

John 3.1-21
Information to Transformation
WRCoB 3.5.23



Morgan
Freeman.mp4

Would you agree with Morgan Freeman
That if we just stop talking about racism
It will simply go away?

That the real reason racism is an issue
Is because everyone is making
Such a big deal about it?

I believe there are folks here who would agree.

But I believe it is naïve to think
By simply not talking about it
It will simply go away.

It is so engrained within us
And within our society
That we have to address it
Before we can simply forget it.

Some are just tired of hearing it
But, tell that to the person who faces it daily.

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In all actuality, we shouldn't have to talk about it
Because, biologically speaking, race does not exist.

It is a social construct, developed in the late 16th Century
To dehumanize certain groups of people.

An article published by the National Institutes of Health
Dated November of 2020 entitled

We Should Abandon “Race” as a Biological Category

Quoted from a statement made by the
American Association of Physical Anthropologists.

“pure races, in the sense of genetically homogenous populations, do not exist in the human species today, nor is there any evidence that they have ever existed in the past.”

“...The only living species in the human family, Homo sapiens, has become a highly diversified global array of populations.

The geographic pattern of genetic variation within this array is complex, and presents no major discontinuity. Humanity cannot be classified into discrete geographic categories with absolute boundaries...

Partly as a result of gene flow, the hereditary characteristics of human populations are in a state of perpetual flux. Distinctive local populations are continually coming into and passing out of existence.”

In a perfect world we won't have to label people.

In a perfect world.

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Our Scripture Lesson concerns the story
Of a night time rendezvous and conversation
Between Nicodemus and Jesus.

Nicodemus was a scholarly man
A leader within the church.

He was considered well informed, knowledgeable
And a very capable leader.

And yet, he doesn't seem to have a clue
As to what Jesus was talking about.

Jesus says if you want to see the K of G
You need to be born from above.

And then Jesus and Nicodemus
Has this disjointed conversation.

Jesus speaks from a spiritual perspective
While Nicodemus speaks from a physical perspective.

Jesus tries to explain to Nicodemus
That digesting a bunch of information
Knowing all kinds of stuff

Being a successful academic and scholar
Will not help you see the kingdom of heaven
Until something else happens.

A transformation through the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus was missing a step in true spiritual formation.

Information to transformation.

You can be the most scholarly person on earth
But if it doesn't transform who you are
Your perception and perspective on things
It won't do you any good.

Jesus became quite disheartened and disillusioned
Over Nicodemus' innocence or ignorance
Whichever fits best.

John 3:10 CEV How can you be a teacher of Israel and not know these things?

A sharp criticism of Nicodemus
Who, in this story, we might say
Represents the church of the day.

And Jesus is not through.

John 3:11 NIV . . . we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.

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If you've not been in conversation with someone
Who has personally experienced racism
You need to.

It is a difficult conversation to be sure.

But so necessary to truly hear, see and understand
People's personal experiences with racism.

Many are well-informed
Gathering in all kinds of information

But until we hear someone speak personally
And hear and see one's pain
As they share their experiences
It will just be information.

What we need is transformation.

And that is the transformative work of the Holy Spirit
Who enlightens and convicts people of sin.

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Last week during Sunday school
Freda shared some personal experiences.

We could all feel her pain as she talked.

It was truly transformational
For those who've never directly heard
How racism affects someone.

Our involvement with Citizens and Clergy Against Racism
And the Town Hall events which were held
And our work with Henrico Ministers' Conference

Opened up for us the continued trauma, pain, and outrage
Found in our African American communities.

We discovered the systemic side to racism
In our church's book studies.

I had never understood racism at that level.

I grew up believing racism
Could end by simply being kind and respectful
To all people.

But it isn't that easy.

Racism is so engrained within each of us
Regardless of color.

We all carry what's known as "intrinsic bias."

The National Institutes of Health defines it this way

Implicit bias is a form of bias that occurs automatically and unintentionally, that nevertheless affects judgments, decisions, and behaviors.

For example, it has been proven that people
Are more receptive to names that are familiar to them
Than those from other culture groups.

In looking over job applications
Names that tend to identify an ethnic group
Other than your own

Are often put aside in favor of names
Within your own social group.

Implicit bias doesn't mean that we don't value multiethnicities

What it means is, that we are not even aware of
Biases that impact our decisions and actions.

Going back to Jesus' comments to Nicodemus.

11 We speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive out testimony.

Are we will to listen to testimonies from people of color?

Yes, it might make us feel uncomfortable.

Truth tends to do that.

I am sure for German citizens
To hear the stories of the Holocaust
Is terribly uncomfortable.

But they keep it in their history's memory bank

LEST THEY FORGET.

The Black American has testified to what they know
Yet, have we truly listened?

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Jesus said, no one will see the Kingdom of Heaven
Unless they be born from above.

I believe our work as white Christians
Is to inform and help transform other white folk

Transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our work is to listen.

We all need to know the continued prevalence of racism
The people of color still face.

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As we listen and as we learn
We have come to understand
That racism takes many forms.

The Smithsonian's
Museum of African American History and Culture
Identifies four types of racism.

1. **Individual racism** refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism in conscious and unconscious ways. The U.S. cultural narrative about racism typically focuses on individual racism and fails to recognize systemic racism.
 - *Examples include believing in the superiority of white people, not hiring a person of color because “something doesn’t feel right,” or telling a racist joke.*
2. **Interpersonal racism** occurs between individuals. These are public expressions of racism, often involving slurs, biases, or hateful words or actions.
3. **Institutional racism** occurs in an organization. These are discriminatory treatments, unfair policies, or biased practices based on race that result in inequitable outcomes for whites over people of color and extend considerably beyond prejudice. These institutional policies often never mention any racial group, but the intent is to create advantages.
 - *Example: A school system where students of color are more frequently distributed into the most crowded classrooms and underfunded*

schools and out of the higher-resourced schools.

4. **Structural racism** is the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. These systems give privileges to white people resulting in disadvantages to people of color.
- *Example: Stereotypes of people of color as criminals in mainstream movies and media.*

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Whether we realize it or not
Racism impacts us all.

It is engrained in our society
In the places where we live, learn, play and work.

People experience it
When they take their children to school
Apply for jobs
Rent or buy a home

Visit a doctor
Or when trying to access decent healthy foods.

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The first step in this process
Is receiving information that leads to transformation.

We start by listening to the voices
That speak of what they know
Who testify to what they've seen

Will we receive their testimony?

And as we gather information
Through listening to our Black brothers and sisters

May the Holy Spirit transform us
Through the conviction
Of our individual and corporate sin

May we, in prayer, seek God's mercy and grace
For the sins of commission
And for the sins of omission.

May we pray for racial healing in this great country of ours.

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2 Chronicles 7:14 CEB

¹⁴ if my people who belong to me will humbly pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.

Amen. May it be so.