



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

Racial Equity & Women's Equality Ministries

FACING RACISM:

A Vision of the Intercultural Community

Antiracism Study Guides





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Week 1. Biblical Imperative to Antiracism

Introduction

The Bible provides a firm foundation and compelling imperative to engage in antiracist work. There are at least four different biblical themes that can ground and motivate antiracism. While we will read some selected texts, it is important to recognize that these themes are not confined to isolated verses. Rather, they are woven throughout the biblical witness.

Creation

Read: Genesis 1:1-31
see also Psalm 104

We are all part of God's intricate and amazing creation. We did not bring ourselves into being, rather we receive our existence as a gift from God. Our lives are interwoven with all of creation, including the stars, planets, oceans, animals, trees, and plants around us. We are all part of creation that God has made and declared good.

God created all the cosmos in an intricate interwoven system of life. When humanity elevates one group over another, or falsely declares particular groups less good than others, we usurp God's place as creator of all that is. We deny our interrelation and proclaim our judgment more powerful than God's.

Image of God

Read: Genesis 1:26 "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness."

Humanity is made in the image of God. The 1999 PC(USA) Policy Statement on Antiracism (*Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community*), builds upon the image of God in all human persons as fundamental to the rejection of racism. While humans

have many differences, we are all children of God, made in the image of God, and therefore of equal worth, value, and dignity. The 1999 Statement calls us to a vision of humanity without racism that is “grounded in our common origin as children of God from which we derive our inalienable worth, dignity, and sanctity.”

All humans are made in the image of God. It is therefore falsehood and deception to deny the full humanity of any group of people.

God loves diversity

Read: Acts 10:9-23

While focusing on the image of God emphasizes how all human persons are fundamentally the same, the differences between persons are also valuable. The Bible portrays God as delighting in the variety in creation (see Job 38-41). In the New Testament, the God of Jesus Christ offers grace to all people, regardless of their social group or status. Jesus spoke with and honored all those he encountered, including respectable Jewish men, women, tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, Samaritans, and Canaanites. The book of Acts recounts the momentous decision to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles, who were at the time considered unclean by the Jewish followers of Jesus. Peter's initial hesitation to have anything to do with gentiles is overcome by a series of visions in which God tells him, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” Once convinced, Peter tells others, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34). People do not have to all be the same in order to be loved by God. There is room in God's grace for vast differences. And the grace of God does not erase differences, but rather invites unity among them. When the Spirit came upon the people at Pentecost, each person present could hear the believers speaking in his or her native language (Acts 2:1-11). God did not provide a new language that erased all native tongues. Rather, God created understanding within the diversity of languages present.

God loves variety and diversity. The grace of God is not contained within particular human groups, nor does God's grace erase our differences. Racism falsely proclaims that difference is negative, rather than evidence of God's abundant creativity.

God loves justice

Read: Jeremiah 9:23-24

Another Biblical theme that compels us to anti-racism work is God's delight in justice. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible continually proclaim God's care for those who are

oppressed and God's demand for just action. Jeremiah says that God "delights" in justice (Jer. 9:24). In Amos, the LORD calls for the people to "establish justice in the gate" and "let justice roll down like waters" (Amos 5:15, 5:24). The prophet Micah states that what the LORD requires is "to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

God delights in justice. Racism, as systemic inequality, is fundamentally unjust and therefore against the will of God.

Discussion questions:

1. Which of these four biblical foundations for anti-racism work (creation, image of God, diversity, and justice) speaks most powerfully to you? Why?
2. The Bible has often been used to support racism. What are some ways you have heard or seen this happen?
3. How can our church community counter racist interpretations of the Bible?

Resources:

Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community. 211th General Assembly (1999) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (insert Minutes reference)
Jennings, Willie James. "A God Who Joins," 15 April 2015,
<<http://caldwellchapel.blogspot.com/2015/04/a-god-who-joins.html>> .