

EPHESIANS 6:1-9

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise...”so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling; in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ not only while being watched and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

And masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven and with him there is no partiality.

GALATIANS 3:23-29

Before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you

as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

BECOMING COLOR BLIND

Ephesians 6:1-9

Galatians 3:23-29

When you look into the mirror, who do you see? The first thing in the morning, I use a low light over the vanity because I really do not want to conjure who that gray bearded, elderly man is returning my gaze. What happened to that handsome devil I used to see staring back at me?

On this national holiday weekend when we celebrate the life and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we have an opportunity to do some serious soul searching—not in a critical sort of way, but in an effort to grow beyond our entrenched biases and move closer to a colorblind way of

looking at the world. It is no secret that racism is a reality not only in our culture, but in every society across the globe. It is not going away and actually seems to be on the rise with the strengthening of nationalistic and extremist white supremacy movements both here and abroad. It's destructive affects on people of color can be seen in violence, economic disparities, prison populations, hiring practices, law enforcement, housing availability, school funding and too-many-to-mention other dimensions.

Confronting this reality is a compelling spiritual challenge of our times. And it's a difficult one because no one is exempt from seeing color in people and within a split-second making judgments which have no basis in reality. It really represents a sorting process where we mentally divide people into subtypes which determine how we shall regard and behave toward them. Sometimes it is fear-based stemming from ignorance; other times it is racial narcissism which assumes one's superiority based on nothing more than skin color. Whatever its origin, it is destructive and unfair. And we have to work at getting beyond it. So let us explore some ways we can move in that direction.

Our scripture lessons for this morning focus among other things upon slavery which is a manifestation of racism and they appear to contradict each other. One of the reasons behind the contradiction is that while we

are absolutely certain that Paul is the author of Galatians because he has firsthand experience with the congregation and is clearly an insider, most scholars do not believe he also wrote Ephesians. It is more of a generalized missive which focuses on how to live a Christian life and was likely addressed to multiple congregations. The author doesn't seem to have any personal connections to the addressees. It is also suspected that it was written after Paul's death.

This is important because the author of Ephesians leaves zero doubt about his endorsement of slavery itself...*obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling...Render service with enthusiasm...* This passage was surely music to the ears of slaveholders and undoubtedly used to justify the practice—even centuries later in the Southern states of America. His proscription to the slaves occupies an entire paragraph while his proscription to masters to treat slaves well is a tag on of two brief sentences. It is obvious that the institution of slavery was acceptable and simply taken for granted. For indeed, it had been practiced since time immemorial. One thing for sure, he is not challenging it.

Paul, on the other hand, does not share that perspective. He is very clear when he writes *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave and free, there is no longer male and female, for all you are one in*

Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Have you any idea how radical this statement was? Slaves, Gentiles, Jews, women...all the same? Its implications in that era were revolutionary and likely drew heavy criticism from his Jewish audience. There is absolutely no endorsement here for slavery. For Paul well understood that to even consider enslaving other people required labeling them as an inferior species who could be physically and mentally abused and coerced to perform whatever task was demanded. But if *in Christ Jesus all are one*, what happens to the rationale for slavery?

Yes, slavery has been outlawed for 160 years in America. But before 1863, it was prevalent for over 200 years and when Congress passed the Emancipation Proclamation, 866,000 human beings were owned by others. And let it be noted that over two million White Southerners sacrificed their lives to fight for the right to maintain that institution. They had to. They had built their entire economy on their backs. Needless to say, the effects of that entire catastrophe have continued and in many people's minds it should just be glossed over and forgotten because, after all, we aren't responsible for what our ancestors did. But without examining not only what was done, but how relevant the

consequences are in the twenty-first century, how can we even begin to heal?

And yet, school boards in many parts of the country are besieged by outraged parents who believe that the so-called Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is damaging to their children by exposing them to a truth their parents themselves don't want to acknowledge. Reading about the lynchings, and the beatings, and the burning of Black churches and the evils perpetrated by the Klan are just too stressful and raise too many questions about their heritage. They demand that an altered history of the South be taught alongside the historical documentation. Isn't that the same as insisting medical students study alchemy alongside bio-chemistry?

There is no doubt that history can be painful. But as George Santayana famously said, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." We are not allowed to be ignorant of the past. If we are to grow toward Becoming Color Blind as Paul insisted, we cannot remain blind to our own history and deaf to the cries of our past. No, you cannot rewrite history and you cannot un-live it. But if we face it with courage, it need not be lived again.

Accepting facts as truth is a step in the right direction. Understanding that Christ never condoned ownership of another human

being and that he was far ahead of his time in bringing all people on board in his quest for the kingdom of God provides us with ample motivation to courageously confront our own beliefs and behaviors as we evolve toward becoming colorblind.

Reverend Thomas Dunlap

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