

Overcoming Racism Together Workshop – Are you against racism? Do you want a more diverse congregation?

How do you react when you hear about anti-racism training? “Ho-hum.” “Done that already.” “Don’t need that anymore.” “I’m okay with other ethnic groups.” “There’s no racism in this congregation.”

I have five white grandchildren in Cleveland high school’s STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) program up on Beacon Hill. You may have heard that zip code 98118, Columbia City, is the most diverse in the nation. These five tripled the number of white students in their high school. At the end of the year, I watched as 120 ninth graders were called up to say what they appreciated about their first year in high school and how they had been changed. As each student was described by her or his teacher, I formed a picture of that brilliant, open, curious, enthusiastic child in my mind. When a black African, brown Southsea islander, or Latino, or Asian young person made their way to the front of the room, I experienced a disconnect, realizing that I had constellated a white child in my imagination, based on the teacher’s words and my white privileged background. I was shocked at my unbidden, unexpected racism, for that is what it was.

A few years ago Bill Moyers interviewed Jim Cone, African American theologian, ordained in the AME church and professor at Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Cone said the cross and the noose (the lynching tree) are part of our DNA in America and until we talk about it, we will not be able to look each other in the eye. We white people know that black slaves built America for 247 years, and for another 100 years of legal segregation and lynching.

What we may not know is that the cross, the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus, breathes hope into the person who, in the eyes of the dominant society, has nothing, is nobody, is looked down on. The cross gives people dignity, humanity, hope for a better life, here or in the hereafter.

“So,” Cone says, “America must face up that we are one community. Black people and white people are in a tussle that you cannot get out of. It is deeply engrained in our relationship to each other.”

My white life in the 50’s can be described as innocent. The black poet JT Stewart took one look at me, drew a deep breath and said, “Girl, the 50’s were not innocent.” Dr. Cone tells us that as long as we whites behave as innocents, we are doomed to remain alienated from our fellow Americans, members of the Beloved Community.

Dr. Cone says “the next step is to connect with people who also have hope: blacks, whites, Hispanic, Asians, all different kinds of people. You have to connect and be around and organize with people who have hope.”

Anti racism training is a way to begin this connecting, to have a conversation that goes the necessary depth, breaking out of innocence. Are you ready to explore your

relationship to the cross and the lynching tree? How would that make a difference in your experience of the other, wherever you encounter him or her?

Join us on Friday evening, October 5th, Saturday 10/6, 9:00-4:00 p.m.

If interested in learning more about this workshop put on the by the Dismantling Racism Training Team of the Diocese of Olympia please contact Liz Shea at [206-782-1608](tel:206-782-1608)/lizeshea@gmail.com or Mac Brown at [206-290-5423](tel:206-290-5423)/kmb@seanet.com.