WADE IN THE WATER: Preaching about Race and the Church

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Introductions

OPENING PRAYER

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What we’ll cover

WHAT TO EXPECT
Moving from the “front porch” to the “back porch”

- Real talk
- Deconstruction – reconstruction
- Remember – God’s a-gonna trouble the water!
Emotions you may feel

Challenged
Anger
Withdrawal
Overwhelmed
Guilt
Argumentative
Righteous
Frustrated

Recognize that these are defense mechanisms that keep us from being held accountable.
How to handle those feelings

Listen deeply

Sit with those feelings.

But don’t let them block the content that we are offering - which is an opportunity to “get real” and have “real talk” about racism in the church.
The “Iceberg” of Racism

OVERT
(socially unacceptable behavior and groups)

Lynching
Burning Crosses
Swastikas
KKK
Neo-Nazi Groups
Racial Slurs
The N-Word
Hate Crimes
Racist Jokes

Tokenism
Hiring Discrimination
Self-Appointed Ally
Paternalism
Not believing the experiences of People of Color
Claiming "Reverse Racism"
Expecting PoC to Teach White People
Confederate Flags
Cultural Appropriation

Questions?

COVERT
(socially acceptable)

Believing we are "Post-Racial"
"Getting Paid to Teach White People"
"Bootstrap Theory"
"Virtuous Victim" Narrative
"Don't blame me. I never owned slaves."
Denial of White Privilege
Cultural Appropriation

Questions?
WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DECONSTRUCTING RACIALIZED SYSTEMS AND PRIVILEGE?

- Not yet in the water
- Shallow
- Intermediate
- Deep
PERSONAL
What is your level of engagement with deconstructing racialized systems and privilege? [personal]

Not yet in the water

“I have a black friend.”
“I don’t see color.”
“It’s not always about race.”
“I’m nice to everyone.”

Shallow:

Watching a movie/documentary
Reading a book
Signing petition
Going to lunch with BIPOC
Voting [in LOW RISK area]

Intermediate:

Calling out a racist joke told by friend/family member
Invited BIPOC friend to home for a meal
Affirming the story and/or experience of a BIPOC friend or associate
Publicly acknowledge BLM (wearing shirt, posting sign) [in LOW RISK area]
Publicly opposing systemic racism (protests, sit-ins, etc.) [in LOW RISK area]
Asking “what is it like for you?” - then believing and trusting what is shared with you
Voting - [in HIGH RISK area]
Leveraging your privilege to open up space to BIPOC, then stepping back
Attending anti-racism workshop
Donating to and/or patronizing BIPOC businesses and organizations
WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DECONSTRUCTING RACIALIZED SYSTEMS AND PRIVILEGE? [personal]

Deep:

Engaging my social circle about systemic racism (willing to have difficult, even painful conversations)

Publicly acknowledge BLM (wearing shirt, posting sign) [in HIGH RISK area]

Publicly opposing systemic racism (protests, sit-ins, etc.) [in HIGH RISK area]

Divesting of privilege (giving up my space so that the voices and experiences of BIPOC are centered)

Basing my decisions and actions by centering voices and experiences of BIPOC

Ensuring accountability in the realms of power: finances, business, banking, education, medicine (not just service industry)

Person of color in authority in my life
CONGREGATION
WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DECONSTRUCTING RACIALIZED SYSTEMS AND PRIVILEGE? [congregation]

Not yet in the pool:
“It’s not an issue for us.”
“We welcome everyone.”
“Focusing on race is what divides us.”
“They worship so differently than us.”
“They don’t want to worship with us. They have their own church.”
“We invited them, but they don’t show up.”

Shallow:
Watching a movie/documentary
Doing a book study
Participate in joint ecumenical service.
Pulpit exchange
Incorporating spirituals into music
MLK program
Regular prayers in public liturgy
WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DECONSTRUCTING RACIALIZED SYSTEMS AND PRIVILEGE? [congregation]

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR CONGREGATION IS IN THE “SHALLOW END” FOR PREACHING ABOUT RACE?

• You’ve never preached a sermon in which you’ve mentioned race, white privilege, or white supremacy
• You’ve barely mentioned race, white privilege, or white supremacy in a sermon and have received negative pushback
  • Complaints, angry words, emails, “sniping,” silent treatment, “ghosting”
• You’ve directly addressed race, white privilege, or white supremacy in a sermon and have received negative pushback
  • “You’re being ‘too political.’”
  • “Stay in your lane.”
  • “I come to church to worship God, not be told I’m a racist.”
  • “Why are you judging me for being white?”
  • “It’s not an issue for us.”
  • “We welcome everyone.”
  • “Focusing on race is what divides us.”
WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DECONSTRUCTING RACIALIZED SYSTEMS AND PRIVILEGE? [congregation]

Intermediate:

Public acknowledgement (sign on church property) [in LOW RISK area]
Engage church around systemic racism (deep conversations)
Donating to BIPOC church/charity
Artwork that shows people of diverse backgrounds (more than “white hippy Jesus”)  
Hosting an anti-racism workshop
Inviting BIPOC organizations, groups, etc. to share space in the church
Ongoing relationship with congregation of color
Members attend event in a cross-cultural space
Donating to and/or patronizing BIPOC businesses and organizations
Raise money for the work of anti-racism
WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DECONSTRUCTING RACIALIZED SYSTEMS AND PRIVILEGE? [congregation]

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR CONGREGATION IS IN THE “INTERMEDIATE” LEVEL FOR PREACHING ABOUT RACE?

- You’ve directly addressed race, white privilege, or white supremacy in a sermon and there’s been little to no negative pushback BUT no response to the invitation to action.
  - Haven’t moved beyond the book study.
  - Lack of participation in anti-racism workshops
  - Signs of white discomfort in non-white spaces (“huddling in the corner” at multi-cultural events, outreach, etc.)
- You’ve bumped up against the edges of unspoken but sacralized whiteness. Signs might include:
  - Microaggressions
  - Passive aggressive efforts to undermine anti-racism work
  - “Checking the box” syndrome
  - “White savior complex” (white righteousness)
  - Defensiveness when pointing out unconscious bias and hidden assumptions around whiteness and blackness
WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DECONSTRUCTING RACIALIZED SYSTEMS AND PRIVILEGE? [congregation]

Deep:

Public acknowledgement (sign on church property) [in HIGH RISK area]

Making anti-racism part of yearly church curriculum - for all ages (like an Advent study every year)

Budget line for anti-racism and justice work

Provide training for BIPOC leaders to equip them for the work

State expectation for staff, parishioners, leaders, etc. that all people will be treated with respect and honor - setting the tone

Holding whites accountable for micro-aggressions

BIPOC on staff and congregational leadership positions

Require all STAFF in anti-racism training and cross-cultural experience on a regular basis

Regular opportunities for PARISHIONERS to work and serve in cross-cultural spaces
WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH DECONSTRUCTING RACIALIZED SYSTEMS AND PRIVILEGE? [congregation]

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR CONGREGATION IS READY FOR THE “DEEP” LEVEL FOR PREACHING ABOUT RACE?

• You’ve directly addressed race, white privilege, or white supremacy in a sermon and there’s been little to no negative pushback AND they’ve done at least THREE of the actions in the INTERMEDIATE LEVEL.

• Still some vestiges of negative pushback, resistance, or “white exhaustion”:
  • Microaggressions
  • Passive aggressive efforts to undermine anti-racism work
  • “Checking the box” syndrome
  • “White savior complex” (white righteousness)
  • Defensiveness when pointing out unconscious bias and hidden assumptions around whiteness and blackness

• Even congregations in the “deep end” need ongoing encouragement, challenge, and accountability. Preaching accompanies them through this process.
QUESTIONS?
WHERE IS YOUR CONGREGATION?
You will choose your small group accordingly.

- Not yet in the water
- Shallow
- Intermediate
- Deep

If your congregation is in this group (Shallow – Intermediate), you’ll go to Leah’s break-out session.

If your congregation is in this group (Intermediate - Deep), you’ll go to Sonna’s break-out session.
15-MINUTE BREAK
FIVE PATHS OF PROPHETIC PREACHING

FLOWERING
* Asking the questions
* Raising awareness

ROOTING
* Biblical principles
* Theological frameworks
* The Bible gives permission, authorization to address

FLOWERING
* Asking the questions
* Raising awareness

POLLINATING
* Voices in dialogue
* The Bible models different voices disagreeing while still faithful

LEAFING
* What, then, shall we do?
* Suggestions for action

FRUITING
* Sustained conversation
* Transformational change

Hermeneutical Principles for Preaching and Race

1. Hermeneutic of suspicion
   a. Interrogate the text: don’t believe everything you read (or what people say that it means, especially white folks)

2. Be prepared to ask questions (God’s a-gonna trouble the water!)
   a. Who is NOT speaking? Who is ABSENT from the text? How do you stretch this text to incorporate the fullness of the gospel?

3. Hold every speaker or actor to the highest tenets of the gospel
   a. If they fall short, call them on it.
      (Even Jesus himself! Remember Syrophoenician woman!)
      No interpretation of the text should leave anyone – racist or not – out of the grace of the gospel.
FIVE PATHS OF PROPHETIC PREACHING with Hermeneutical Principles for Preaching and Race

FLOWERING
- Asking the questions
- Raising awareness

ROOTING
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FRUITING
- Sustained conversation
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POLLINATING
- Voices in dialogue
- The Bible models different voices disagreeing while still faithful

LEAFING
- What, then, shall we do?
- Suggestions for action

Hermeneutic of Suspicion
- Ask Questions
- Hold to the gospel
QUESTIONS?
TEXTS WE WILL EXAMINE

Shallow End:

Acts 9:1-19 – OPTION ONE

• Saul’s conversion experience where his eyes are opened to the pain of those he persecutes.

• Central Question: What are examples of “scales falling from eyes” to see the truth of Jesus’s justice-seeking love for the American church founded on and perpetuating racism? What is the conversion we are see(k)ing today?
TEXTS WE WILL EXAMINE

Shallow End:

Acts 9:1-19 – OPTION TWO

• God brings Saul and Ananias together – the oppressor and the oppressed – to disrupt a program of persecution and convert the persecutor.

• Central Question: What was it like for Ananias to come face-to-face with the architect of his people’s persecution? What was it like for Saul to be at the mercy of those he persecuted?
TEXTS WE WILL EXAMINE

Intermediate:

Amos 7:7-17

- Recognizing what’s going on and becoming a prophet.
- **Central Question:** When considering those who speak out for racial justice, what truth comes to light when we look at the “who” as much as, if not more than, the “why”?
Deep end:

Matthew 18:21-35

• The parable about the Unforgiving Servant shows us that forgiveness is essential – but so is accountability.

• Central Question: What can white folks learn from the parable of the Unforgiving Servant when it comes to racial justice?
THE CHALLENGE:

• Choose one of these texts to preach a sermon addressing racism in your congregation sometime before Jan. 14, 2021.
Reminder: Choose your group according to where your congregation is at this time.

- Not yet in the water
- Shallow
- Intermediate
- Deep

If your congregation is in this group (Shallow – Intermediate), you’ll go to Leah’s break-out session.

If your congregation is in this group (Intermediate - Deep), you’ll go to Sonna’s break-out session.
WELCOME BACK!
NEXT STEPS

• Preach a sermon addressing racism in your congregation sometime before Jan. 14, 2021

• Coaching meeting on January 14

• Preach a second sermon addressing racism (going deeper!) before March 11, 2021

• Coaching meeting on March 11