

"Three Songs: Thoughts on Racism"

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August 23, 2020

Did you know that for years Crayola Crayons had a color in the box called "flesh"? It used to make me wonder, "Whose flesh?" Later, after some consciousness raising, it was renamed "peach". Did you also know that bandaids came in "flesh tone". Again, whose fleshtone? A socially aware company now makes bandaids for people of color.

We are living in a time again of racial reckoning. It's a time when we, as a nation, is being asked to take a closer look at some of our painful history.

As I thought about and prayed about this, I thought about three songs that have stuck in my head. the first one goes way back...to when I was a little girl, way back! I'm sure you know it:

"Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white,
they are precious in his sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world."

The message is unmistakable. ALL people of all races are loved by their Creator. All people, of ALL races.

Yet the ugly reality of racism is with us yet. the evil side of our humanity is evident everywhere. We still hear terms like "ethnic cleansing". We witness another revival of Nazi rhetoric. Hate speech in the political arena arises out of our debate on immigration reform. Folks from the middle east are held in suspicion. "Hate thy Neighbor" is heard throughout the world.

Racism is essentially a spiritual problem. Racism is sin. Racism represents the ugliest side of human nature. Racism denies the special uniqueness God has given each of us. It denies that each of us is marked with the imprint of God, created in the very image of God!

Racism also denies God's demand for justice. "Let justice roll down like waters..." cries the prophet Amos. And Isaiah wrote, "thus says the Lord: Maintain justice and you do what is right".

the writer of the letter to the Galatians caught God's vision : "there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, male or female, we are all one in Christ Jesus."

The Constitution of the State of CT declares, "there shall be free public education in the state for the equal benefit of all the people, as justice requires. And yet there are two Connecticuts, separated by racial and economic divisions. There is the CT of promise as seen in many of its suburbs, and a CT of despair as seen in sections of our poverty-stricken cities.

In a classic book called "Savage Inequalities", author Jonathan Kozal describes the devastating effects of segregation, "we are children only once and after those years are gone, there is often no second chances. The consequences of unequal education have a terrible finality.

Racism is sin. A sin we need to confess. Our human nature is to exclude those who are different. We hate and fear and even persecute those who don't look like us..while God is trying to convert our hearts, to get us to join in a new creation.

That brings me to my second song: "We are a Rainbow"..a song I learned at several youth rallys.

"We are a rainbow, together we are a sign
We are a rainbow tolive for humankind,
We are a rainbow, it's time for us to shine.
We are a rainbow."

There is One who brings out all our colors
And sees them together as one.
Reaching out to our sisters and our brothers,
we find our place in the sun.

Ironic isn't it? While we're busy trying to create homogenous community, God is working to create a rainbow!

And the third song. It was written in 1862 by Julia Ward Howe. She was inspired after a visit with union troops in the thick of the Civil War. She wrote this song as a pro-union, anti slavery anthem. Not everyone in the north was an abolitionist, many just wanted the nation put back together, with or without slavery. But Howe's song help to change that. The Song is the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Listen to one of the stanzas:

God has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat,
He is sifting out the hearts of all before his judgment seat.
O be swift my soul to answer him, be jubilant my feet,
Our God is marching on."

Now I don't usually like hymns with warimages, but racism is a kind of battle, a battle agains an terrible evil. It's not we who must prevail, but truth and beauty, and dignity and freedom and justice for all. We pray for that kingdom to come; for our God is marching on.

The only question for us is whether or not we will be there with God on the march.

Wherever people struggle for justice, for equality, for liberation from the chains of racism and discrimination, let us be there with God!

Wherever children struggle to escape the choking stench of poverty and sickness and inhuman housing and inadequate education, let us be there with God!

Wherever people are lonely, hurt, confused, and forgotten, let us be there with God!

Let us be there to look deep into their faces and see that all of us are related and that we travel together. Let us be there with God to weep and to laugh, to hold out our arms and hug the world. Let us sing songs and share in God's work, that's the only thing that will make us truly human.

Will we be swift and jubilant to follow? For God is marching on.
Amen.