**Provincial Racial Justice Team**

**Advent 2020 Study Series**

**“A New Way of Being”**

**Listening to Stories of Those Impacted by Racism**

**with the Biblical Texts for Advent, Year B**

**Welcome to the RJT Series – First Week of Advent, 2020**

**First Session “We Are All God’s People”**

**Sue Koenig**

Introduction (5 min.)

Welcome to the RJT Series – First Week of Advent, 2020

First Session “We Are All God’s People”

Story Sharing The Rev. Mark Breland, Lititz Moravian Church, Lititz, PA

“My Life Matters” – One Black Man’s Perspective

Scripture Isaiah 64:1-9 [Isaiah 63:15-64-11]

 Review of Handout – Rules for Respectful (Faithful) Conversation

 Vocabulary

* Lament – “A passionate expression of grief, often in music, poetry, or song. The grief is often born of regret, or mourning.
* Biblical lament – “A means for God’s people to express pain and suffering; a prayer to God for God’s help and deliverance from distress, suffering, or pain

Opening Prayer and Scripture (5 min.)

O God who opened the heavens at the baptism of your Son, Jesus Christ, open our hearts and minds that we may learn and grow in our understanding of what it means to be your people. Amen.

Read Isaiah 64:1-9

Questions and Reflection (10 min.)

1. One commentator, C. Westermann, calls this expanded section of Isaiah, “probably the most powerful psalm of lament in the Bible.” What is communal lament? In what ways do you hear communal lament in the reading from Isaiah?
2. Have you experienced a time of communal lament in your congregation? What was the source of the grief or pain?
3. What other feelings are expressed in the text?
4. What are the people crying out to God to do?

Reflection

In this psalm of communal lament, the people of Israel cry out to God to turn again to face them. They have sinned against God, and God has turned away from them. They confess their disobedience and their sin, acknowledging that God is right to be angry and that their sin has consequences and cannot simply be overlooked. They plead with God to remember that they are all God’s people, the work of God’s hand. In our participation in racial injustice and in our complicity, we have sinned against God and we make our communal lament, acknowledging that the sin of racism has deep and dire consequences causing harm to generations of Black people. We recognize that this sin cannot simply be confessed and lamented, but that we must find ways, by prayer and supplication and action, to bring justice and healing.

The Rev. Mark Breland’s Sermon (Video) (10 min.)

Questions (30 min.)

1. Is Rev. Mark Breland’s sermon a lament? In what ways?
2. What feelings does Rev. Breland express in his sermon? What feelings did you experience as you listened to Rev. Breland’s sermon?
3. Rev. Breland mentioned The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s quote and a related film, “A riot is the language of the unheard.” This quote as used numerous times by Dr. King and may be found in his 1967 speech at Stanford, “The Other America.”

…I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity. And so in a real sense our nation’s summers of riots are caused by our nation’s winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention.

In what ways have we continued to fail to hear over the past 53 years? Are non-violent protests and riots both forms of lament? Why or why not?

1. What are ways that we show we value the lives of others?
2. Rev. Breland said that if the congregation values his life and the life of his wife and children, they will also affirm that Black lives matter. How do you respond when you hear the phrase, “Black lives matter?” Why?
3. Could communal lament, as it is expressed in Isaiah 64:1-9 (acknowledgement and remorse for sin, expressions of feelings of pain, sadness, grief, sorrow, anger, isolation, abandonment by God, regret), be helpful to the Church’s work of racial justice and healing? If so, in what ways?
4. What did Rev. Breland ask of the church? What does he appreciate? What is his prayer?
5. What is your prayer? What would you ask of God as this season of Advent begins? What steps can you and your congregation take towards racial justice and healing?

Closing Prayer

Holy God,

Hear our song of lament of the communal sin of racism. Lead us, for we are all your people, to do the work of justice, righteousness, healing, and peace. Amen.

Activity for the First Week of Advent

Write a psalm, song or prayer of lament from your experience or understanding of the pain caused by racism.

**Second Week of Advent**

**God’s Deliverance**

**Isaiah 40:1-11**

**Amy Gohdes-Luhman**

Introduction (5 min.)

Second Session “God’s Deliverance”

Story Sharing Tory Reid

Scripture Isaiah 40:1-11

Review of Handout – Rules for Respectful (Faithful) Conversation

Opening Prayer & Scripture (5 min.)

Story Sharing Tory Reid (15-20 min)

Reflection (5 min)

Get you up to a high mountain! The word of our God will stand forever! This is the good news we are to proclaim when we see the grass wither and the flowers fade. Because they will, that is what grass and flowers do. Isaiah, the prophet, explains to God that the people are grass. We wither and fade.

In this time of a pandemic, racial injustice, violence, and malice of word and deed we may feel like our nation is withering and fading, or going down in a blaze like the forest fires out West. But our God commands us to get ourselves up to a high mountain and speak, to cry out.

In this wilderness we are in, we are to prepare the way for a God who will come with might and gentleness, with a strong arm of recompense, ready to enfold us in his arms and carry us in her bosom. God will feed us and gently lead the mother sheep.

Let us say and believe that we are in a new time this Advent of 2020. Some say we are in a “third reconstruction” of our nation as it pertains to racial justice. We have abolished slavery, fought for civil rights and now….what?

Having lived the reality of being questioned, detained, and chased by those who are committed to protect and serve, Tory still shared a hope of eradicating racism. He said that white Moravians need to look in the mirror and educate themselves on their privilege and figure out how to use it for the good of God’s order. This can be done.

Had the store owner in Tory’s reality, not chased after the police who were chasing after Tory and his track team, things could have gone very differently. Those who have power must be ready to run to and stand with those who are oppressed and make sure things go right, not wrong.

Tory shared the wisdom of James Baldwin with us: “Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

We can and must face racism in this nation. God is commanding us to get to a high mountain and make some noise. Not just noise, but speak the word and promise God. Things can be made straight and right again. Mountains and hills can humble themselves and valleys can be lifted up. When this happens…then we will see the GLORY of God coming in the first born son of Mary, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questions for discussion (15 minutes)

1. How were you able to empathize with Tory’s real-life instances of racial profiling?

2. What new things have you learned about racism in America this past year?

3. Rev. William Barber, a pastor and activist from North Carolina, speaks of a “Third Reconstruction,” a time like in the past when black and white people of faith worked together to create change. The language of a third reconstruction suggests that we are in a time now that is calling once again for a fusion of faith and politics by people from various races and classes in response to systematic racism. Do you feel this is happening? Do you sense a backlash against this fusion of faith and politics and anti-racism? Do you feel a hope in the midst of it all that includes you and your actions? How so? Or why not?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

**Third Week of Advent**

**Bearers of Hope**

**Text: Isaiah 61:1-3a (1-4, 8-11)**

**Desna A. Henry Goulbourne**

 Introduction (5 min.)

Third Session “Bearers of Hope”

Story Sharing Bevon White, Jr.

Scripture Isaiah 61:1-3a (1-4, 8-11)

Review of Handout – Rules for Respectful (Faithful) Conversation

Opening Prayer and Scripture (5 min.)

Reflection (5 min.)

The beloved Jewish city of Jerusalem is still in ruins and much work is needed to rebuild after the return of the people from exile in Babylon. It is a daunting task compounded by community infighting, and corruption among their leaders. Yet in the prophecy of Isaiah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem hear a message of hope and change in their circumstances. Isaiah is convinced that he has been appointed under the anointing of the Spirit of the Lord to bear to bear this message in the midst of despair, “the oil of joy instead of mourning” (v. 3a).

The tradition among the Jews and many of their neighbors was to use oil (most likely olive oil) on their faces and hair to add luster. Oil was also used for medicinal purposes, for cooking, and for giving light. However, in periods of mourning no oil would be applied and would often be replaced by ashes. Oil was so valued for its positive contribution to life that it became a symbol of the good life, not of sadness but of gladness, not of grief but of joy. So when the prophet Isaiah shares this message, the people hear an invitation to visualize a positive change in their circumstances and to prepare for a season of festivity.

Bevon Jr. is an immigrant from the Caribbean, and responses to his story may vary widely. Yet what we hear is that his painful experiences of pervasive racism may have hijacked hope of wholesome life in American society. It has raised existential issues for him as he compares his experiences with God’s plan for equality and justice in our world.

The word from the prophet is critical for our communities as it addresses situations that cause many to live with hopelessness and despair, such as systemic inequality and racial injustice, and the catastrophic climate changes already taking place. While we may see the storm clouds of hate and disaster gathering around us, the invitation from Isaiah in this season is to reposition our lenses. Consider the likelihood that we may be community-transformers, not only by becoming bearers of hope, but by living the vision of a new reality that God has shown us. This mission, if we choose to accept it, is possible when we allow the Spirit of God to anoint and equip us.

Story Sharing Bevon White, Jr. (5 minutes)

Questions for Discussion (15- 20 minutes)

1. What is our reaction to Bevon Jr.’s story?

2. What are the elements in his story that point to the discrimination faced by people of color in our communities?

3. What changes are needed in our worldview to better enable us to empathize with the pain of others and to inspire us to take on God’s hope-bearing mission?

4. Identify specific ways in which God may work through us to usher in a season of joy and gladness.

Closing Prayer (5 min)

**Advent 4: December 20, 2020**

**Topic: Mary’s Song**

**Text: Luke 1:47-55**

**Marian Boyle Rohloff**

Introduction (5 min.)

Fourth Session “Mary’s Song”

Story Sharing James McGee and Ivy Summers

Scripture Luke 1:47-55

Review of Handout – Rules for Respectful (Faithful) Conversation

Opening Prayer, Scripture, Reflection and Discussion Question ( 5 min.)

Mary’s voice lifts up her experience of the world’s brokenness as it is. Her song also gives voice to the world as it should/could be. Her experiences stand in stark contrast to conventional notions of being blessed. She is a young woman from a peasant class. Her gender makes her especially vulnerable, especially for a woman with questions surrounding her pregnancy. Mary’s yes to God’s calling brings new tensions into her life yet she claims a blessed state for God is doing great things and she is part of that. Her song is about a God who disrupts unjust systems and structures here and now. Mary voices the work of God in a social leveling and moves away from the have/have not systems we still tolerate today. Though Mary’s song speaks to the real world as it is, it is a song of hope and points to a new way of being community for God is lifting up the lowly, God is filling the hungry with good things, God is scattering the proud, bringing the powerful down from their thrones and sending the rich away empty. This is not a song about reversals of fortune but a leveling where privileges are not assigned to a few at the expense of others. This song points to an equitable sharing in the abundance of resources and life God desires for all. It is a song that still rings out every Advent and Christmas time reminding us that we’re not there yet.

Q. Bring to mind the communities you share life with… name a place of brokenness, name a place of hope.

Story Sharing: James McGee and Ivy Summers (20 minutes)

Q. What are your initial reactions to Ivy and James’ story?

Discussion and Reflection (15-20 min)

Ivy and James give voice to the very real burdens of living as people of color in our communities. They speak to the world’s brokenness as it is. James shares “I understand that any interaction that I have with somebody in law enforcement could be the end of my life and the saddest thing is that I’m resigned to that.”

James also spoke of the “talk” his father gave him and he has had to have with his daughter about living as a black person in this country. Ivy spoke of her son having a pocket knife in his vehicle and having to point out to him the dangers of having this as a person of color. Ivy speaks of the emotional labor and exhaustion of being a person of color in our communities.

Q. How do you connect or empathize with their story?

Q. What changes could be made to create safer communities for all our youth and children?

Q. What spiritual, physical and emotional impacts can come from bearing such emotional labor?

James and Ivy’s story gives voice to hope and the world as it could/should be. James says “Listen to the experiences of people of color when they tell you something is not right.” He speaks about listening without rebuttal or dismissiveness. Ivy speaks about it not always helpful to be around people just like me and the importance of listening to others experiences.

Q. Bring to mind your experiences have not really been “heard” by another. How does that feel?

Q. What are ways we can listen and hear the stories of people in our communities?

Ivy shares “the reason I love being a Moravian is Love… In all things Love… I keep turning to that.”

She shares her hope that our denomination grows in diversity and would love to see our congregation be more diverse as this is good, healthy and would make our congregation stronger.

Q. How do you see the work of racial justice living out our Moravian calling and motto “In All Things Love?”

Q. In what ways can we embrace diversity as a strength?

Closing Words and Prayer (3 min.)

“Jesus crossed every barrier between people, including the greatest barrier of all—the divison between God and humankind. He is our peace, and because of his life, death, resurrection, and coming return, those who belive in Jesus not only have a God’s presence with us but in us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we have the power, through God to leave behind the compromised Christianity that makes its peace with racism and to live out Christ’s call to a courageous faith.” Jemar Tisby The Color of Compromise”

Rules for Respectful Conversations

1. Use “I” language, speak from your own experience

2. Do not speak for a group of people, i.e., “we” “everyone”

3. Listen carefully and actively

4. Ask clarifying questions, but do not attack a person’s point of view

5. Allow yourself and others to pass on any question or discussion

6. Be gracious and open to all comments

7. Refrain from “educating” each other

8. Be open to all perspectives, looking for the best in each other

9. Be open-minded and ready to learn

10. Confidentiality: we will not quote or summarize another person without their permission. We are encouraged to share what we personally learned from the collected ideas shared.