (Colonially known as Vancouver, British Columbia).

Rev. Saroop is a second generation Trinidadian Canadian born in Guelph, Ontario and raised in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. She studied English literature and Sociology at the

University of Victoria, earned a BTh/MDiv from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, and is a doctoral candidate at the Saskatchewan Theological Union working on a Doctor of Ministry in Practical and Contextual Theology. She currently serves as the Assistant to the B.C. Synod Bishop for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

# Canannite-ism and Anti-Black Racism: Navigating Archives of Nightmares

*Rev. Paulette Brown*

**Scripture: Matthew 15:22, 24–27**

## REFLECTION

The *peculiar rawness* generated by dislocation of peoples locally and globally, genocidal traumas, pop-up protests, walking for justice and peace, plus the ongoing unfolding of the legacies of the Bible's involvement in colonialism has a way of creating *wake-up moments*. My church's recent "tumbling" into a call to do racial justice strikes me as a wake-up moment for facing a question we often dodge – **how to make sense of the capacity of Bible and biblical interpretation to support racialized oppression?**

As a "seasoned" descendant of enslaved Africans I have discovered ways of living and working through the late arrival of racial justice on justice agendas of the Church. My knowledge of how both Europe and the Church have benefitted financially from the racialized enslavement of Black people is summoned into helping me to make sense of the late arrival.

That the Bible has functioned to facilitate settler colonialism (conquest, land grabbing, cultural genocide and racialization of peoples deemed to be the Other of Europe), is neither new nor good news (Joshua-Deuteronomy).

I must admit that in this moment of *peculiar rawness*, I am not excited by Paul's declaration that all is one in Christ (Gal. 3:28) Perhaps it's because this declaration seems tame and inadequate to stimulate imagination given the fierceness of my experiences as woman, Black and pastor in Canada, serving in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

I am drawn to biblical texts that I call "*troublesome, reality check, nightmarish*." (TRCN) They cannot be wished away or circumvented -- at least not for me, whose Caribbean Christian heritage fits Jennings' description of a "heritage of peoples

made Christian under destructive conditions” (Jennings, 37). Jennings’ concern is that these conditions may cause us to surrender to a logic that perpetuates fear and disgust for self. I do not take this concern lightly.

Matthew 15:21-28 is a TRCN text! I am that Canaanite woman, constructed by a binding and inaccurate discourse. I walk a daily “tightrope agency” that often blurs distinctions between resistance and complicity. Yet I know very well that my ethical accountability to selfcare, wellbeing, justice and hope are non-negotiable.

By calling the woman, a Canaanite (when Mark calls her a Syro-Phonician), Matthew evokes Israel’s foundational myth of chosen-ness that gave divine authority to enter and possess */N*habited lands (Dube). Jesus is constructed as gatekeeper of Israel’s “idealized longings”<sup>2</sup> and traditions of chosen-ness. Matthew presents a non-subversive Jesus who maintains the supremacy of “lost sheep of Israel” and extends generosity to the woman, wrapped in subjugation. This Jesus resembles a white benevolent male acting within the dictates of white supremacy.<sup>3</sup>

Matthew’s constructions help me coin the word *Canaanite-ism* to describe a biblical discourse that functions like AntiBlack racism, in the sense that it is governed by a logic of exclusion and obliteration (Ferreira Da Silva). Anchored in conquest narratives (Josh 1-2) Canaanite-ism constructs Canaanites as polluters of their own lands, justifying a need to destroy them. Likewise, AntiBlack racism, despite the absence of qualifying data, constructs Blacks as a “threat” to Canada’s security, enabling policies and practices of

racialized surveillance, policing, and incarceration that disproportionately affect Black bodies (Maynard, 48-49).

I enter the Matthean scene of humiliation, as a Black woman, concerned about racial justice. This leaves me with two options. I must wrench the Canaanite woman from the biblical archives that construct her as needy, subjugate-able and genocide-able.

And I must talk to God!

You see, the racial justice that I hope for cannot be limited to concerns about my exclusion. After all, racism against Blacks and Indigenous peoples have always been governed by a logic of exclusion PLUS a logic of obliteration.(Ferreira da Silva) This awareness is real.

Like the psalmist, I speak directly to God, saying:

*“Matthew reaches deep in the biblical archives*

*that house rhetoric of Israelite supremacy and Canaanite inferiority*

*to tell a story about you in Christ.*

*Matthew re-presents Jesus as non-subversive*

*Gatekeeper of Israel’s myth of chosen-ness*

*Blurring the lines between complicity and resistance*

*In your name I am enacting a double refusal*

*Refusal to submit to imperializing rhetoric that endorses unequal relations*

*Refusal to comply with ideologies requiring my complicity with my subjugation.”*

My devotional is not concerned about exonerating Jesus, nor having the woman win an argument with the Rabbi. It’s about learning and nurturing practices of “wrenching” and “double refusal.” This does not speak to easy agency. It is the hard work of learning to wrench the text from its entanglement in rhetoric of supremacy, boldly practice a double *refusal*, and unapologetically reclaim the subversive Jesus, whose rejection of Empire and its values brought him crucifixion.

## QUESTIONS

1. How might practices of “wrenching” and “double refusal” serve racial justice ?
2. How might inclusion of a racial justice spirituality of “One one cocoa full basket”<sup>4</sup> provide space for self-care and joy?
3. What benefits lie in a racial justice optic that centers *intersectionalities* of disabilities, genders, sexualities, and mental health?

## PRAYER

*God of justice and righteousness*

*We come. Weak. Tired. Worn. Seeking.*

*Grant us wisdom to dig deep in the soil of the struggle for racial justice.*

*Infuse within us the spirituality of the Jamaican proverb, “one one cocoa full basket” so we may find connection with the Creator, tenacity, and joy for the work.*

*Amen.*

## RESOURCES

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<sup>2</sup> Williams

<sup>3</sup> Williams identifies white supremacy as primarily “a longing for an idealized community populated by a fetishized, White ideal.” (Williams, 170)

- Da Silva, Denise Ferreira, 2014, 'Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World', *The Black Scholar*, 44(2), pp.81-97.
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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paulette emigrated from Jamaica together with her husband and three children, and is now a grandmother of four. She embodies the diverse working experiences of newcomer-women in their struggles to secure wellbeing for their families in Canada. These include factory worker, house cleaner, and Community Legal Worker at the Jane Finch Community Legal Services, Toronto. These life

experiences continue to shape her work for justice.

Ordained in the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC), Paulette has served in congregations and community ministries developing programs aimed at building leadership and resilience among youth, with particular emphases on Black youth. Presently, Paulette is a part time Adjunct Faculty at Martin Luther University College in Waterloo, teaching decolonizing approaches to biblical interpretation: *A Critical Analysis of Biblical texts* and *A Survey of the New Testament*.

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<sup>4</sup> *A Jamaican proverb speaking to values of deliberate planting, persistence and tenacity in caring for, patience in waiting, and joy in reaping. The farmer plants cocoa (yams) one at a time. In reaping the farmer digs out the cocoa - one cocoa at a time. In reaping the farmer does not expect to fill the basket all at once. It is a process of filling the basket – with one cocoa at a time. Racial justice work requires deliberate planting, persistence in prayer, tenacity in in self-care, patience in waiting, and joy in celebrating the “one one cocoa” full basket moments.*

# Forgiving the Daughter of Babylon

*Fr. Bohdan Hladio*

**Scripture: Psalm 137: 8–9**

## REFLECTION

Why do you hate us?

Why do you want to kill us, to wipe us off the face of the earth?

What is behind your desire to steal our ancestral land, to pollute the soil which nurtured our ancestors for countless generations, and to defile the earth which has embraced their bodies with your presence?

Why do you seek to destroy our language, heritage, and culture?  
What drives your need to commit murder and genocide?

How can I not want you to die, to be killed, to suffer?

How can I not want your loved ones to feel the pain which you have inflicted upon mine?

How can you live your life in peace and contentment when your actions—and the actions of your ancestors—have caused so much anguish, grief, and destruction to my people for so long?

And to you, God, a question. “Why?” Why—if you exist and truly are all-powerful, if you really do love us, why do you permit such evil?

How can you permit so many to suffer for so long? Have our beautiful language, customs, and culture been born and flourished over the course of millennia only to be wiped out by those who regard them as strange and “other”?

You truly are horrible, not only because you permit such abominations, but even worse, because you tell us that, after suffering such abominations, it is our duty to forgive! “Love your enemies . . . bless those who curse you” (Matt 5:44). And, most terrifying of all, you tell us that you will, “forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us*” (Matt 6:12, emphasis added).

Yet the same psalmist who can be so murderously angry at his oppressors can, almost in the same breath, recognize that you are “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,” that you are a God who “does not deal with us according to our

sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities," who "crowns us with steadfast love and mercy, and satisfies us with good as long as we live." (Psalm 103)

Yes, in my darkest moments I think I truly would be happy to give back evil for evil, to "requite them" with what they have done to us, to "dash their little ones against the rock." I want, in the deepest, darkest recesses of my soul, to hurt her, that "daughter of Babylon" who has exploited and persecuted my people for so long.

But I know that this is not God's response, nor the way I should respond. "What would Jesus do?" is an interesting question, but what he did is a historical fact. When faced with evil and sin, he took it upon himself—he suffered with us.

Loving our enemies is hard, but knowing that another human being – a divine-human being, God in the flesh, but a human being nonetheless—has done so at least suggests that it might be possible for me to do so as well. Perhaps, by God's grace.

What is God calling me to do in this circumstance? The same thing he is calling me to in every circumstance: to repent, and to love. To "change my mind," and to regard my enemy as my dearest friend, to look at him and see Christ.

Because it's one thing for someone else to harm me physically, emotionally, or spiritually. But when I choose to return hatred for hatred, or violence for violence, I compound the harm done to me by the other with the harm I commit against myself.

What I often forget, and perhaps try not to remember, is that those who propagate this hatred and

commit these evil acts of violence are harming themselves as well. If God exists, if God truly is just, then the consequences of their heinous crimes will be much worse for them than they have been for us.

As difficult as it is to say, if there is a choice between having to suffer or inflicting suffering on someone else, it seems pretty clear that it is always better to suffer than to inflict suffering on others.

So at the end of the day, what can I do? What should I do? All I can do is try to love you and repent of my hatred. And pray that you, the "daughter of Babylon," whom we encounter in one form or another in every human generation, will come to your senses and do the same.

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus, who in your human nature experienced hatred, violence, torture, and death,

Who taught us to love our enemies, to bless those who persecute us, and to forgive others even up to "seventy times seven" times,

Who, upon the cross, in your agony, prayed "forgive them, for they know not what they do,"

As the same Lord, help me to bear the cross of hatred, intolerance, violence, and dehumanization,

Help me to see my persecutors as human beings, made in your image,

Grant us and them your divine grace, that we might have the strength to bear, and they might be given the eyes to see and the courage to repent of, the sinful and horrible evil which they have and continue to commit against us.

Amen.

## QUESTIONS

- To what extent do greed and jealousy function as motivating factors in regard to imperial or colonial expansionism?
- Is "just war" possible? Given the manner in which contemporary wars are fought, is it sometimes necessary, even virtuous, to try to prevent violence through the use of violence?
- How is it possible to maintain spiritual equanimity when faced with violence of any kind, especially violence directed at a particular community, nation, or cultural group?
- Groups which have historically suffered from cultural or physical trauma or genocide exist throughout the world. What can I do, whether as a member of one of these communities or someone from without, as a person who cares for the welfare of my fellow human, to facilitate spiritual, emotional, psychological, and even physical healing?

## RESOURCES

For further reflections on war, violence, suffering and peace-making from an Orthodox Christian perspective, please visit *In Communion*, the website of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship, at <https://incommunion.org>.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fr. Bohdan Hladio is a priest of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada. He was born in Sewickley, Pennsylvania and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. He met his wife Tania Pidlynsy in Toronto where they were married

in 1984. He has served parishes in Toronto, Hamilton, and Oshawa, Ontario. In addition to his parish work he has served on many church committees, led spiritual retreats, and offered presentations for the clergy and faithful of various Churches in Canada and the USA. Fr. Bohdan completed a Master of Theological Studies degree at Trinity College in Toronto in 2021 specializing in Orthodox and Eastern Christian Studies and is currently pursuing

doctoral studies at the Toronto School of Theology, where his research focuses on Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology and the history and polity of Eastern Orthodoxy in North America. Fr. Bohdan has written hundreds of popular articles for both ecclesiastical and secular newspapers and magazines. A collection of his articles was published in 2009 by HDM Press in Rives Junction, Michigan. His writings have also appeared on the Public Orthodoxy

site of the Orthodox Studies program at Fordham University, and he has presented papers at academic conferences and had articles published in academic journals in Europe and North America. Fr. Bohdan lives in Hamilton, Ontario with his wife Presvytera Tania and is a faculty member of the Patriarchal Toronto Orthodox Theological Academy under the auspices of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada.

# Are Black People Cursed? Challenging the Hamitic Myth

*Fr. Arsene Dutunge*

**Scripture: Genesis 9:25–27**

## REFLECTION

Growing up, I used to hear people singing a popular song that none of those I knew would find offensive. The lyrics of the song in my Burundian/Rwandan language were: “NSIGAYE NDI NKUMUZUNGU, SINGAYE NITWA PATORO” (I have become like a white person, now my name is Patron). Was it just a funny song or was it what people unconsciously believed to be true? Anyways, the fact that the expression muzungu (white person) also meant civilized, educated, well dressed, wealthy, or elegant... tells me that becoming a muzungu (like a white person) was conceived as escaping

the reality behind being Black: poverty, lack of culture, low position in the society, worthlessness...

Although I didn't pay much attention to that when I was younger— didn't I believe it was true myself, maybe? — in my young adult years, after studies in various human sciences, the discovery of the Hamitic myth caught my attention.

And...what is the Hamitic myth about? The very first Hamitic theory was expressed in the sixteenth century. This theory considered Black peoples as savages and “natural slaves,” descendants of Ham. As mentioned In the Book of Genesis 9:25–27 the curse of Ham is described as a curse which was imposed upon Ham's son Canaan by

the patriarch Noah. This theory or myth served as a rationale for slavery, using Biblical interpretations in support of its tenets.

Any attentive reader of the Bible and of the history of evangelization will come to understand that the Hamitic myth is a colonial and slavery strategy. And it functions only for those who were evangelized concomitantly with the arrival of colonization. If you consider the ancient African churches in North Africa or Ethiopia, you will not find acceptance of that myth; their evangelization was not contaminated by it.

What is striking to me is this: even now, some Black people have come to believe religiously in the myth

and then consider their poverty and historical sufferings, and exclusions to be the result of a biblical curse. I grew up hearing some people convinced that there was nothing to do to have a better life in Africa, because we were “cursed.” We were to “serve” other races. Anytime I heard it, I sensed more a feeling of helplessness and resignation to fate rather than a real religious belief.

This reminds me of a folktale of my country that seems to be a psychological case study of what the Hamitic myth can cause in the lives of individuals and societies influenced by it. The folktale tells about a man who strongly believed he was a corn seed. Whenever he saw a chicken wandering around, he would flee for his life, convinced that the chicken was looking for a corn seed to swallow. His family understood that they needed a psychiatrist to help the man. The psychiatrist kept the man in his hospital for months, programming his subconscious mind by repetition. The man had the task to keep repeating this sentence: “I am not a corn seed, I am a human being.”

In order to assess if this was working, the psychiatrist began to tell the man: “you are a corn seed!” To which the man would respond amazingly:

“No, I am not a corn seed, I am a human being!” The psychiatrist was so delighted about the treatment and decided to let the man go home. While the man was exiting the hospital and his family was happy to have him back home, the man stopped abruptly. And then he asked the psychiatrist this terrific question:

“Doctor, you helped me to understand and acknowledge that I am not a corn seed but a human being. And I know it is true. Now, my question is...did you likewise tell the chicken that I am not a corn seed?... The man was not yet healed...

Could the Hamitic myth, or any other similar theory, be a paralyzing reality for many Black people who believe conscientiously or not—that they are not created equally? Could it be that they believe themselves to be created equally and yet they are still wondering if other races, especially Caucasians, consider them to be equals in humanity? Wouldn't this be what keeps tensions between races when we lean into the dynamic of “them and us” rather than that of a “universal we” that doesn't exclude some diversity, (just as “catholic” means universal, without neglecting diversity)? Have you ever felt as if Black people were naturally inferior or even cursed?

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, the priest Caiaphas prophesied that you would die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to gather them together into one. And you yourself confirmed: “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:32). We pray to you, Lord, teach us that each one of us is blessed in you, and remind us that our main identity is that of belonging to you! Amen.

## RESOURCES

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963)
- Edith R. Sanders, “The Hamitic hypothesis; its origin and functions in time perspective,” *Journal of African History* 10, no. 4 (October 1969), 521–532

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Father Arsene Dutunge is a Roman Catholic priest born and raised in Burundi. He is currently serving in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver, British Columbia.

A close-up photograph of water being poured from a metal spout into a pool. The water is captured in mid-air, forming a clear, dynamic stream that falls into the water below, creating ripples and splashes. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery and a bright sky. A solid red horizontal band is overlaid on the top portion of the image, containing the text.

**SECTION 4**

**Calling Forward**

# Calling Forward Holy Anger

*Boston Laferté*

## Scripture: James 1:19–20

### REFLECTION

In 2019 and 2020, I was involved in a series of solidarity demonstrations in Victoria, British Columbia on the unceded lands of the Lekwungen and WSANEC people. At the time, the RCMP were in the middle of raiding Wet'suwet'en lands, so a group of Indigenous students gathered and started to plan a series of demonstrations around the city. There were smaller office sit-ins and marches, but it culminated with an occupation of the ceremonial front steps of the British Columbia legislature that lasted weeks. In February 2020, while the Lieutenant Governor was inside talking about

all of the good the province had done in relation to reconciliation during her throne speech, there were hundreds of Indigenous people and allies outside blocking all entrances, chanting, calling for justice, and declaring reconciliation as dead.

Though we had to act quickly to plan, we were not quick to anger. The oppression of Indigenous peoples started hundreds and hundreds of years before 2019. However, we still had the sentiment of James's message levied at us. As if we were unjustified in our anger, as if it was the first time RCMP had violently displaced Indigenous people, as if we did not even know what we were angry about. While James's call to be quick to listen and slow

to anger is for everyone, I think that the anger among those of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities is an incredibly righteous form of anger. We hear over and over in the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament to oppose oppressive systems, and to stand (or in Jesus's case, sit) with those who are looked at poorly by the authorities.

I think this passage can also be read as an important call to our churches in the US and Canada. Especially in Canada, there is a tendency for Christians to respond first with anger and disbelief when they hear that our churches are complicit in and benefactors of horror. Like the dispossession of Indigenous people, the residential school system, the

Sixties Scoop, and countless other atrocities against Indigenous people, named and unnamed.

This response is especially true of Lutherans, who get exasperated and like to say, “but, we never even ran a residential school! Not like the Anglicans or the United Church or the Catholics.” While this may be true in Canada, on the other side of the Medicine Line, Lutherans ran boarding schools, the US equivalent of residential schools. And while in Canada, we Lutherans may have never had a residential school, we still benefit from the legacy of this and other systems.

Instead of being angry at being forced to look at themselves in the mirror, churches need to first listen to what Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour are telling them.

When, instead of getting angry and shutting down, churches stop to listen, they will realize that BIPOC are simply asking for justice, acceptance, and care. There are BIPOC in every church. We want to be here, but we want to be here feeling love and acceptance. Not just from our God, but from the whole Body of Christ.

### **PRAYER**

Our Sustainer and Righteous Advocate, you sit at the table with the least of us. Help us all to open our hearts, minds, and ears, that we may learn from one another and live in love and harmony. This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior. Amen.

### **QUESTIONS**

- What is a time where you responded in anger instead of

listening well? How could you have acted differently?

- How has your denomination been quick to listen to BIPOC? Where has it fell short?

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

I am a Métis person, and part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. I grew up in Treaty 8 territory of northern Alberta and moved to the lands of the Lekwungen and WSANEC peoples in 2018 to attend the University of Victoria. I am currently a student in the Joint Degree Program in Canadian Common Law and Indigenous Legal Orders at UVic and completing my MDiv at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon. I am also one of the Youth Governing Board Members of the Canadian Council of Churches.

# The Samaritan, a call to radical kinship

*Patty Krawec*

**Scripture: Luke 10:25–37**

## REFLECTION

The story of the good Samaritan is a familiar story, an answer to the always timely question, “who is my neighbour?” It is a story of contrasts, among them a good Samaritan vs the selfish others, too concerned with purity and status to be willing to help. But the story doesn’t actually call him a good Samaritan. He’s just a Samaritan. And the others, while certainly failing to act compassionately, are going down from Jerusalem, so the ritual purity we often hear about in this story is not an issue. The writers of the Bible consistently use up and down to describe how you travel to and from

Jerusalem. You go up to Jerusalem, and down when you leave. So these two men were going down the road, away from Jerusalem and the need for ritual purity to complete their tasks in the temple was no longer an issue. Even if they weren’t, Jewish law referenced by Jesus elsewhere would require them to stop and offer help, knowing that they could access other rituals in the temple to restore their purity. So yes, a failure of compassion; they should have stopped because of their Jewish beliefs, not in spite of them.

And what then of the Samaritan? We call him good to emphasize that he is different from others and as an Ojibwe woman, I am keenly aware of what it means to be one of

the “good” ones. I am keenly aware of the costs and contradictions of being one of the good ones because that inevitably means aligning with the dominant system in ways that are both overtly and often subtly against my own community. Good Indians are spiritual and connected with nature, always willing to save the white people, often at their own expense, eventually fading sadly into the distance. Think Lone Ranger, Dances with Wolves, Avatar.

Is that what Jesus is setting up here? The antipathy between Jews and Samaritans was real, each group believing that the other had compromised fundamental beliefs in order to survive occupation or exile. Is he really asking his followers

to resolve their antipathy towards Samaritans by showing them a good one? I refuse to accept that this is what Jesus was doing.

Now let's consider 2 Chronicles 28:9–14. Because that may not be as familiar to us, but it would certainly have been familiar to Jesus's listeners. Particularly these words: "they clothed all who were naked. They provided them with clothes and sandals, food and drink, and healing balm. All those who were weak they put on donkeys" (v. 15, NIV). Doesn't that sound like what the Samaritan did? These are older Samaritans, before they were called Samaritans, fellow Israelites who lived in Samaria and had participated in the defeat of the Judeans at the hands of the Arameans. But before they could celebrate their victory, the prophet Oded came to them and reminded them that they were also guilty of sins against the Lord their God, and told them to send back their "fellow Israelites" whom they had taken as prisoners (v. 11).

Your neighbour is your unwanted, unacknowledged kin. This is a call for the self-examination needed to unforget histories and shed ideas of racial or cultural or theological purity. Because if there is a thread of purity within this story, it's the idea that we are the ones who act or believe correctly, and it is others who misread Scripture or do worship wrong or any such thing that creates and then reinforces division. Before the church can claim to have good news for anyone else, it must examine its own history for the kin it has broken away from or refused to acknowledge.

In her work on claiming bad kin, Alexis Shotwell turns the question of who claims her on herself as a white

woman and she realizes that among others, white supremacists claim her. People who may, as she says, despair of her politics but are working to create a world in which she will be safe. And then she considers her responsibilities to these unwanted kin. Rather than ignoring or shunning or insisting that she isn't like them she takes responsibility to challenge and confront them. More than that, she examines her own beliefs and politics for the things that may seem benign but reveal themselves to just be a kinder and more inclusive settler colonialism.

Jesus did not point the expert in the law towards Gentiles or others, he pointed him towards his fellow Israelites and invited him to consider old relationships. Alexis and I developed an activity called "Roots and Routes," that you can do as an individual, as a faith community, or as a denomination. I invite you to use these questions to examine your own histories and answer the question of who is your neighbour. Remember that Jesus made a deliberate choice to have the protagonist be a fellow Israelite rather than a Roman or any other. It is too easy to ignore unwanted kin in favour of others, but you can't be a good ally to vulnerable people if you are unwilling to consider your relationships and responsibilities to your own kin. *Please do not take this exercise as a demand to revisit or reconcile abusive relationships. Acknowledge their existence and the things they may teach you about family patterns and the impact of destructive systems, but protect yourself and your peace.*

## PRAYER

Great mystery, in whom we live and move and have our being. Remind us today of our connections to each

other and relationships that have been lost or buried beneath ego. Give us the courage to remember who we are so that we can transform harmful legacies and move forward into relationships of liberation and peace.

## QUESTIONS

- Do a family tree to the best of your knowledge. As a faith community you can list out the leaders of your church back to its beginning, similarly with your denomination.
  - What stories do you know about the people in your physical or spiritual genealogy?
  - What would you like to know?
- Consider the geography which your family, faith community, or denomination has covered.
  - How and where did they travel? Why did they move?
  - Land Back: how did your family, faith community, or denomination acquire land?
- What relationships emerge, particularly from the places where branches break off or names are unknown?

## RESOURCES

- Patty Krawec, *A Thousand Worlds* blog, <https://www.thousandworlds.ca/>
- Jessica Price, "Better Parables: Resisting anti-Jewish readings," Better Parables website, <https://www.betterparables.com/>
- Alexis Shotwell, "Claiming Bad Kin," Alexis Shotwell's website, March 2, 2018 <https://www.alexisshotwell.com/2018/03/02/claiming-bad-kin/>

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Patty Krawec is an Anishnaabe-Ukrainian writer and speaker addressing anti-racist and decolonial possibilities in labour, education, and faith-based organizations. Patty has been published in *Sojourners* and *Broadview* magazines as well as the online publications *Rampant* and *Midnight Sun*.

# Beyond Racism

*Greg Kennedy*

## Scripture: Jonah 3:6–8

### REFLECTION

The book of Jonah, barely two full pages in many Bibles, is a concentrated study in compassion. More specifically, it is a parabolic, possibly tragic, exploration of what happens to someone who becomes inured to compassion. Such a person—pictured as Jonah, the furious “prophet,” alienated, isolated, and disgusted to death—creates a living hell for himself. Refusing mercy to others, he robs himself of it. The book of Jonah, short as it is, has a great deal to teach us about the infernal scourge of racism.

At its core, racism seems to me a rejection of compassion. This

statement can easily be misconstrued if compassion is taken as a charitable concession of the strong to the weak. In this sense, mercy becomes a product available to the powerful to spend at their discretion on those below them, perhaps to assuage their guilt. This is a colonial understanding of mercy and compassion. It has permitted centuries of serious Christians to own slaves. Etymologically, however, “compassion” means “to suffer with,” a meaning that undermines all presumed hierarchies. Any truthful acknowledgement of the commonality of hurt and vulnerability stops short every kind of self-congratulatory handing-down of mercy. On the contrary, it places everybody in the same boat and appoints no captains.

Once we wake up to suffering, the false divisions and devices that perpetuate racism fall away. If I really manage, even in the limited extent open to my imagination, to suffer with someone the shame, indignity, and injustice imposed by discrimination of any variety (racism, ageism, sexism, ableism, “rich-ism”), I might start perceiving from their perspective the systems and beliefs that unfairly favour me. I might begin to glimpse the sinful absurdity of it all. Furthermore, if I see it clearly enough, I might do something about it.

This very thing happens time and again in the brief book of Jonah. Moreover, it occurs in unlikely places. Take ten minutes to read the story again and see for yourself. Jonah,

the proud Hebrew, worshipper of the one true God of justice and goodness, comes off as an irreverent narcissist compared to the pagan sailors who go to every length and danger to protect him. The Hebrews viewed the cultures devoted to other gods around them as irredeemably inferior. Their assumed status of the Chosen People gave them all the license they needed to disdain their “un-elect” neighbours. What sometimes they lacked in political or military power, they made up for in superiority complexes.

As with the sailors, so too with the Ninevites. A chief city of Assyria, the archenemy of the Hebrews, Nineveh represented to them everything evil, rotten and wrong in the world. Jonah, essentially sent to save his foes from, in his mind, their just deserts, wants nothing to do with them or this mad mission. All flames of compassion in him towards this group have long been snuffed out. He craves their destruction; the bloodier the better. But in a flash of contrition, these despised foreigners change. They repent. God relents. But Jonah laments like a petulant boy who can't stand watching other kids play with the toys that bring him joy. Here again, the Ninevites, in their actions, show themselves much closer to Jonah's compassionate God than the stiff-necked prophet who claims allegiance simply by virtue of his pertinence to his clan.

The “racist” tendencies in Jonah block him from regarding people outside his circle as worthy of what he wants: safety, freedom and happiness. In the story, God unequivocally sides with those whom Jonah disdains. That's what it is to be God—to love indiscriminately across divisions. Throughout the little book, God works on Jonah

with patience and creativity to dissolve his isolating elitism, which only keeps him defensive, angry, cold and inhospitable. Along for the painful and pedagogical ride, we readers finish the book unsure whether Jonah learns the lesson of compassion. Is he so entrenched in his own prejudices that he digs himself a grave to die of hatred in, dead already to the reality of equity and inclusion at the heart of God?

Ending rhetorically with a question, the book of Jonah only generates more question marks. One of these is whether our current work of anti-racism goes far enough. Rather unique in the Bible is the book's provocative treatment of animals. Almost comically, Nineveh's king includes the livestock in the general fast and sackcloth-donning intended to avert the city's demise. Aiming at a common good, the king doesn't discriminate between groups, in this case humans and other-than-humans. Likewise, the concluding query God puts to Jonah goes: “And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” (Jonah 4:11). More than just quaint details slipped in by an inventive author for the sake of crayon-wielding Sunday School students, the inclusive concern for all animals draws the challenging frontier God invites us to cross. Not only does compassion call us beyond racism, it also coaxes us out of speciesism, that deep-seated delusion that humans are the only beings that really matter in God's Creation.

The short story of Jonah is a very tall ask of us to get beyond the many damaging lies that arbitrarily put

some above others. This goes most obviously for people. But it also applies to all creatures. Because he's an antihero of racism and speciesism, the moral of the story is “Don't be a Jonah!”

## PRAYER

Teach me, Lord, the tables-turned compassion

You picked up on the Cross,

For, nailed high above, God-emptied,

You never looked down on Your hurting people

But always looked up to us.

## QUESTIONS

- How has compassion freed you from prejudice?
- What relation do you see between racism and speciesism?
- How do you imagine Jonah answering God's question at the end of the book?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Kennedy is a white, Canadian-born spiritual director called to serve Creation. He is a retreat facilitator, currently works as Executive Director of the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, Ontario, where ecology and spirituality come together. His Roman Catholicism has been enriched by his friendships with other faiths.

# St. Philip on the Road to Gaza – An Antidote to Racism

*Lucie Leduc*

## Scripture: Acts 8:26

### REFLECTION

When I think back to growing up in a small, largely French Roman Catholic community in Western Canada, I recall the tight-knit bonds and pride of faith held by our French Catholic heritage..., and the quietly held prejudices that lay hidden beneath that pride. Little did I understand as a girl growing up the long history of ethnic racism, of wounds and fear seething beneath the surface, between French and English in and beyond our community.

Add to the French and English in our town the First Nations and Métis who lived among us or came to town for education, shopping, or business.

They were less visible than the contrast between French and English, but there seemed to me an unwritten code lurking in the shadows: this code dictated that we were not to mingle, that we were to stay clear. Words were rarely spoken on the subject, but one time I heard “Savages...” in an angry tone coming from my own dear father’s mouth. What a path of purification and enlightenment I have faced these years since, walking with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in truth, healing, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples!

Fear is at the heart of all racism: fear of the unknown, the strange, the different—or worse, fear of God’s creative wisdom at work in the abundant diversity of colour, culture

and landscapes that we grow in. “Love casts out all fear,” we hear Saint John say in his first letter. The Holy Spirit in the heart of broken humanity undoes all fear and mysteriously guides us to the places and people we’d sometimes rather not go.

There is a stillness and an inner world of angels and the Holy Spirit in the Church—and in each of us that guides us wisely in these complex matters. A world of other spirits seeks to destroy and derail us. Discernment and self-assessment for self-awareness is needed regularly.

We hear wisdom in the small yet significant interlude in Acts 8:26–40—which tells of the meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch—when we listen deeply and follow the

Voice of the Way within. With Philip we are led to places of encounter with the Great Other, who stills warring hearts and baptizes us together in the bond of Christ's peace.

There is a cost to this Way. Will we choose to sacrifice creatively with and for others, even our enemies, as Jesus did on the cross? Or will we side with the crowd, crying out for the release of Barabbas, who symbolizes the release of impatience, anger, hatred, revenge, and violence into politics, religion, and social circumstances?

See how Philip manages as he follows the Spirit's call on the road to Gaza:

Now, there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home, seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." (Acts 8:27, 28)

This was no surface impulse or curiosity moving Philip to encounter the Ethiopian. Philip did not fear or stand in awe of the ethnicity or royal connections of this man. Add to this, he had been sent on the road to Gaza, a foreign place to all that Philip knew before. He was attuned to the Spirit within.

So Philip ran up to it (the chariot) and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. (vv. 30, 31)

In this joyous scene, Philip, and the Eunuch -- did the Eunuch's difference cause him to be treated as less

human than others of the time? -- read together the scripture that says,

Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe this generation? For his life is taken away from the earth. (Acts 8:32-33)

Philip then tells him about Jesus the Messiah, and all the good he had accomplished in his life on earth, his being handed over to suffer and die on the cross, and his resurrection too! Philip's sharing inspires the Ethiopian to claim baptism for himself and stop the chariot at a place where there's water. Philip baptizes him, after which they each go their own way.

God's love overcomes fear. Christ's love is not about race, colour, ethnicity, or loyalty to a group, but rather about deep faith in a gospel that makes being human a joyous and meaningful journey. When we listen deeply to the Spirit in our hearts and walk along with each other, placing our Creator God at the centre of all, we see anew the whole colourful, diverse creation we have a part in living, loving, and shaping together, non-violently, into the Body of Christ. With the promise of resurrection, we live to become self-aware of our flawed human condition, to be transformed in Christ, and to bring God's good news into our world now.

There is no hatred or violence in Jesus's message. Neither with Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian. There is only a gentle listening to Spirit, or a gentle turning away where we are not wanted and the time is not yet, and a strong, faithful meekness that accepts human freedom and limitations, that boasts in the cross of Christ, while always holding an open heart and door for others who are ready.

Racism is overcome in our hearts by following the heart of Christ, by facing our own hidden prejudices, and by not giving back in kind when we encounter violence and hatred.

## PRAYER

We pray. Holy Spirit, awaken us to our poverty of spirit that we may humbly be guided like St. Philip on the way of Christ, free of hatred, anger, vengeance, and violence. Grant us courage to sacrifice creatively for the common good of all peoples and nations, and to give voice to and raise up those oppressed by racism in our midst. Give us the heart to listen faithfully to your counsel in us. We make this prayer in the name of the Holy Trinity, mystery of communion, drawing and calling all to union in the wondrous array of diversity seen in the whole of creation. Amen.

## QUESTIONS

- How have I witnessed racism while growing up? Are there areas of bias and prejudice in myself still needing to be brought to prayer for healing?
- How do I hear the Spirit in my daily journey calling me to different places and encounters? Who have I met on the way who's helped me to deeper conversion?
- Who are the oppressed in my area? How do I stand and walk with them?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lucie Leduc was born in Edmonton and raised in Morinville, Alberta, of French-Canadian heritage. She is a Roman Catholic Christian and an Associate of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate who serves as Executive Director for The Star of the North Retreat House in St. Albert, Alberta.

# Break!

*Rev. Ha Na Park*

**Scripture: Isaiah 65:17–19, 21–23**

## REFLECTION

In the voice of the prophet Isaiah, God declares, “My people will build houses and live in them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They will not build for others to live in, or plant for others to eat” (Isa 65:21, 22).

When you hear these verses, this declaration is not really about building a house. These people are in captivity. They have built houses for their landlords, their masters, their colonizers in Babylon. So, they have been already building houses.

I’ll say it again: the declaration we hear today is not about *building* a house.

It is about *owning*.  
Owning your life.  
Owning your voice.  
Owning your body.  
Owning your labour.  
Owning your language.  
Own your United Church story.

Own your congregational ministry story.

Own God’s dwelling in you, in the moment of the difficult, challenging, creative “ruptures” you’ve experienced in life and ministry.

You may think of rupture as a word associated with trauma, or an intolerable amount of damage, but “rupture”, by definition, means “breaking away from the established pattern. A break from

social, cultural or historical norms or conventions; a significant turning point; a moment of crisis, signaling the necessity for change or transformation.”

Isaiah’s declaration to build a house is not for the landowners; it’s for those whose ancestors have been enslaved. It’s for those who, for generations, have seen their lives, their community, and their children be robbed of autonomy and forced into a system which is not their own.

Isaiah’s message is for those who have lived and survived, resurging from the colonial apocalypse and its intergenerational impact. Isaiah’s housebuilding is for those whose ancestors paid a head tax in order

to build the Pacific Railway. It is for those whose ancestors' homes were stolen while they were imprisoned in internment camps.

I hope to see the sacred verb *build* be reserved for the communities which resurge, reconnect, and reclaim a reconciliation that includes reparation.

God's declaration, "My people will build houses and live in them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit" is written for those whose lives have been disrupted by oppression. If we flip it, creating a rupture for the hearers who are in the position of being able to use their power and privilege without any hindrance, God's Word is reversed in the statement of prohibitions:

- Do not build on stolen land
- Do not build on stolen labour
- Do not build on the mastery of English
- Do not build on white culture
- Do not build on White Supremacy
- Do not build on the patriarchy
- Do not build on the false concept that Canada or The United Church has overcome the patriarchy,
- Do not build on "We are not perfect, but we are still better"
- Do not build on White male privilege
- Do not build on White female privilege
- Do not build on non-White male privilege
- Do not build on Gender binary and cisgender privilege
- Do not build on able-bodied privilege
- Do not build on Neo-liberalism
- Do not build on the 1% hard-working CEOs
- Do not build on praising the 1% hard-working CEOs
- Do not build on "What is mine is mine"

Do not build on "It's my property; it belongs to me and I can use it however I please" (including church property)

Do not build on taking advantage of the grace of Mother earth

An example of the moment of rupture: I would like to invite you to be "radically contextualized" in my lived experience, owning my United Church story. It happened at a lunch table in a Conference office building, around 2012. I was there for an interview as a candidate for ministry, and at the lunch table, someone, a well-known and respected minister, was sitting alone. And they saw me, and I saw them. And in that split second, when I was anxious but ready to say hi, the eyes which stared at me quickly turned down to whatever they were doing, with no expression on their face, as if telling me, "I am not seeing you. I am not interested in you. You are not enough for me to recognize. I am waiting for someone else, and it was not you. I am too occupied with whatever I am doing. I am busy, distracted, I find no reason to acknowledge your presence and say hi to you...."

I was there to join the ministry, after years of study and effort... I felt unwelcome.

There are four wildfires in my lived experience which burned me, and I came out of them, eventually, as who I am. But, as they are fires, their flames were blazing enough to scorch my spirit, to cause me to groan and mourn and rage, in the United Church of Canada! It is hard to build a home—it is hard to build anything—when you are engulfed in flames.

The four flames that have burned me deep are gender, race, culture, and language. I am not alone in feeling these refining fires.

What happens when gender and race intersect? It is quite simple. For me, it's MisogynAsian. (I coined that term). Say, Misogyny. Say, Asian. Now, put together the two. Misogyn~Asian. Racism and misogyny come at me together. Not only that - since I am married, all of racism and sexism, and heteronormative cisgender-centred patriarchal assumptions and biases hinder me. Then, language is the fuel that makes everything above so much worse. Accents or broken English... That immediately creates the stereotype of an Asian immigrant woman, and such stereotyping affects the way you're treated.

Then, a month ago, I had this exhilarating, unprecedented, deeply personal Pentecost experience. It created a liberating rupture, breaking the tight chains of the four refining fires: gender, race, culture, language. I was at the Transgender History Moving Forward Conference at the University of Victoria, centering Transgender people's voices and presence. Through the presenters' voices, I felt belonging in this diverse community, and suddenly started to speak my mind and own my story, delivering them in a super-fluent BROKEN ENGLISH, in Pentecostal style. I let go of the fear of losing the mastery of language. I abandoned the apprehension of whether the others are getting what I try to mean in English. My English was broken; my grammar was disorganized, but I did not care. I kept "talking like a Baptist"! In the moment of the Mystery of Broken English, I came alive from the Language Burn and resurrected in the Holy Spirit, Born Again in Brokenness. What a rupture! WE need to allow many more rupture moments to happen in all the spaces we build to create a community. In the Bible's Pentecost story, even

though God may be one, Christ may be one, the Holy Spirit allowed themselves to be BROKEN into one hundred, one thousand, one million different pieces, ... one million different tongues. Intercultural Pentecost is born in ruptures, born in brokenness, *not* in building to maintain the status quo.

Let us honour the million and billion broken Spirit pieces in the world, and celebrate their resurrection.

For those of us who continue to learn how to own our stories, do not build a house for others to dwell and live. Plant the vineyard for yourself and eat the fruit for your own body.

## PRAYER

(A Benediction—Using the words from Richard Wagamese’s *Embers: One Ojibway’s Meditations*. Wagamese’s own words are highlighted in bold.)

So, Break. Build,  
Plant and Praise,  
Rupture and Rest,  
Let’s do all of these.

***You can’t test your courage timidly.  
You have to run through the fire,***

***arms waving, legs pumping and heart beating wildly*** with your efforts to build a house for you to dwell and live and plant the vineyard for yourself and eat the fruit for your own body. ***Then, let us shine most brightly in community, bound together forever by a shared courage, a family forged in the heat of earnest struggle.***

## QUESTIONS

- Think about your own “rupture experience(s)” that had an impact on you and helped you own your story. What were you able to “build” after breaking away?
- Could you identify any wildfires from your lived experience that burned you, and how you emerged from them as who you are?
- Have you had an experience in which you came alive after being burned by oppressions such as racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, or the grind culture of capitalism, and emerged like a phoenix with the Pentecostal Mystery of Brokenness?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Ha Na Park (she/her/they) is an ordained minister in The United Church of Canada, currently serving at Broad View United, Victoria, BC. Her family migrated from Korea in 2007, when her older son, Peace, was 7 months old. In that year of transition, Ha Na realized that she had become the moon, “Which lives by depending on another and shines by reflecting another’s light” while living as the shadow of her ordained husband of two years. Since then, Ha Na has strived to be the Sun again and keep that poetic image as her motivation. Her recent path has been leading her to continue to evolve through her various interests and passions. Ha Na has committed herself to deepening her understanding of intercultural ministry, decreasing racism and questioning white privilege in her institution, and decolonizing herself, her work and her theology. She believes in friendship and mutuality as the antidote to racism, and seeks liberation from patriarchy and racism for women of colour. In addition, Ha Na embraces mysticism and spirituality to help build resistance to oppression.

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