



# **Becoming Anti-Racist – Dismantling Racism**

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Episcopal Address Part II (Part I) | September 8, 2020

**In faithfulness to Jesus' model of inclusive love and justice, as bishop of the Greater Northwest Area of The United Methodist Church I am committed to leading United Methodists in the Alaska Conference, Oregon-Idaho Conference and Pacific Northwest Conference to make dismantling systemic racism within the church and throughout society a long-term missional priority.**



## The Original Sin is taking what isn't yours.

**A**fter studying the scriptures and observing how people abuse their power in many inventive ways, I have come to believe that the original sin is *taking what isn't yours*. Think of Adam and Eve in the garden abundant with food, animals, plants, provided by a generous Creator. Good climate. Good company. And all God asks of them is to leave one tree alone. You can have it all. Enjoy everything in this garden -- just don't eat the fruit of this one tree. But they couldn't resist temptation. They picked the fruit that wasn't theirs and ate it. By this one small act, the entire balance between creator and human creatures was disrupted.

*Taking what isn't yours* is not only the *original* sin, it is the *pervasive* sin throughout the human family. What is rape or sex trafficking if not an invasion and claiming of rights to another person's body, privacy, autonomy? What is the refusal to acknowledge a person's self-knowledge and identification as LGBTQ? Doesn't child abuse rob the child of innocence, trust, security? What is the confiscation and removal of Native Americans from their ancestral lands and repression of their languages and cultures if not a taking? The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Armed invasions and occupations. Think of the separation of children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border. Employers callously take workers' health by exposing them to pesticides, coal dust or COVID-19. Human beings are cunning in the ways they deny each other the fullness of life Jesus came for us to enjoy (John 10:10). The thing about original sin is that it is hard to give up the sweet taste of the stolen apple.

Today I want to talk with you about the original sin of enslavement and its enduring legacy of racism, especially, though not exclusively, anti-Black racism in America.

## A prophetic word for my siblings who are targeted by systemic racism

### Isaiah 54

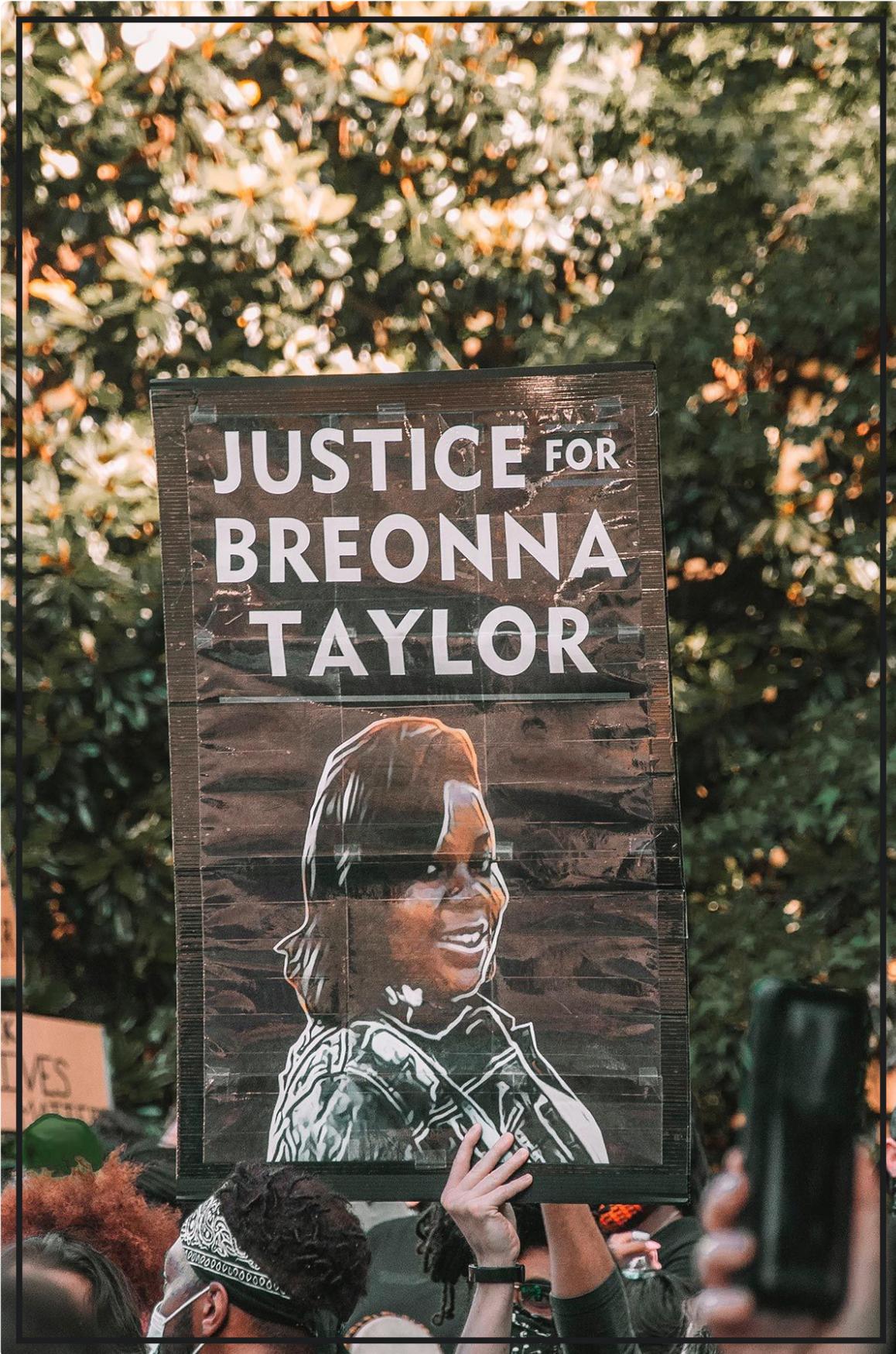
**11** O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted,....

**13** All your children shall be taught by the Lord,  
and great shall be the prosperity of your children.

**14** In righteousness you shall be established;  
you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;  
and from terror, for it shall not come near you.

**15** If anyone stirs up strife,  
it is not from me;  
whoever stirs up strife with you  
shall fall because of you....

**17** No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper,  
and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.  
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord  
and their vindication from me, says the Lord.



Friends, I speak first to you who suffer at the hands of oppressors – you, who have not been shown dignity and respect, and afforded the rights God breathed into every member of the human family at creation. I address, particularly, those who bear the accumulated burden of

centuries – generations – of white supremacy, and who daily feel the eye of distrust, suspicion, accusation, exclusion, hatred, rejection.

I am learning to hear and see that in America, systems that we call equal, just and fair – *equal* opportunity, *criminal justice*, *fair* housing – have injustice and bias baked into them. I am learning to hear and see that implicit racial bias, [i] pervasive among white people in America, ensures that white police, teachers, judges, parole officers, congresspersons, election officials, parking lot attendants, neighbors and strangers carry into their work and lives, suspicion of people of color, and preference – not for the poor and outcast, but for white people. This is what is called white privilege.

I am learning to hear and see that for more than 500 years, the Christian church has granted European explorers permission “to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue” all Muslims, pagans and enemies of Christ, “the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery....and to convert them to their use and profit.” [ii]

I am learning how in America, enslavement of Black bodies didn't end with the abolition of slavery and emancipation of enslaved people, but that enslavement continued through Jim Crow segregation and the denial of the vote to Black citizens. When the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts dismantled Jim Crow segregation in the 1960s, control of Black bodies and lives wasn't eradicated, it became embedded elsewhere: the War on Drugs, stop and frisk, disproportionate arrests, convictions, and sentencing of Black citizens, especially men, and in the denial of access to public assistance programs, and the right to vote or serve on a jury for convicted felons. [iii]

Smart phones and social media have opened a window on racial oppression in America; denied, hidden and ignored for generations.

I remember and say their names again: Trayvon Martin, Walter Scott, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Freddy Gray, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland and many more that never made the headlines. George Floyd's desperate last breaths, caught on video, and the relentless cruelty of the officer of the law who took his life tell an undeniable story. Eight minutes and 46 seconds; when the officer's knee pressed George Floyd's neck into the pavement, there was plenty of time for the officer to pause, think, and re-evaluate the situation. It was time enough to recognize that Mr. Floyd was no threat to him, to recognize that the suspected offense was a trifling compared to the death sentence the officer carried out – plenty of time to hear God's voice, and the bystander's voices shouting – “STOP! This is my beloved son. You are killing him.” And Ahmaud Arbery, hunted down by men who had a

plan, stalked him, and killed him. Rayshard Brooks, shot and killed by police at a Wendy's drive-thru. Breonna Taylor, in her own home asleep. Jacob Blake, shot seven times in the back. His shooting was followed a few days later by a white vigilante, armed with a semi-automatic weapon, shooting and killing two protesters and wounding a third. He returned home without ever being confronted or questioned by police.

## A prophetic word for my white siblings

### Isaiah 55

- <sup>6</sup> Seek the Lord while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near;
- <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake their way,  
and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
- <sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
- <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God looked at God's chosen people and saw their sin. He named it and called them to account. As I read this passage, I hear the voice of God speaking to dominant culture Americans and to me in this season of anti-racism uprising, saying, "My thoughts are not your thoughts. My ways are not your ways." *The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth* (Luke 3:5). Leave the crooked path you have walked all these years. It's a severe charge. It's hard to look back over your life, over the teachings of your family, school, church and say, "Wait a minute. Maybe we've got this wrong. Perhaps we need to look again, think again, listen anew. Maybe the way our world has been ordered, all the things we take for granted aren't right."

I am learning to hear and see that the standards, norms and habits I was taught to value are not universally shared by all people from every culture. Slowly, I am learning that as a leader, if I simply, unconsciously, lead according to the cultural norms that are natural to me, I will inadvertently, unconsciously perpetuate ways of working and relating that do not work for many of its members. I continue practices that silence the gifts, insights and wisdom of people raised in different cultural contexts. I am learning to recognize that white people and Black people do not share the same life experiences or the same generational memory and interpretation of history. These differences mean that we view the ways of the world we share very differently. And when I hear someone say something from a different perspective that doesn't make sense to me and is contrary to how I have always thought of it, I may want to say, "that's ridiculous!" "You're crazy." "Let me show you how you are wrong." "The world just doesn't work that way – it *can't work that way!*" "Let me teach you the right way."

You see, until I learn to have ears to hear, I cannot see beyond my own cultural perspective. This is what is called cultural normativity. [iv]

## **An Eye-Opening Moment**

Late one night, I found myself riding in a car we had borrowed from a Native American friend, who had borrowed it from a relative. The driver was a Black male colleague with a blonde, white woman in the passenger's seat. I sat with a young Filipino man and a young gay Hispanic man in the back. On a dark, remote rural Oklahoma highway, we were pulled over for a broken tail light. None of us was from Oklahoma. No two of us were from the same state. We didn't know the name of the person the car was registered to. In that moment, I experienced something I knew nothing about – driving while Black. Our suddenly serious and vigilant driver's training kicked in:

- Be quiet and respectful
- No-one speaks but me
- No acting up. No jokes
- No quick movements

Nothing bad happened that night, but it was easy to see how it might have, if the car registration or the driver's license had been expired, if there was an unpaid parking ticket, or there hadn't been several clergy in the car. Suppose our driver had been alone in the car. Suppose the officer had been in a bad mood. Who would have known and told the truth? I will never doubt the real danger and fear of driving while Black.

Without the videos, the brazen police actions we witness in cities across America would never have seen the light of day. A story would have been woven that “justified” unjustifiable police actions:

- the suspect was menacing
- police acted in self-defense or thought there was a weapon
- evidence is lost, tampered with or suppressed
- the witnesses aren't credible
- or they just don't show up to testify

Since smartphones have become commonplace, individuals can shine a light on a pattern of abusive power that has gone unacknowledged and unaddressed for far too long. Endemic, systemic racism now confronts white Americans who have been able to pretend it didn't exist or have explained it away.

This year, in this season as we watch protests that continue after four months, each one of us has to decide whether to pay attention to the evidence and re-evaluate whether or not racism is alive and well in our world, or whether we will continue to kid ourselves by denying the evidence.

Will we continue to minimize the role of racism in the events we see, and adopt conspiracy theories that protect us from having to face a deep, hard sin in our society?

This is why I am talking to you about this today. America has been broken since there was money to be made by kidnapping, imprisoning, shipping like cargo across the ocean and literally delivering from Africa Black bodies to the New World African people, to be marketed to enslavers who built the wealthiest nation in the world on their backs. And all these years later, the deep wounds caused by that original sin have not healed.

But we have a chance today, in this generation, to learn to hear and see what we have not wanted to admit – that our nation is not fair, rights are not equal, and systems are not just. And we have the opportunity to journey with Jesus on a straight path that might lead to a just, equal, fair and beloved community.

***I want to be part of that project! Don't you?***

And yet, even as I say that I want to be part of the project of dismantling racism in the Greater Northwest, in The United Methodist Church, in the human family, I can feel a little fear rising in myself. I will have to give up something for justice. Justice would not have

given me all the advantages I enjoy. God's justice will lift up the lowly and humble the rest of us (Luke 1: 52).

What if I – if we – venture outside the values, beliefs and ways of living that I have spent a lifetime learning? What if we can't find a way forward? What if it's a wilderness and not a promised land? Well, friends, we're in the wilderness already, wouldn't you say? Were the Israelites right to leave slavery in Egypt in search of something better?

And you know what God says to our fearful selves? Don't be afraid of the wilderness. You have been there before. There is a better way than the way things are now. I will show you the way. Take a step on the path of right relationship.

Fear not. Perfect love casts out fear.

Your cabinet members and I are stepping out in love, and I hope that United Methodists in Alaska, British Columbia, Idaho, Oregon and Washington will join us on a walk from fear to love.

## Dismantling Racism and Creating Beloved Community

### **Phillipians 2:1, 3-5**

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy.... <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...

When Boise First United Methodist Church, known as the Cathedral of the Rockies, was built and dedicated in 1960, it included was a stained-glass window with the image of Robert E. Lee alongside George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Robert E. Lee was the Civil War general who led the fight to protect and preserve the legal right to enslave people in the United States. In recent years lethal attacks on Black Americans brought renewed attention to this widow and raised the question whether it was appropriate to elevate Robert E. Lee to the company of Washington and Lincoln.

After George Floyd's cruel death, as the public display of Civil War monuments and confederate flags was challenged across the country, criticism of the window at Boise First flared up on social media. Church leaders decided the window should be removed. In July, Clint and I drove to Boise, Idaho, to participate in a small, socially distanced gathering to deconsecrate this window as workers removed it permanently. [v]

At the deconsecration, I issued a call to United Methodists in the Greater Northwest Area to enter a season of self-examination, confession, repentance and housecleaning in our churches.





## A Call to Dismantle Racism

In the Greater Northwest, we recognize and strive for “inclusion” as one of three practices of a vital, healthy church. As I lead the church in its mission of helping people become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, I call upon the United Methodist clergy and laity of the Greater Northwest Area to promote greater cultural and racial equity and inclusion in our communities of faith. I call every pastor and lay member of the Annual Conferences to lead their church(es) to:

1. Learn the history and current reality of racism, anti-blackness, Native American exclusion, anti-immigrant attitudes, implicit racial bias and white supremacy.
2. Examine the visual images present in worship spaces and facilities, newsletters, for imagery that is culturally biased or exclusionary.
3. Reflect on traditions, decision-making, and communication styles that assume and privilege Euro-centric culture and values.
4. Examine the values and people prioritized in church budgets and activities.
5. In word and deed, intentionally to appreciate and honor the God-given goodness of a diverse human family.
6. Intentionally to welcome the wide diversity of God's children into full, authentic voice and leadership in our churches.
7. Initiate and enter into partnerships with groups in the community that are not now present in each congregation.

During Charge Conferences this fall and winter, district superintendents will work with congregations to begin to engage these challenges. God has opened a door for us listen, to grow and to honor people who bring varied experiences of life in America. God is leading us in this work, to make us whole, and to help our churches deepen their discipleship, broaden their engagement with the racially diverse people in their communities, and become places where the inclusive love of Jesus Christ will be evident to people from all races and walks of life.

**We can do this. God is in this work. Jesus leads the way. The Holy Spirit is with us for encouragement. We must do it.**

*Elaine JW Stanovsky*

**Bishop Elaine JW Stanovsky**

Greater Northwest Episcopal Area

[i] <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-to-think-about-implicit-bias/>

[ii] "The Bull Romanus Pontifex, English translation: [www.doctrineofdiscovery.org/dum-diversas/](http://www.doctrineofdiscovery.org/dum-diversas/), cited in Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery*, (Downers Grove, Illinois, Intervarsity Press, 2019 page 15.

[iii] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York, The New Press, 2010.

[iv] <https://thewitnessbcc.com/denominational-diversity-cultural-normativity/>

[v] <https://www.umi.org/newsdetail/boise-idaho-church-deconsecrates-and-removes-stained-glass-window-depicting-confederate-general-robert-e-lee-as-it-repents-of-racism-14145799>

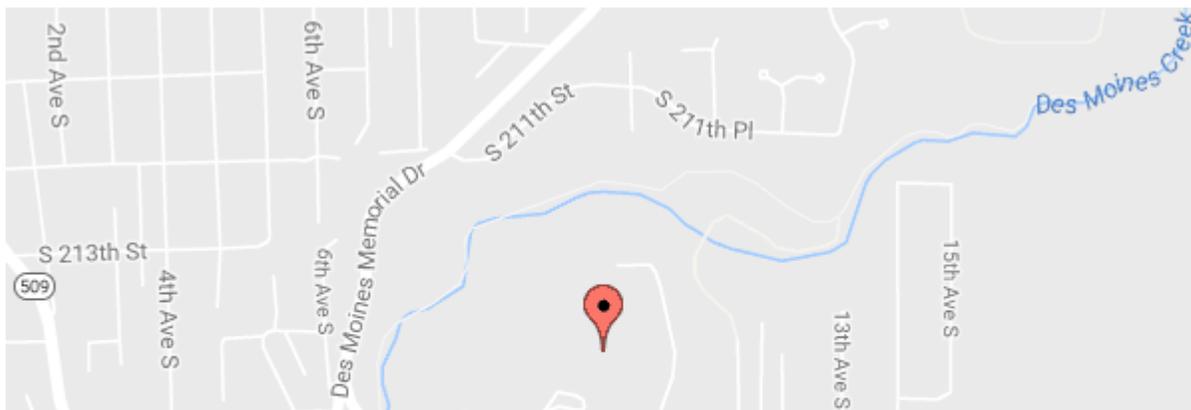
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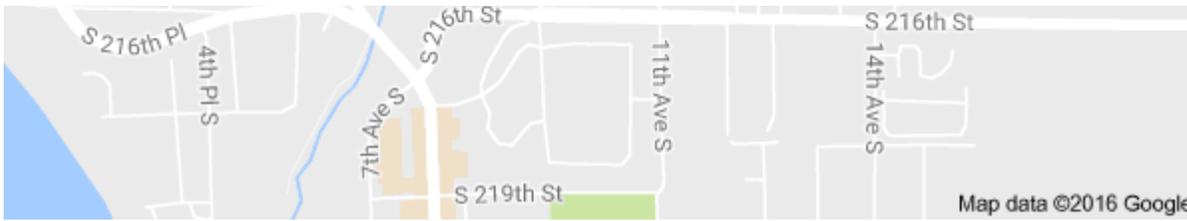
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## **Our Address**

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## **Our Conference Websites**

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