

Pastoral Reflections on Religion, Race, and Relationships

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When I was a child growing up in Madison, Florida (Cherry Lake), I went to a one-room first and second grade schoolroom focused on the “Three R’s” of Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic. My family attended the wooden framed “Church in the Wildwood” at Cherry Lake Methodist until my third-grade year and prior to the Uniting part of Methodism with the Evangelical United Brethren in 1968. At Cherry Lake Methodist we had outhouses instead of indoor plumbing and a wonderful “Dinner on the Ground” for homecoming with the best fried chicken, desserts, and sweet iced-tea ladled out of brand new galvanized 20 gallon cans. (All off limits now to me today due to diet and type 2 diabetes!” – No surprise!)

From my sandy playground at Cherry Lake Elementary, I looked up in the sky and watched John Glen orbiting the earth in his space capsule, Friendship 7, and all seemed right with the world! When I went into town as a small child, the only thing I really couldn’t understand was why there were water-fountains and bathrooms labeled “White Only”.

I was fairly oblivious to racism and wouldn’t have understood it at that age anyway. I have always known that the family I was born into provided certain privileges that others did not have. Not having to understand racism because my life wasn’t at stake like children of color in my community was certainly one of them.

I began to understand and experience integration in Valdosta, Georgia, during 9th grade. We were sent to the black high-school and on my first day of school both the white and black students got rocks thrown at them from both sides of the street. I still didn’t understand it.

I remember being ushered out of the “white only” waiting room at my dentist’s office and told I couldn’t sit there. I purposely sat there anyway to the office manager’s great dismay.

In high school, I spent the summer before my senior year in a singing group called “His People” touring the South Georgia Conference, of the now United Methodist Church, with a stop in Brunswick, Georgia, where we sang in an historically black church. Our nine-member group stayed in church members’ homes and it was the first time I had ever spent the night in a person’s home who looked different than me and ate at their kitchen table for breakfast. I remember feeling a little apprehensive at first, but the mother and son tried very hard to help me feel at home and we got along just fine. The Dad stayed in the back of the house, but did come out to meet me when I was ready to leave the next day and head back to the church to continue our summer singing tour. I am reflecting on these years about religion, race, and relationships to better understand my own personal growth in what it means to be



anti-racist these days. I had to look up anti-racist this year to make sure I understood what I was seeking to become.

An anti-racist is a person who opposes racism and promotes racial tolerance (Oxford English Dictionary). Yep, that’s me! I think I’ve always been an anti-racist, even when I acted racist during integration in the 9th grade; yet, deep down, I knew that wasn’t me. I have also begun to understand more deeply what it means to grow up in a culture where the color of my skin brings with it a sense of rank in society that I did not necessarily earn.

When I think about who I am as a child of God, I lean into the understanding that we are all created in the Image of God (Imago Dei). I base that understanding in Genesis 1:27. “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”

All of creation is a reflection of the nature of God. I continue to grow in my faith with an understanding of what it might mean to reflect God's nature through his love and with all that I meet.

That's where the relationship part comes in! I have been reaching out lately to our neighbors in downtown Tallahassee. As I shared in a recent sermon, I've connected with Dr. RB Holmes at Bethel Baptist and he and I hope to renew the partnership we used to have together in worship and shared ministry. I joined with Dr. Judy Mandrell last Tuesday night, pastor of Life Changers, COGIC, as we planned with other pastors in the area a time

of fasting and prayer to be launched on March 8, from 6am to 6pm as we commit to pray for Tallahassee and the unity of our area churches.

I am looking forward to where the Holy Spirit may lead our city as we join together with Capital Area Justice Ministry and the 30 congregations who are living into the vision of providing a way for the faith community in Tallahassee to do justice and love others throughout the Tallahassee and big bend area.

Some of our Trinity Leadership have committed to come together for a time of study and discernment as to how Trinity might best respond

to the ways in which we can help lead the way in anti-racism in Tallahassee. We will have a larger invitation to the entire congregation after Easter and I look forward to all that we can accomplish as together we truly love our neighbors and continue to care for the Tallahassee community.

Anyone who needs help with a Covid-19 Vaccine Appointment please call the Church Office and let your pastors know. We will be glad to help with appointments and transportation if needed. Call 850-222-1120 or email us at trinity@tumct.org