

## Just Like Jesus Sermon Series

### 21 Days of Justice Challenge

Since we first heard the name George Floyd in late May of 2020, there has been renewed conversation about justice and racism. The pastors and staff are going to address these issues in a worship series called Just Like Jesus. To complement the sermon series and go deeper, we've compiled twenty-one resources that speak biblical truth to issues of race. We invite you to spend twenty-one days furthering your own understanding of biblical justice, and hope this time will allow you to examine your own heart, reflect, and pray. Jesus is the perfect picture of justice and mercy. At the cross, He does grace and truth. He reconciles ALL people to himself.

### Week 1

#### Value & Dignity: Day 1

Historian and New York Times bestselling author Jemar Tisby, in his book *The Color of Compromise*, describes our future, Heavenly reality and reminds Christians that Jesus calls us to work towards this goal now.

*In that heavenly congregation, we will finally see the culmination of God's gathering a diverse people unified by faith in Christ. We will not all be white; we will not all be black. We will surround the throne of the Lamb as a redeemed picture of all the ethnic and cultural diversity God created. Our skin color will no longer be a source of pain or arrogant pride but will serve as a multihued reflection of God's image. We will no longer be alienated by our earthly economic or social position. We will not clamor for power over one another. Our single focus will be worshiping God for eternity in sublime fellowship with each other and our Creator.*

*This picture of perfection has been bequeathed to believers not as a distant reality that we can merely long for. Instead, the revelation of the heavenly congregation provides a blueprint and a motivation to seek unity right now. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Christians have been mandated to pray that the racial and ethnic unity of the church would be manifest, even if imperfectly, in the present. Christ himself brought down "the dividing wall of hostility" that separated humanity from one another and from God (Eph. 2:14). Indeed, reconciliation across racial and ethnic lines is not something Christians must achieve but a reality we must receive. On the cross when Christ said, "It is finished," he meant it (John 19:30). If peace has been achieved between God and human beings, surely we can have greater peace between people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. (p. 23)*

Given our future, diverse reality in Heaven, how might this inspire Christians to treat people who differ in ethnicity, culture, and nationality with value and dignity today? Pray that, as messengers of the Gospel, we would value what God values and that we would dignify what God dignifies.

## Value & Dignity: Day 2

In 1848, social reformer, abolitionist, and orator Fredrick Douglass wrote a letter to his former enslaver on the anniversary of his emancipation. In the letter, he recounts cruel treatment at the hands of his enslaver, thanks God for the ability to escape, and asks about his enslaved family members. Despite the injustice he experienced, he ends the letter in this way:

*I will now bring this letter to a close, you shall hear from me again unless you let me hear from you. I intend to make use of you as a weapon with which to assail the system of slavery—as a means of concentrating public attention on the system, and deepening their horror of trafficking in the souls and bodies of men. I shall make use of you as a means of exposing the character of the American church and clergy—and as a means of bringing this guilty nation with yourself to repentance. In doing this I entertain no malice towards you personally. There is no roof under which you would be more safe than mine, and there is nothing in my house which you might need for your comfort, which I would not readily grant. Indeed, I should esteem it a privilege, to set you an example as to how mankind ought to treat each other. I am your fellow man, but not your slave (<https://glc.yale.edu/letter-thomas-auld-september-3-1848>)*

Frederick Douglass writes about showing his former enslaver “how mankind ought to treat each other”. How does Douglass’ offer of hospitality rightly restore his God-given value and dignity? Furthermore, how does his offer of hospitality echo the examples we see in the life of Jesus?

## Value & Dignity: Day 3

The following paragraphs are taken from an open letter written by the LCMS President of the Kansas district, Rev. Justin Panzer, and addressed to fellow Christians. In the letter, he explains how he and his wife adopted a Black son while they were students at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. While recounting some of the experiences raising their son, he also wonders what kind of reception his son might receive in other churches.

*So, would my son be welcomed and embraced at your church? What if he wasn't the district president's son? What if he was your next-door neighbor? Would you befriend him? Would you offer him an invitation to church? What if he visited your church unannounced? He's growing. Right now, he wears a size 13 shoe and has some very large hands. If you didn't know him, he could be intimidating.*

*I pray that as Eli goes through life, people will take the time to get to know him, keeping in mind the words of Galatians 3:26-27: “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:26-27)...*

*Dear friends, now more than ever, the world needs the peace that only Jesus can give. You and I have received that peace of the forgiveness of our sins through our baptism. We have a great heritage in the Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to “proclaim, teach, and share” with others. Pray for the Spirit to break down hostile*

*barriers. Pray for the Spirit to give you “new eyes” to see your neighbor in love (and willing ears to listen to those neighbors). Pray for the Spirit to give you opportunity to extend an invitation to someone you know to church with you, where they can hear the life-saving message of Christ. (<https://kslcms.bmeurl.co/A75EB3B?fbclid=IwAR0by1KS10j4G8CXTpDN1K5z3J4BfxQlytUFcau4jLS9kXZkCOH-jR7JEyY>)*

Pray the prayer written above - for hostile barriers to fall, for new eyes, and for new ears to listen to people from backgrounds different than your own. Pray that as Lutheran-Christians we would hold valuable and precious all people, regardless of skin color, because they are God's Creation that He values and loves, even to death on a cross.

#### **Value & Dignity: Day 4**

Below is an excerpt taken from the statement Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President of the LCMS, wrote following the killing of George Floyd.

*God's Word rejects racism. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “No one is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). All are equally created by God. All are equally accountable to God. The sins of all are equally atoned for by Christ. All are equally precious to God. Racial animosity is the result of sin and is sin in itself. Racism is not acceptable in the church. Jesus Himself bids us love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31) and did so precisely while rejecting racial preference (cf. Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37).*

*Unity in the church according to the Augsburg Confession is defined by Article VII: “For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached ... and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word.” Christ and His gifts bring unity and equity in the church. Racial discrimination in or by the church is sin. Racial conflict in our nation calls every Christian to introspection. “It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God” (1 Peter 4:17). “Righteous indignation” without self-reflection and repentance is meaningless, or worse, hypocrisy. (<https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/statement-on-the-death-of-george-floyd-and-the-ensuing-riots/>)*

The President of the LCMS reminds us that “All are equally precious to God. Racial animosity is the result of sin and is sin in itself.” Contemplate how racism takes away value and dignity. How might Christians use introspection, as recommended above, to combat racism? How might self-reflection and repentance be one way to restore value and dignity from those it was taken from?

#### **Value & Dignity: Day 5**

Theologian and pastor Tim Keller explains in the following paragraph how Jesus deviated from societal norms in his treatment of people at the margins of society.

*“Jesus shocked the social sensibilities of the day by receiving and treating all classes of people with equal love and respect. Samaritans were seen by the Jews as racial inferiors, yet twice Jesus places Samaritans on the same spiritual level as the Jews (Luke 9:54; 17:16). Jesus touched off a riot when he declared that God loved Gentiles, such as the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:25-27), as much as Jews. Jesus reached out to lepers who were social outcasts, touching them and defying the contemporary social prohibitions (Luke 5:12-16; 17:11-19). He exhorted his disciples to not only be generous to the poor (Luke 11:41; 12:33; 19:8) but to welcome them into their homes and families (Luke 14:13). Hospitality in that time was an act of friendship and partnership and it was shocking to treat the poor as equals in such a way. Through the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus defined “loving my neighbor” as giving practical, financial, and medical aid to someone of a different religion and race. Both doing justice and loving one’s neighbor means treating people of all races and religions and social classes as equal in dignity and worth.” (<https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/justice-in-the-bible/>)*

How might you in your daily life treat members of different races and classes with dignity as Christ did? How might you follow in the footsteps of Jesus and be “shockingly” generous in your thoughts, words, and deeds? Pray that we as Christians might be known for treating people of all races and classes with equal dignity and worth.

### **Value & Dignity: Day 6**

In the following passage from Latasha Morrison’s New York Times bestselling book, *Be The Bridge*, she explains how our Christian faith can bridge the gap between Christians from the majority culture with those who are not from the majority culture in the United States. She also points out a key component that is necessary to unify the two groups.

*As Christians of differing ethnicities, we share a common heritage, a common memory. We are reminded who we are and whose we are through our salvation history. We remember how Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary connects us to the family of God, connects us eternally to one another. In our Christian faith, our memory is embodied in various communal and liturgical acts. In common prayer, in communion, in baptism, we are reminded that all our stories are wrapped in and intertwined with God’s story. And as brothers and sisters in Christ, we must not only share our foundational memories and practices of faith but also share and understand our personal and ethnic histories. To participate in the family of Christ alongside the non-White culture, the majority culture must understand non-White perspectives and the truth of historical narratives.*

*Without understanding the truth of racial injustice, both majority-culture and non-White-culture Christians will find themselves mired in dissonant relationships. If we avoid hard truths to preserve personal comfort or to fashion a facade of peace, our division will only widen.*

*Jesus can make beauty from the ashes, but the family of God must first see and acknowledge the ashes. (p. 24)*

If you are a Christian from the majority White culture in the United States, what resources might help you better understand Christians who are not from the majority White culture in the United States? How can we dignify those from other communities and cultures by foregoing comfort and looking into the “ashes”?

### **Value & Dignity: Day 7**

On June 3, 2020, the Black Clergy Caucus released a statement addressing the killing of George Floyd. The statement was written by Rev. Warren Lattimore, Jr., pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in New Orleans, LA and president of the Black Clergy Caucus of the Lutheran Church.

*I encourage you to read more, to learn more, to listen more. To Black Lutheran pastors and laity. To Black authors. To Black musicians. To Black business owners. To people you normally do not. With a heart that listens to understand. So often what divides us is a defensive heart born of fear, anger, or pride. But as brothers and sisters in Christ, God says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ez. 36:26). This world is unable to solve the problems that vex us, but God is able. This world may seek to tear us apart, but God is able to “knit [us] together in love” (Col. 2:2). This world may test our patience, but God is able to give us a peace “that surpasses all understanding” (Phil 4:7). (<https://www.theunbrokencord.com/writings/black-clergy-caucus-statement-on-george-floyd>)*

Many of our Christian brothers and sisters in the Black community are tired - tired of feeling that they cannot go to the store, grab a soda, hang out with friends in certain areas and so much more. Let us listen to and connect with our Black brothers and sisters in Christ on a new level. How might listening be an act of love, born of humility, and communicate value and worth to the speaker?

### **Week 2**

#### **Justice & Righteousness & Shalom: Day 8**

In his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King Jr. explains how his concern for his neighbor drives him to action and to seek justice for his neighbor, much like what we see in the Bible.

*Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial “outside agitator” idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.*

*You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative. ([https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html))*

How might Christ ask us to respond to those suffering hardship and injustice? How might our Christian faith compel us to look at underlying causes of injustice and act on behalf of those suffering injustice?

### **Justice & Righteousness & Shalom: Day 9**

In Ephesians 5:11, we read "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" asks injustice to be exposed and addressed.

*Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection...*

*I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured. ([https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html))*

Are there ways we have tried to hide and avoid the tension of racial injustice? How can we be faithful to the words of the Apostle Paul by confronting tension and exposing structures that perpetuate injustice, first in ourselves and secondly outside of ourselves?

### **Justice & Righteousness & Shalom: Day 10**

Following the killing of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, Concordia Seminary Professor Leopoldo Sánchez spoke with two Black Lutheran pastors, Rev. Micah Glenn and

Rev. Warren Lattimore. The text below is transcribed from a recording of the conversation. In this portion of the conversation, Professor Sánchez asks both pastors how they have personally processed the death of George Floyd.

*Glenn: For me, it's a bit of rollercoaster at times. You know, having watched George Floyd's death and being made aware of others and even seeing others. At first, it's quite traumatizing to see somebody be strangled to death in broad daylight. Somebody who shares ethnicity with you. That has happened historically in our country. Because as you're watching it, most likely in the forefront of your mind, there's this reality that at any given time, it could be you, just simply based upon your skin color...*

*Lattimore: It creates this lament within me that there's not an answer, there's not a solution, there's not a clever homiletical structure that will make it all work out. But the repetition also in an ironic sense, a Niebuhrian irony, almost creates this sense of hope...*

*Sánchez: Often, we think of hope as something that is disconnected from real life, as some sort of future thing that is coming. But, hope in the scriptures is really hope in the midst of lament. And I think as I was processing some of your reflections on the past view weeks [after George Floyd], it is striking to me that rather than say - how do we move forward right away? How do we change this right away? What you're saying is that we need to step back. Hold on a second. We need to step back. Reflect. We need to lament. We need to grieve, right? We need to make space for righteous anger, as it were, right? We need to be in deep solidarity with the suffering. And from that place, then we can talk about other stuff, but let's not jump over that. (<https://concordiatheology.org/2020/06/lutheran-voices-on-racism/?fbclid=IwAR1V6-YD4F1U1-ZuT3nINR1jyw1DawdlgrkCbVSwRO5R-sYCFfKxMa1JIPI>)*

As Lutheran-Christians, how can we make space in our homes and churches for people of color to lament and grieve injustice? How might recognizing pain and suffering allow Christ to shine forth hope and usher in peace? Has God done this in your life in times of mourning? How could you extend that empathy to others?

### **Justice & Righteousness & Shalom: Day 11**

From the same recorded conversation as Day 10, Professor Leopoldo Sánchez asks what are some obstacles to conversations about race. A portion of Rev. Warren Lattimore's answer is transcribed below.

*Lattimore: Sometimes we're bad Lutherans. Sometimes we see suffering [and] we default to being theologians of glory... a theology of glory calls evil "good" and good "evil", but a theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. When we see those eight plus minutes of someone having their life taking out from [them]. It's simple - we can look at that and say that is unjust. We might not know what's institutional or individual or [what] all these sorts of injustices are, but we can look at a thing and call it what it is.*

*But what happens, as we see suffering - is it makes us realize it can happen to us. And so we'd rather look away. We'd rather look at something else that is happening - a building that might be burning, a different issue that might come up, a focus on COVID-19. We'd rather look anywhere but the topic itself. And so zooming in and calling a thing what it is, and not moving away, and not averting our vision, is something that a theologian of the cross does. But a theologian of glory wants to look somewhere else. But "evil" reminds us of our own propensity or our own susceptibility to fall victim to the evil of the world...*

*Sometimes we're bad Lutherans because we want to be people of works righteousness. We want to be able to check off a box and say therefore I am righteous, therefore my guilt is eased. What three things can I do and feel better about myself, because I feel so much guilt? Can I do ten Hail Marys? Can I do ten Facebook statuses? Can I do ten food giveaways? If I can, then I'm done. And I don't have to worry about this. And we can stop talking about it. It's this feeling that there is something bigger than us and that we can't control. And therefore we're afraid to take part in it. But that's works righteousness. That's not a love that's anchored in a faith that does not ask "Can I solve this on my own?," but "What has God equipped me to do in this moment?" Even if it's bigger than me, it's not bigger than He. (<https://concordiatheology.org/2020/06/lutheran-voices-on-racism/?fbclid=IwAR1V6-YD4F1U1-ZuT3nINR1jyw1DawdlgrkCbVSwRO5R-sYCFfKxMa1JIPI>)*

Think about your own response to suffering and injustice. How does our Lutheran-Christian faith inspire us not to lean on our own strength and abilities, but trust in God? If we operate from a place of trust in our Creator, how does it free us to participate in racial and social justice?

### **Justice & Righteousness & Shalom: Day 12**

In the article titled "A Familiar Story: Lutherans And The Birmingham Church Bombing," current LCMS pastor Matthew E. Borrasso details the connection between the 1963 bombing and a Lutheran pastor. Pastor Borrasso explains how Rev. Joseph Ellwanger of St. Paul's Lutheran participated in the memorial service of one of the victims and helped to compose the following statement the day after the bombing. A portion of the original 1963 statement reads:

*"This act of violence is the responsibility of a man or a group of men. The guilt of such violence is ours also because we did not heed the Savior's directive that "we love one another." To the extent that we have supported forced segregation by our words or silence, we have given encouragement to such lawlessness. We must repent.*

*We as Lutheran Christians are compelled by the Word of God to believe that the church is not a segregated community. We are one in Christ. The members of our congregations as part of the body of Christ therefore have no right to segregate any member of that body."*

Reflecting on the above statement from 1963, Pastor Borrasso writes:



*For me, the most moving part of the pastors' statement is the confession embedded within the second paragraph. While they recognize that "this act of violence is the responsibility of a man or a group of men," they also confess that, "the guilt of such violence is ours also because we did not heed the Savior's directive that 'we love one another.'" Moreover, they recognize the need for repentance. "To the extent that we have supported forced segregation by our words or silence, we have given encouragement to such lawlessness. We must repent." These pastors didn't bomb the church. These pastors were not personally racist. These pastors did realize, however, that sometimes people can reinforce problematic attitudes and perspectives unintentionally—sometimes silence is precisely what Dr. King called it, betrayal. (<https://lutheransforracialjustice.com/a-familiar-story-1>)*

How might silence be a kind of betrayal? As Lutheran-Christians, how does our faith implore us to speak and stand up for those who are marginalized at best and victims of heinous crimes at worst? If we are one in Christ, what should our response be to past and current crimes against people of color?

### **Justice & Righteousness & Shalom: Day 13**

Pastor and editor Matthew O. Staneck, from the Lutheran Forum, explains how we might use the words of Luther to take a new look at how Black Americans have been treated in the United States and how our Christian faith might compel us to action.

*We can lay down our tools of self-deception and lean into the words of Luther: "We are to fear and love God, so that we neither take our neighbors' money or property nor acquire them by using shoddy merchandise or crooked deals, but instead help them to improve and protect their property and income." [12] It is staggering to think of the generations of Black Americans who have seen property and income taken away from them through the de jure institutions of slavery and Jim Crow segregation and the de facto institutions that persist to this day. The righteousness that saves comes to us from God, and we receive it passively. Righteousness is also lived out daily in our horizontal relationships with and among our neighbors. Lutherans, who understand that identity and security is rooted in Christ alone, can and should reasonably advocate for righteousness to be done for the sake of our defrauded neighbors. Our Black neighbors have been cruelly defrauded against throughout the history of this country. (<https://www.lutheranforum.com/blog/a-lutheran-case-for-reparations-summer-2020?fbclid=IwAR3cU8mn62I1DRzaxIkZt6-F62wl1Dsxb04ENwM9Yyr7sS8yu5xQ9uoVp0g>)*

How might we as Lutheran-Christians, individually and as a church, "improve and protect" the lives of Black Americans? Could we support more businesses owned by people of color? If you are in the place to hire people, could you actively seek to hire a person of color or promote a person of color to a place of leadership? Pray that God might use you to bring forth social and racial justice.

## Justice & Righteousness & Shalom: Day 14

In 2017, in the wake of the events in Charlottesville, Virginia, Professor Leo Sánchez from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis released a word on dealing with racism, titled “Racism, Dealing With It.” Below he talks about repentance and sacrifice.

*The sinful flesh finds all kinds of sneaky ways to avoid dealing with racism and ethnocentrism. The best first response is simply to repent: ‘We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone.’” It goes on to say that “In this cyclical rhythm of repentance, of contrition and absolution, Christians learn to live daily under the sign of their baptism into Christ, drowning the sinful flesh so that a new creature may rise every day...*

*Racism is an expression of egocentricity. It is a love of self which only loves those who look like self. It is a form of what Luther called our being curved in on ourselves. Service takes us outside ourselves, away from a misguided love of self and into the realm of neighbors who are different from us. We begin to see life in terms of the pain of others, including those whose race and ethnicity makes them the object of hurtful words and acts, and dare to speak on their behalf and defend them when they are portrayed in the worst possible light or their lives are threatened in some way—even if we suffer for it. No one said being a Christian is easy. (<https://concordiatheology.org/2017/08/racism-dealing-with-it/>)*

In repentance, we ask Christ for forgiveness to the misdeeds of racism. Furthermore, we must step outside our comfort zone. We must “dare to speak” to shield those whose appearance differs from our own from hurtful words and actions. Dear Heavenly Father, let us be slow to anger and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through situations that deal with racism and segregation in our homes, churches, and cities.

### Week 3

## Reconciliation Matters: Day 15

Below historian and New York Times bestselling author Jemar Tisby talks about the difference between intent and impact. While we might not intend to harm another person, sometimes we find ourselves unintentionally harming other people.

*When I speak to white evangelicals about race I often encounter a strident effort to prove that one is not racist. To be honest, it doesn’t really matter whether you think you are racist. What matters is whether your words or actions caused harm.*

*African Americans who have endured race-based chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation and inequality, as well as ongoing forms of institutional injustices, deeply understand that a person does not have to intend to discriminate racially in order for racial discrimination to occur.*

*As an African American, I wish my white brothers and sisters in the faith understood the difference between intent and impact. Empathy is an essential ingredient*

*in racial reconciliation. Racial minorities must feel that others understand their pain before authentic relational bridges can be built.*

*Spending too much energy indignantly proclaiming one's innocence shows that the concern isn't really for the one who was hurt. It tells minorities that their pain is less important than the reputation of the perpetrator. If it doesn't seem like white Christians care as much about the harm caused as the intent of the offender, then racial dialogue will continue to flounder. (<https://www.fathommag.com/stories/but-i-didn-t-mean-to-be-racist>)*

How might we lead with empathy like Christ? How might our Christian faith implore us to focus on those who are hurting rather than protect ourselves?

### **Reconciliation Matters: Day 16**

Below theologian and pastor Tim Keller explains how sin and idols divide people against each other, but God's plan was always one of restoration for all nations and families.

*Every culture that is not based on God will make an idol — an ultimate value — out of something else, and that idol will necessarily divide. If my highest love is my family, then I will privilege my family over others. If it is my business, my racial group or my individual selfish interests, I will privilege my race or my self over other races and selves. The result of sin is that humanity becomes divided into racial and cultural segregated ghettos that cannot understand one another. Some of these ghettos are created for less powerful groups by the more powerful. But even dominant and dominating racial groups are, spiritually-speaking, hopelessly ghetto-ized in that we are all under the influence of sin, blind and deaf to the full humanity of people of other communities.*

*Israel and the nations. The Bible traces all human beings back to one couple, teaching that there is at bottom only one race, namely the human race. “[God] made from one man every nation of humankind...” (Acts 17:26) [2]. While sin continually divides the human race into warring, mutually non-comprehending fragments, this hostility is not God's will. Even though in Genesis 12 God chooses to bring his salvation into the world through one man — Abraham — and therefore through one family who becomes one particular nation — Israel — God nevertheless at the outset explains that his purpose is to bless all the nations and families of the earth (Genesis 12:2-3). (<https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/the-bible-and-race/>)*

Under the influence of sin, we are blind and deaf to the full humanity of people from other communities, people that are different from us, people who are not like us. Pray that God frees us from sin that seeks to divide and brings us into greater unity across the color line.

## Reconciliation Matters: Day 17

Professor Leo Sánchez from Concordia Seminary goes on to explain in his article “Racism, Dealing With It” that racism hinders our devotion to God and how we can combat racism.

*Racism gets in the way of proper devotion to God because it denies the beauty of his creation, which comes in no other way than in many different colors. It also denies the gift of the church into which God has gathered unto himself, through his Word, a people from different nations, races, and languages. By resting in God’s promises of creation and new creation, Christians learn to look once again at neighbors of different races through the eyes of faith and love—namely, as God’s own precious creatures for whom Christ gave his life. They also learn to give thanks and praise to God for the lives and gifts new neighbors bring to them personally, as well as to the church and our world. And yes, they learn to rejoice in each other’s company and play together.*

*How then do we respond to racism, whether crass or subtle, not only in public but at all times? By looking in the mirror with the eyes of repentance, at our spiritual lives with the eyes of vigilance, outside of ourselves with the eyes of a servant, toward excluded neighbors with the eyes of welcome, and toward the Giver of all gifts with the eyes of devotion. This picture of life is, of course, quite a burden for any person to fulfill on his or her own. Inevitably, we will come up short when dealing with racist and ethnocentric impulses.*

*Yet Christ’s grace is abundant and he gives us his Spirit to provide what is needed along the journey. (<https://concordiatheology.org/2017/08/racism-dealing-with-it/>)*

We must ask for forgiveness. We are all God’s children. He sent his Son to die for us, because he wanted us to be united as ONE church. Dear Heavenly Father, forgive us when we have not loved others the way you love others. Thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit to lead and guide us to be the inclusive, loving church that you called us to be.

## Reconciliation Matters: Day 18

Rev. Micah Glenn spoke with high school youth and adults about racism at the LCMS Youth Gathering in 2019. Below is transcribed from a recording posted on the Concordia Theology webpage.

*Glenn: Racism, bigotry, prejudice is only born of one thing and that’s hate. It’s sin and it’s brokenness. And so, for the rest of our lives and for the rest of time, the topic is always going to create a certain amount of tension and a certain amount of uncomfortability. But instead of promising to relieve you of it, what I would say is - embrace that tension. Be uncomfortable with me for the next forty-five minutes because we are going to use that tension and we are going to use that uncomfortability to propel us, the church, forward. So that, as the topic comes up, we can hit it with the force that it needs. The force that our real and present God gives us through the faith that we have in Jesus Christ. Because, Jesus, the gospel, is the only way that these tensions, this*

*brokenness, is ever going to become something that the church deals with in a way that, I believe, is truly faithful to the God we serve...*

*I think one of the first ways to get through this is proximity. If you're in a context where they aren't a lot of Black people or people who look differently than you, it might seem difficult. But, there will come a time in your life when it's not difficult. I'm sure of it. But, if you're in a neighborhood where there are people of color and you're afraid to go there, because you have preconceived notions of what that neighborhood would be like - go. Meet the people. Get close to them. See what makes them tick. Understand who they are and then maybe you might begin to understand their pain and their struggles, why they do the things they do. And, through building a relationship with them and investing time with them, you'll be able to help them overcome their preconceived notions of you, as you overcome your preconceived notions of them. And then through that proximity, through that empathy, there will most likely be space for you to share who you really are. Not simply a person of color, a white person, a German, an African, a Mexican, but a child of God, one who has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. (<https://concordiatheology.org/2020/06/do-we-really-need-to-talk-about-racism/>)*

Why might Lutheran-Christians be called to embrace tension and discomfort in order to address racism? How might proximity build empathy? Think of an example from your own life where proximity led to empathy for someone who differed from you.

### **Reconciliation Matters: Day 19**

In her New York Times bestselling book, *Be The Bridge*, Latasha Morrison explains how Ezra, while not personally responsible for the sins of the people of Israel, acknowledged and lamented the sins of Israel and cried out to the Lord. She goes on to give another example from the book of Daniel.

*In the same way, the prophet Daniel identified with the guilt and shame of his people. Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord, and because of that unfaithfulness, Jerusalem lay in desolation, a desolation that would continue for seventy years. Daniel heard from the Lord, and as he did, he felt the weight of shame and guilt. He confessed, "O LORD, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you." Like Ezra, Daniel had been personally innocent of the offenses against God, but he did not try to distance himself from the collective sin of his people. He owned his part in it as a member of the community.*

*In both instances, the confessors were personally innocent of the wrongs, but they came under guilt and shame nonetheless. They allowed that shame and guilt to draw them to acknowledgement and lament. And in that lament, they asked God to spare his people.*

*Although communal shame and guilt brought both Ezra and Daniel great personal distress, their response highlights the redemptive arc of Scripture. For them, experiencing shame and guilt provided an opportunity to recognize the ugly reality that had led to their current situation and initiate communal restoration. As members of a*

*group, they assumed the responsibility to confess and seek reconciliation on behalf of that group. (p.68-69)*

How might Christians in the United States acknowledge past wrongs and seek reconciliation? Pray that we might follow the example we see set forth in the Old Testament and ultimately in Christ Jesus. Pray that we too might take on guilt and shame so that reconciliation might take place.

### **Reconciliation Matters: Day 20**

In this article on the Bible and race, pastor and theologian Tim Keller discusses what our resurrected bodies will look like and how they will reflect different aspects of the body of Christ. He also offers a nuanced viewpoint on political ideologies.

*And Revelation 7:9 tells us that in the new heaven and new earth, the people of God will be of “every tongue, tribe, people, and nation.” Our bodies are not unimportant, discardable containers for the soul. They will be resurrected and much of our pre-resurrection lives will be brought into the new creation. The resurrection body of Jesus was both different and yet recognizable, and it contained the nail prints of the cross (John 20; Luke 24). Revelation 7:9 tells us that our resurrection bodies will keep their ethnicity. Final redemption, then, does not erase racial and cultural difference. Different cultures have their own particular glories and splendors, analogous to the differing gifts of the body of Christ.*

*There is always a danger of putting so much emphasis on the unity of the human race that we come to insist that race is unimportant as the older liberalism taught, namely that we should be completely ‘color-blind.’ But it is also possible, especially today in the time of the newer progressivism and identity politics, to put too much emphasis on irreconcilable diversity, so no racial group has the right to “speak into” the experience of the other, which obscures our common humanity. (<https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/the-bible-and-race/>)*

How does placing too much emphasis on the similarity of all people discredit God’s diverse creation? How does placing too little emphasis on our God-given humanity keep us from the vision set forth in Revelation 7:9?

### **Reconciliation Matters: Day 21**

In New York Times bestselling author Jemar Tisby’s latest book, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice*, he notes a critical attitude we must have for the work of racial justice and reconciliation to begin.

*According to a popular tale, The Times newspaper in London asked authors, “What’s wrong with the world?” Famous author G. K. Chesterton responded, “Dear Sirs, I am.” Chesterton’s succinct but pithy answer stays in circulation today because it articulates a profound truth: We are all part of the problem.*

*Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." This is the mindset we must have as we pursue racial justice as a way of life and not simply a pastiche of isolated actions. Fighting racism is ultimately about serving other people from a wellspring of love. A spirit of loving service has to be infused with a spirit of humility that puts the interests of others before our own.*

*To pursue racial justice, the critical attitude we must cultivate is humility - to listen and learn, yes, but also to admit that we, too, can act in racist ways. We must have the humility to realize that, in some cases, we have benefited from the racial status quo. White people must recognize with humility that, although life can be difficult for anyone, their skin color has not added to their hardships. People of color must recognize that, despite their life experiences, they can sometimes get it wrong when it comes to race. (electronic page location 2330)*

What might our approach to racial justice and racial reconciliation look like if we took the same approach as G. K. Chesterton above? What about if we took to heart what is written in Philippians 2:3-4? Heavenly Father, forgive us for intentional and unintentional sins that devalue people you have created. Help us to pursue social and racial justice and to serve others, across the color line, from a place of love and humility.