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Table of Belonging: Exploring Social Reversal at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

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TABLE OF BELONGING:

EXPLORING SOCIAL REVERSAL AT ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE HAZELIP SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

NATALIE ELIZABETH MAGNUSSON

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This Doctor of Ministry Project, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Hazelip School of Theology of Lipscomb University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry.

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By:

Natalie Elizabeth Magnusson

for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Director of Graduate Program

1-31-23
Date

Doctor of Ministry Project Committee

Dr. Scott Hagley

Dr. John York

Dr. Naomi Walters

ABSTRACT

TABLE OF BELONGING:
EXPLORING SOCIAL REVERSAL AT ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Readers: Scott Hagley, John York, and Naomi Walters

This research project explores the problem of a predominantly white, affluent Episcopal congregation confessing racial justice as a shared value while struggling to embody that conviction. The project pursues the following research question: How might a congregation of the most historically powerful, prominent, and affluent church in the U.S. imagine its life in the Jackson, MI community in light of Luke 14 and encounters with people who experience racial injustice? In the theological chapter, the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11 and the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 serve as interpretive bookends for Luke 14. In the literature review, the researcher makes the distinction between racial reconciliation and racial justice and hypothesizes that the communal struggle to participate in racial justice stems from an overemphasis on racial identity and insufficient emphasis on the exploitative realities of racial capitalism. Additionally, the literature review explores the Episcopal Church's antiracism initiative of "Becoming Beloved Community," highlights the practice of communal listening, and identifies and critiques a common antiracism approach—the individual as an image bearer of God.

Through various practices of listening, the project was designed to stimulate the congregation to confront the troubling relationship between greed and racism. Each Sunday for seven weeks, the congregation practiced Dwelling in the Word with Luke 14. During the same timeframe, three Black leaders from the community hosted conversations called Listening Opportunities. Data was collected through field notes, three sets of post-Listening Opportunity surveys, and two focus group interviews of seven participants at the end of the seven weeks. After coding and comparing the data from all responses, eight major themes were identified and are presented in Chapter Five. The final chapter concludes by identifying areas of strength and growth for the congregation while considering possible next steps.

DEDICATION

In honor of my three daughters,
Melaina, Zoë, and Evelyn.

You have taught me what it means to be
loving, courageous, long-suffering, and persistent.
The world is a better place with you in it,
and I am thankful I have a front row view.

In memory of my aunt Holly
whose calling to ministry ended too soon.
May God's expansive love and your calling live on in me.

I am sure glad God calls women, too.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The past three years of school have been exhilarating and strenuous. I am deeply grateful for the many family members and friends who have encouraged and strengthened me along the way. I cannot possibly name all of you. Many have checked in and renewed my spirits in the moments when I most needed it. I am thankful for texts that have made me laugh, care that has moved me to tears, and your own sacred concerns you have shared with me. This experience has galvanized my belief that we are created for community.

To my D.Min. cohort, we have laughed, we have cried, we have cared, we have received care, we have told the truth, we have received the truth. I have become a different person, a better person, because of each one of you. You would never know we were Zoom friends before we became in-person friends! To John, who brought us all together, thank you for showing us what it means to relinquish yourself for the pursuit of God's justice and mercy. I have learned how to be a more compassionate professor and inclusive program director because of you.

I am grateful for my MREML family at Rochester University. I have learned so much from my colleagues, specifically Mark, Naomi, and Richard. Thank you for being some of my greatest supporters. You have patiently answered heaps of questions and have helped me to think more critically. Most of all, I am grateful for the sincere listening and care you have given while also sharing hours of laughter, "Don't give up!"

To my current and former students, wow. I have learned so much from each of you. You are curious and courageous learners. You love well, and I can see why God has called you into ministry. Thank you for vulnerably sharing your lives with me and for cheering me on in my own endeavors. Thank you for receiving me as a real human being who is struggling through this challenging world alongside you.

To the people of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Jackson, MI, thank you for trusting me. I am grateful for and inspired by how you open yourselves to the painful work of racial justice and press on in the face of discomfort. Thank you for loving my family and me so generously for the past eight years. To Pastor Sarah, your support means the world. Thank you for making this research project possible, especially when you were navigating flux in your own life. You taught me how to love and pastor a church well, and I hope to grow up and be like you some day.

To the three Conversation Partners for this project. Thank you for stepping into an uncomfortable space and for sharing painful truths with our community. Your work is a gift to this world, and we are grateful to have received your offerings. We hope this is the beginning of many years of partnering with you in the work of racial justice.

To my thesis committee, Scott, John, and Naomi, thank you for making the time for me amidst your own heavy loads. Your wisdom and experience have made this project better.

Falon, your gift of editing is much appreciated! Even more, I am grateful for your companionship during this program. I have learned so much from you and will always treasure the fun and meaningful memories we created.

Thank you also to those who have financially supported me in my vocation and school. Your generosity has not gone unnoticed. I have had opportunities to engage in work that I love and believe matters. I am so appreciative.

Thank you to two of my most consistent companions, Laura and Barbara. You always make gracious space for me. Thank you for receiving me as I am and being the steadiness I needed during these days.

To Eric, Melaina, Zoë, and Evelyn, thank you, thank you, thank you for patiently supporting me over the past few years. I know that you have made sacrifices for me to

accomplish this work. I see that you have each had your own challenges and am thankful God has carried us all in ways beyond my capacities. Thank you for seeking to love me well.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 1963[1]

Personal Context of Researcher

I began my coursework for a Doctor of Ministry in April 2020. In other words, all of my readings, projects, papers, discussions, and residency courses, including a Civil Rights pilgrimage, have occurred within the crucible of the Covid-19 pandemic and increasing tensions in the U.S. regarding race, immigration, LGTBQ+ rights, democracy, the economy, gun violence, abortion, and climate change. These present cultural realities have undoubtedly tinted my "reading glasses." In this context, I have had the additional gift of a diverse cohort and professors who have pressed me to face these challenges as well as graciously cultivated space for exploration, mistakes, and growth.

I have not only been a student during this time, but I have been a professor and leader of a graduate program in missional leadership, a spiritual director, a participating lay member of my local congregation, a wife, and a mother of three daughters—three brave young women who are trying to make sense of this complicated world along with me. Through students and my own congregation, I have seen how the already difficult space of congregational ministry has become exponentially more polarized, confusing, and exhausting. After two plus years, I have more questions than answers, more lament than solace.

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From Birmingham Jail," California State University Chico, accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf.

In addition, I came into doctoral work at a moment of disorientation in my career. I received spiritual formation training from an evangelical university from 2007-2010 and have served as a spiritual director for graduate students virtually ever since. I have deep gratitude for all that I have received from spiritual formation guides, companions, and writers. I reached a point in my career, however, where I began to notice that the ministry of spiritual formation, as it is often framed in the U.S., frequently emphasizes the individual's personal relationship with God rather than spiritual practices for the sake of deepening communal participation in the mission of God. Social justice and joining in God's mission seem to be an activity a person does after they attend to one's self. If one is not carefully attuned, spiritual formation can become another form of self-help and personal improvement.

I started to wonder things such as how a single parent working three jobs to put food on the table would be able to engage in practices of solitude, sabbath, retreats, and *lectio divina*. As meaningful as I believe those practices to be, I noticed that Christians who are privileged with time, money, and ease often define how one comes to be spiritually formed. And that definition is severely deficient. When one does not live with the harrowing daily reality of dependence on others and on God for survival, spiritual formation practices can easily become arid and forced disciplines, rather than lifelines tethering one to God.

I was putting my finger on an often-overlooked aspect of spiritual formation that Barbara Holmes later defined for me as "crisis contemplation."[2] She provokingly wonders if "lying in a field with a loaded gun, unsure as to whether you can prevail or whether you will be captured and burned alive or hanged, counts as a contemplative moment."[3] In other words, I came into

[2] Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 46, 64-65.

[3] Ibid., xxix.

doctoral work wondering if the spiritual formation I had inherited was big enough to encompass, attend to, and learn from the harsh complexities of the real world. I sensed that being formed into the image of the triune God necessitated opening ourselves up to people from *all* walks of life.

Given my professional context of teaching and providing spiritual direction for ministers in a variety of settings, I could have chosen virtually any focus for my project thesis. Early in my doctoral work, however, I decided that I would only invest myself in a project if it could matter for those in our society who have their "backs against the wall."[4] At the time, I could not articulate all that led to this commitment. I was able to name the concerns about spiritual formation mentioned above, but it was not until my recent reading of Jonathan Tran's *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, that I understood how else I came to be so concerned about people who have been forced into conditions outside of their choosing.[5]

For the two years leading up to the doctoral program, I had an additional job that located me in one of the most capitalistic spaces of my local community, the grocery store. Though the setting was not particularly diverse from a racial standpoint, Tran's work on racial capitalism helped me to name the exploitative and relational dynamics of capitalism that I witnessed, felt, resisted, and benefitted from during that season of life. In brief, Tran locates the leverage point for the work of antiracism by asking the following questions that expose the materially exploitative forces of racism: "What does racism accomplish? Whom does it benefit? How does it work?"[6] Reading his case studies, it is not too difficult to identify the ways that economic

[4] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 1.

[5] Jonathan Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*, AAR Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion, ed. Vincent Lloyd (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[6] Ibid., 294.

structures and conditions produce the commodification and racialization of others. It is also not too difficult to see how white people in the U.S. most often benefit from this system and gain an even larger benefit when non-white groups are pitted against one another.[7] Tran critiques the orthodox approach of antiracism, what he calls identarian antiracism, for beginning and ending the conversation with racial identity instead of addressing the political economy of exploitation.[8] In his critique of identarian antiracism's fixation on racial identity, however, he is not arguing for post-racial color blindness.[9] As an immigrant from Vietnam, the *telos* of his argument is not to view all people as the same or to assert that one's particular identity does not matter. Instead, he desires to dismantle the unjust conditions that racialize in the first place: "Deracialization, not postracialism, should be the goal."[10] In Tran's estimation, antiracism will only gain traction when it exposes the "divide and conquer" tactics of racial capitalism and ushers us into the abundant and generous community of God's economy.[11]

In light of Tran's work, I have reconsidered a formative season of my life. In 2018, our family found ourselves in a financial situation where I needed to take an additional job if we wanted to maintain a similar standard of living. While we had some legitimate financial needs to cover, the decision to pick up extra work exposes our desire and willingness to satiate our wants rather than to go without them. Due to the flexibility that the job offered, I applied for and

[7] Following *Columbia Journalism Review*, I will use lowercase when referring to white individuals and groups and uppercase when referring to Black individuals and groups. Mike Laws, "Why We Capitalize 'Black' (And Not 'white')," *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 16, 2020, https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php.

[8] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 4.

[9] Ibid., 9-10.

[10] Ibid., 10.

[11] Ibid., 105.

immediately became a grocery shopper and delivery person for one of the largest grocery delivery companies in the U.S. I had the advantage of adequate transportation to fulfill the requirements of the job, which I quickly realized was not the case for some of the employees of the grocery store where I shopped. Also, I experienced the luxury of creating my own schedule and attending our daughters' extracurricular activities, though I also felt the immense strain of meeting certain financial goals each week. In just a fraction of what others experience, I faced the unrelenting and anxiety-inducing pressures of scarcity. I often felt stressed by the ways that the delivery company pitted shoppers against other shoppers and overjoyed when we rose above and looked out for one another.

I was frequently humbled and troubled by the customers who lived in low-income housing, ordered overpriced groceries, and tipped me more generously than some customers who lived in extravagant homes. I recognized that I was profiting off of those who did not have their own transportation and could not shop on their own. Sometimes I wondered if I received more 5-star ratings and more generous tips because I have been racialized as white. If I was racialized as another race, would people tip me the same and rate me high enough that I could keep shopping for them, thus generating even more income? I had no evidence to support my suspicions, but the fact that I even wondered reveals something about the ways that economic opportunities in the U.S. are tied up with racism.

I shopped enough to learn the frequency of orders and regular grocery lists of many customers, which was troubling when I discovered how much money I made off of those who appeared to be suffering from alcoholism or other addictions. I knew that I only encountered and was friendly to some people because my livelihood was dependent upon them. I was bothered by the capitalistic space in which our relationships existed yet not bothered enough to quit. I

frequently felt cross-pressured by the desire to look after my family's needs and wants (something that Tran notes was a factor for the Delta Chinese[12]) and my discomfort with participating in the capitalistic space of exploitation.

In the grocery store itself, I became friends with employees who have not had the resources to attend college or pursue other career paths. They are stuck in the cycle of poverty as they stretch from paycheck-to-paycheck, work when sick, and leave their young kids at home to care for themselves. They have no other choice. I also marveled at the goodness of humanity who take such pride in straightening out endless rows of bread and yogurt and make the best of a lifetime of menial labor. I was leveled with humility by the people working harder than I have ever worked while getting paid less than I have ever made. I was angered when the employees would report of the grocery store corporation taking advantage of them by demanding overtime once again. I was additionally angered when my employer unexpectedly decreased the pay scale to the point where my fellow shoppers and I were spending more time, energy, and money than we were getting paid. I was constantly aware of my undeserved and unmerited privilege, economic safety nets, and ability to escape.[13]

And, it was in this context where I received kindness and care from people I had previously assumed had little to offer. I learned that people who find themselves beneath the dark underbelly of capitalism have many gifts and perspectives that those in privilege need to hear. What I believed about God and humanity changed more during those years than just about any other season of my life.

[12] Ibid., 148.

[13] It is not lost on me that I am no longer working in the service industry, because I have benefitted from the privilege of pursuing doctoral education and the ensuing career advancements and increased pay.

Therefore, when I began school, I was highly attuned to the dichotomy between the ivory tower and the "real world," and I committed myself to keeping that world as much in view as possible. Though I could not articulate it in ways that I can now, I had experienced enough of the exploitative conditions of capitalism to know that things are not the way they should be. If there was any way possible, I wanted my doctoral work to have the potential of creating conditions of flourishing for people trapped in cycles of hardship and oppression. Although the shopping job did not often illuminate the racializing aspect of capitalism for me, that experience helped me to interpret much of what I have read and observed regarding racial injustice over the past two years. I have been able to perceive that racism is more than a set of unkind or hateful attitudes and beliefs about people with a different skin color. It is systemic and oppressive, and those who benefit the most from it are often unwilling to relinquish much in order to create a new world for everyone.

The convergence of these experiences, therefore, has compelled me to select racial justice as the focus of my project. As a woman who has been advantaged by white privilege and access to economic resources her whole life, I could not implement a project that would center and strengthen white supremacy and the wealth and privileges that come with it. In this, I recognize that a project thesis cannot and will not save the world. I have not embarked on this project expecting to dismantle all racial injustice in Jackson, Michigan. However, it is my hope that St. Paul's Episcopal Church will discover an "opportunity to ease into what God [is] already doing" as we seek to create more justice and flourishing in our community than has previously existed.[14]

[14] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 200.

Ministerial Context

I serve as the Assistant Director for the Master of Religious Education in Missional Leadership (MREML) at Rochester University (RU) in Rochester Hills, MI. While this became my position in June 2020, my primary role in the program since August 2011 has been, and continues to be, serving as a spiritual director for the students throughout their time in the MREML. In addition to spiritual direction, I have more recently acquired greater insight into our students' ministry contexts and the MREML curriculum through teaching and administrative work. These multiple roles give me the opportunity to notice recurring challenges our students face in ministry, including seeking racial justice in polarized Christian communities and the current U.S. context, which this research project seeks to explore.

I could have designed a project that would require MREML student participants to lead their Christian communities in seeking racial justice. This approach seemed riddled with challenges, however, including the variety of our students' ministry contexts, the distance between me and their communities, and the existent ministry responsibilities and projects that already consume our students' time. I discerned that I would gain more knowledge and wisdom for my leadership in the MREML through the first-hand experience of leading a congregation in the work of racial justice.

Project Context

The context for my research project, therefore, is the St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Jackson, MI where my family and I have been active members since 2015. St. Paul's was founded in 1839 and has a current active membership of approximately 150 members. The congregation has almost no racial or ethnic diversity, with only three members who do not identify as white. St. Paul's is an aging congregation. In a 2020 survey with 53 responses, 34

percent were over the age of 70, 34 percent were between ages 60-69, 19 percent were between ages 50-59, and 13 percent were between ages 20-49. Most members would be categorized as middle to upper class socioeconomically.

In the 1990s, businesses in the downtown area of Jackson began to close, and the members of St. Paul's made the deliberate decision to remain in the declining area despite few members living in close proximity to the building. St. Paul's is geographically located in a neighborhood that does not racially or socioeconomically reflect its current membership. At this time, St. Paul's primary relationship with the neighborhood is by way of offering facilities, support, and resources to those in the local community. There is frequently little interaction between the members of the congregation and those who live closest to St. Paul's. During the winter of 2022, St. Paul's served as a warming center for homeless neighbors in the community. Volunteers have also served monthly meals at the local homeless shelter for many years. Prior to Covid-19, the church opened its fellowship hall to the community every Halloween as a warm place for our neighbors to receive refreshments. A local day camp for at-risk youth called the Get REAL Summer Program utilizes the St. Paul's building throughout the summer. In 2019, St. Paul's formed a partnership with a Black-owned caterer, which included a micro-loan for the purchase of a food truck and agreement to his use of the church's commercial kitchen. Various individuals and groups are involved in the larger Jackson community in a variety of ways. The above-mentioned efforts are the primary points of contact between St. Paul's and the surrounding neighborhood.

Problem

St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Racial Injustice

In general, St. Paul's Episcopal Church recognizes The Episcopal Church's (TEC) historical and ongoing complicity in colonialism, indigenous extinction, slavery, white supremacy, racism, and elitism.[15] Members of St. Paul's have been exposed to the reality of racism and racial injustice in the U.S. through denominational reports and literature, sermons, education series, and conversations among members. Based on members' willingness to maintain or establish membership with the church, one can presume that members are supportive or tolerant, at the least, of TEC's official stance and initiatives regarding racial justice. The problem at St. Paul's, therefore, does not seem to be one of awareness of or consensus on the reality of racial injustice in the U.S. and TEC's historical participation.

The problem also does not seem to arise from the lack of liturgical practice. For being a predominantly white congregation, the community of St. Paul's does not shy away from the topic of racism and other forms of injustice in the worship setting and education spaces. The call to justice finds rootedness in the Baptismal Covenant of TEC, "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?"[16] One of the regular Prayers of the People at St. Paul's during the 2022 Lenten season was, "We pray for those who hunger, those who thirst, those who cry out for justice, those who live under the threat of terror, and those without a place to lay their head." The act of praying for justice reveals that the congregation holds some sort of theological belief that God cares for and desires justice for those who cry out in oppression and marginalization. Additionally, sermons often call for racial justice

[15] For more details on this history, see section, "Context of The Episcopal Church."

[16] The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2007), 305.

in light of scripture. Racial justice is frequently a topic that both adults and teenagers study and discuss during the Christian education hour on Sunday mornings. As the call for racial justice finds its way so often in the liturgical space and Christian education hour of St. Paul's, the congregation largely affirms that racial justice is not merely a civic matter. The community confesses that Christians are called to lead the way for racial justice in our neighborhoods.

The problem, however, is that there is a disconnect between the stated beliefs of justice and the visible embodiment of those convictions as a congregation. Jemar Tisby names the troublesome dynamic in which I have participated and that I have observed at St. Paul's: "[Y]ou cannot read your way, listen your way, or watch your way into skillful advocacy. At some point you must act."[17] On the average Sunday, St. Paul's is an almost all-white and middle to upper class gathering of believers.[18] Furthermore, outside of the worship gathering, most members do not appear to have the necessary interactions that would compel the work of racial justice with people who experience racial and socioeconomic exploitation. Like most cities of the U.S., the spaces of Jackson are arranged in such ways that white and Black residents avoid encountering one another without too much effort. The wealth gap between white and Black Americans ensures that the middle to upper class members of St. Paul's have very little interaction with

[17] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 214.

[18] As much as I can understand as a white female, I am aware of the generational trauma that Black people bear and the safe and sacred space that Black churches provide for the Black community. I am not under the illusion that seeking an integrated church is a realistic or appropriate response at this time. Simultaneously, I believe predominantly white churches should be troubled when it comes to systemic racism and compelled to participate in racial justice in the local community.

those who have been exploited and racialized by capitalism.[19] As ideas for this project were beginning to form, a member shared with me, "I do not know anyone who is Black, nor do I know where to begin. I understand that I cannot just knock on a person's door and expect them to be willing to talk with me." Though there is some awareness around the city of Jackson that the people of St. Paul's are interested in racial justice, the congregation has plenty of room to grow in terms of taking action.[20] Given the energy that has been expended learning about racism and the prayers for justice offered regularly, many of the members of St. Paul's Episcopal seem to have an interest in addressing racism in our community.

However, the congregation seems paralyzed in terms of putting those desires into practice. I suspect that the historical place of economic privilege that St. Paul's enjoys and the U.S. context of racial capitalism contribute to that paralysis. Furthermore, I believe that the nature of the conversations we have around racism might be stalling our progress. As I read Jonathan Tran's contrast between identarian antiracism and political economic antiracism, I wondered if a problem lies in St. Paul's conception of racism as it relates primarily to identity rather than as a product of exploitation. In other words, dialogue regarding antiracism at St. Paul's tends to focus more on loving and welcoming of people of all races, or any other

[19] As just one example of economic disparity between whites and Blacks in the U.S., "Recent statistics paint a stark and unnerving picture of just how entrenched and deep-seated racial inequity and privilege remain. A 2019 Yale University study called 'The Misperception of Racial Economic Inequality' found that Americans believe that Black households hold $90 in wealth for every $100 held by white households. Tragically, the actual amount is $10 for every $100 held by whites, and at current rates of progress this gap will take more than a century to reverse." Adam Russell Taylor, *A More Perfect Union: A New Vision for Building the Beloved Community* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2021), 149-150; See also Tran's discussion of the Economic Policy Institute's study on compensation ratios as well as Thomas Piketty's return on capital and economic growth formula, "Piketty's $r > g$ formula (i.e., return on wealth outpaces return on growth) amounts to the fact that those who start out with more are put in positions of increasing advantage over those who start out with less," Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 224-225. See also Alberto Alesina, Matteo F. Ferroni, and Stefanie Stantcheva, "Perceptions of Racial Gaps, their Causes, and Ways to Reduce Them," October 4, 2021, accessed December 10, 2022, https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/stantcheva/files/alesina_ferroni_stantcheva_perceptions_racial_gaps.pdf.

[20] As an example of some visibility in the Jackson community, in early June, 2020, clergy and members of St. Paul's were present at a protest in downtown Jackson for racial justice.

identifier, and less on the unjust structures of racism and our complicity and benefit from those structures as a predominantly white and wealthy congregation. When the primary message is to love and be kind to everyone as each person is created in the image of God, we do not seem as motivated to take action. Our thoughts and hearts might be experiencing some sort of transformation for the better, but those changes are difficult for people of color to perceive. At the end of the day, our Black neighbors' burdens are not becoming much lighter due to our warmer feelings and acceptance of all people. Therefore, as a member and lay leader of St. Paul's, I sense a call for us to grapple with the realities of racial capitalism and our complicity in it. That is the problem I have identified in my context and seek to address in this project.

Racial Justice and Liberation for All

The lack of communal action for racial justice is not only a problem for people of color. The entire community suffers. Fannie Lou Hamer's call, "Nobody's free until everybody's free" at the 1971 National Women's Political Caucus bears repeating.[21] When Hamer employs the word freedom, she does not mean freedom in the modern liberal democratic sense of the word where "All people are equal and all are free to pursue their interests and develop their personalities in their own way, provided they respect the same freedom in others."[22] An example of democratic libertarianism having grave consequences for the Black community is when many

[21] Mississippi Scholarship Online, "The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is," University Press Scholarship Online, accessed July 18, 2022, https://mississippi.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.14325/mississippi/9781604738223.001.0001/upso-9781604738223-chapter-17. Six years after Hamer, the Combahee River Collective published a similar statement that spoke even more pointedly, "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression." "The Combahee River Collective Statement," American Studies at Yale University, accessed August 15, 2021, https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf.

[22] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 101.

white Americans during the Covid-19 pandemic have asserted their freedom to pursue their own interests by going without a mask and remaining unvaccinated. This kind of freedom that is centered on one's self, however, leads to the oppression and exploitation of others, especially those who are already vulnerable. And to deepen Hamer's point, some of those who have taken the risk of insisting on their personal freedom over the freedom of others during the pandemic have later come to experience the tragic consequences of their supposed freedom: "Nobody's free until everybody's free."

Though I do not know Hamer's theological framework, I suspect that the freedom that she is after is akin to the freedom of the friendship shared by and with the triune God. Jürgen Moltmann makes etymological connections between the words "free" and "friendly" to convey how the freedom of friendship, "consists of the mutual and common participation in life, and a communication in which there is neither lordship nor servitude. In their reciprocal participation in life, people become free beyond the limitation of their own individuality."[23] The notion of freedom that we are called to pursue is inseparable from community. The only way to true freedom is within the context of community. As we seek the good and the flourishing of others, it begets greater flourishing for all.

In contrast to Heather McGhee's compelling articulation of the zero-sum tactic of racism where "white people would resist policies that could benefit *them*, just because they might also benefit people of color," God calls humanity into a way of life together where love and concern for the other reigns.[24] While the sufferings of people of color under the thumb of racial

[23] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 56.

[24] Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (New York: One World, 2021), xix.

capitalism are categorically different than the ways that racial capitalism impacts the white community, the reality is that racism inhibits all from experiencing the vibrancy of the human community that God has designed. Moltmann notes that there are two sides of justice, "the liberation of the oppressed from the suffering of oppression requires the liberation of the oppressor from the injustice of oppression."[25] Additionally, Martin Luther King, Jr. named how imperative it was for whites to gain freedom too: "If physical death is the price I must pay to free my white brothers and sisters from the permanent death of the spirit, then nothing could be more redemptive."[26] The members of St. Paul's Episcopal might not realize how much we need God's justice and liberation until we participate in it. It is similar to what Jennings says of Pentecost, "The new wine has been poured out on those unaware of just how deeply they thirsted."[27] Therefore, in selecting racial justice in Jackson as the primary aim of this project, those oppressed by racism *and* the members of St. Paul's Episcopal might begin to move toward a greater freedom that is gifted by God.

Racial Justice as It Relates to the Biblical Text

Though St. Paul's Episcopal has general awareness of systemic racism and includes the call for justice in communal spiritual practices, the congregation needs deeper engagement of scripture and theological reflection. There is a specific need to bring the reality of racial injustice into theological conversation with our relationship with wealth. The project, as briefly described later in this chapter and detailed in Chapter Four, invites the members of St. Paul's to read Luke

[25] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 132.

[26] James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 82.

[27] Willie James Jennings, *Acts*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible, eds. Amy Plantinga Pauw and William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 27.

14 together over the period of seven weeks. I selected Luke 14, because it is a prominent text within the narrative unit of Luke-Acts that calls Christians to participate in the social reversal of the kingdom of God. God's reversal is one that welcomes and elevates those who have been exploited and marginalized while simultaneously humbling the powerholders of society.

In both Luke and Acts, it is clear that the kingdom of God is unlike any other kingdom conceived by humanity. It does not turn out to be the kingdom the Jews have expected to be restored to Israel.[28] God's kingdom is not one of power over its subjects, coercion, domination, the accruement of wealth, or vanity. More than any other gospel, Luke's Jesus disparages greed and the ordering of life around wealth.[29] Instead, God's kingdom emerges into our world through the womb of a marginalized young woman,[30] brings good news to the poor,[31] is made visible in the breaking of bread with strangers and outcasts,[32] extends healing and its subsequent restoration into community to those considered unclean,[33] resides in a homeless sojourner who processes into Jerusalem on a humble colt,[34] appears powerless in the face of religious and imperial forces,[35] and demonstrates that suffering and death are the avenues through which true life appears.[36] The kingdom of God begins small and unassuming like a little yeast or a mustard

[28] Acts 1:6-8, Luke 24:21.

[29] Luke 6:24-26, 11:37-54, 12:13-34, 14:1-35, 16:1-31, 18:18-30, 19:45-48, 20:9-19.

[30] Luke 1:39-56.

[31] Luke 4:18-20, 6:20-26, 16:19-31.

[32] Luke 5:27-32, 7:36-50, 10:1-12, 15:1-2, 19:1-10. Acts 10, 15:22-25.

[33] Luke 8:26-56, 13:10-17, 14:1-6, 17:11-19.

[34] Luke 19:28-40.

[35] Luke 22:47-71, 23:1-49.

[36] Luke 9:21-27, 14:25-35, 24:1-53, Acts 2:22-36, 7:51-8:8, 16:16-40, 21:27-28:31.

seed and only expands by way of communal flourishing, not by conquest.[37] Attending to the poor and oppressed in Luke-Acts is not merely a benevolent act done by Jesus's followers. The crucified of the world are where Jesus and the kingdom of God are located and most visible.[38] To borrow Paul's message to the Corinthians, to embrace and embody suffering, the cross, and that which is perceived as foolishness, shame, and scandal is to understand and reside in the wisdom of the kingdom of God.[39]

The social reversal displayed in Luke-Acts does not entail the switching of social places, where the formerly exploited come to exploit and oppress the once powerful. Instead, the kingdom of God enacts a level way of life for all, "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth."[40] Those who have walked in high and powerful places are called to reverse course and walk on level ground alongside those whom God works to liberate from the valley of oppression. In Luke 14, Jesus calls the wealthy and socio-religiously powerful to give their lives over to God's leveling work of rearrangement and table of ultimate belonging.

In the case of St. Paul's and TEC as a whole, we have enjoyed a cultural place of honor and power as a predominantly white and affluent church. While I do not believe the members of St. Paul's have intended harm on people of color, we still need to contend with the reality of our current social arrangement compared to God's vision of the kingdom. St. Paul's is geographically located among people who have lived life in the valley for generations, and I

[37] Luke 13:18-21; Acts 2:42-47, 32-37.

[38] Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

[39] 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.

[40] Luke 3:5.

sense God inviting the congregation to somehow join in new life with our neighbors that accords with the wisdom of God's social order.

Of the gospel of Luke, and particularly fitting with Luke 14, Joel B. Green offers a rationale for creating the conditions of justice now:

> Salvation is neither ethereal nor merely future, but embraces life in the present, restoring the integrity of human life, revitalizing human communities, setting the cosmos in order, and commissioning the community of God's people to put God's grace into practice among themselves and toward ever-widening circles of others.[41]

The salvific vision of the kingdom of God in Luke 14 is not only an eschatological and ecclesial vision. In participation with God's Spirit, this vision is already occurring both within the walls of the church and beyond. As Jonathan Tran asserts, the job of the church is to proclaim and make visible the economy of God that already exists through the Son and the Holy Spirit.[42] I want to take Tran further by exploring how this call is not simply about the church imaging the *imago Dei* (image of God) to the world but also our collective human transformation into the very life of the triune God. It is a call to resist organizing life around the oppressive cultural powers of wealth and privilege and to conceive of belonging, community, and human flourishing where Jesus is the host and all may be saved. St. Paul's, therefore, faces the challenge of responding to Jesus's invitation of social reversal here and now.

While the congregation explores Luke 14 during the project, and that text serves as a centerpiece of my theological framework in Chapter Three, the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11 and the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 will serve as interpretive bookends for Luke 14.

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[41] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 24-25.

[42] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 214. The economy of God differs from the prosperity gospel or Word of Faith movement's notion of the divine economy where God desires for people to be economically and materially prosperous. Debra J. Mumford, "Rich and Equal in the Eyes of the Almighty God! Creflo Dollar and the Gospel of Racial Reconciliation," *Pneuma* 33 (2011): 222.

I will also identify what these texts might have to say pertaining to the social order of the *imago Dei* in contrast with how an individualized construction of the image of God is often used in Christian discourses of antiracism. I draw a distinction between the call to Christians to love all people regardless of race because each person bears the image of God and the call to be transformed along with all of humanity into the image of the triune God, which necessitates being caught up in a new social order.

Context of Jackson, Michigan

To further understand why a congregation like St. Paul's Episcopal Church needs to confront racial injustice, it is helpful to explore the contexts of the city and denomination of The Episcopal Church. The historic building of St. Paul's was constructed in 1853 and is located centrally in Jackson, MI. It sits across from the courthouse and is two blocks over from the central thoroughfare of downtown. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the total population for the county of Jackson was 160,366 and the population for the city of Jackson was 31,309.[43] The racial breakdown for 2020 was as follows:

Table 1.1. Racial Demographic of Jackson County, MI and City of Jackson, MI 2020 U.S Census

Race	Jackson County	City of Jackson
White alone	87.3%	72.0%
Black or African American alone	8.1%	19.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.4%	0.2%
Asian alone	0.9%	0.7%

[43] The United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts," Jackson County, MI; Jackson City, MI; United States, accessed July 6, 2022, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/jacksoncountymichigan,jacksoncitymichigan,US/POP010220#POP010220. All data in this section comes from this source unless indicated otherwise.

Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.1%	0.0%
Two or more races	3.3%	5.9%
Hispanic or Latino	3.9%	6.9%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	84.1%	67.6%

Source: Data adapted from The United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts," Jackson County, MI; Jackson City, MI; United States, accessed July 6, 2022, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/jacksoncountymichigan,jacksoncitymichigan,US/POP010220#POP010220.

Between 2016-2020, the median household income (in 2020 dollars) was $54,511 for Jackson County and $37,192 for the city of Jackson. The percentage of those in poverty was 12.6 percent and 24.1 percent, respectively. An interactive census tract map for Jackson County reveals that Tract 6, where St. Paul's is located, had a poverty rate of 48.7 percent with the surrounding three tracts having a poverty rate 45 percent or higher between 2015 and 2019.[44] For comparison, the national poverty rate at the time averaged 13.6 percent. The owner-occupied housing unit rate between 2016-2020 was 74.3 percent for Jackson County and 55.2 percent for the city, falling below the national average of 64.4 percent. The median values of those housing units were $138,900 and $71,400, respectively. The population 25 years or older with a bachelor's degree or higher was 22.5 percent and 16.0 percent, respectively, compared to the national average of 32.9 percent.

Notably, Jackson is also home of the State Prison of Southern Michigan that expands across 3,469 acres of land and is located only four miles north of St. Paul's.[45] In 1926, it was the

[44] The United States Census Bureau, "My Community Explorer," Jackson County, MI, accessed July 6, 2022, https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/13a111e06ad242fba0fb62f25199c7dd/page/Page-1/.

[45] "Michigan State Prison," *Wikipedia*, last modified October 13, 2022, accessed November 12, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michigan_State_Prison.

largest walled prison in the world.[46] The prison was divided into four separate prisons in 1988, and those locations now have the collective capacity for housing approximately 5,000 inmates. Though it no longer holds its former status, the prison continues to be a powerful presence in the Jackson community and is an often-overlooked aspect of the St. Paul's context. In Willie James Jennings's commentary on the narratives of imprisonment in the book of Acts, he emphasizes the necessity for Christian engagement with the incarceration system: "The church cannot and must not hide itself from the prison."[47] He presses on and notes that this call is not only liberation for the incarcerated and their families, but it is liberation of all those who work for the powers of the system.[48] Therefore, there is a crucial need for liberation of many kinds in Jackson.

As evidenced by the data, the city of Jackson is particularly depressed economically and educationally. The two most dominant racial groups in the county are white and Black with the majority of Black residents living in the city of Jackson rather than the surrounding townships. Due to the particular context of Jackson, MI, this study will focus on the racial divide and economic disparities between the predominantly white, affluent membership that largely commutes into St. Paul's, including myself, and the predominantly Black neighborhoods located near the building.

Context of The Episcopal Church and Racism

Christianity has always insisted that the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear.
– Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Challenge to the Churches and Synagogues," 1963.[49]

[46] Ibid.

[47] Jennings, *Acts*, 125.

[48] Ibid., 131.

[49] Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 84.

A colored priest of my acquaintance recently related to me, with tears in his eyes, how his reverend Father in God, the Bishop who had ordained him, had met him on the cars on his way to the diocesan convention and warned him, not unkindly, not to take a seat in the body of the convention with the white clergy. To avoid disturbance of their godly placidity he would of course please sit back and somewhat apart. I do not imagine that that clergyman had very much heart for the Christly (!) deliberations of that convention.

– Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 1892[50]

St. Paul's finds itself within the larger context of The Episcopal Church (TEC). Regarding the topic of racial justice, Rev. Stephanie Spellers, TEC's Canon for Evangelism, Reconciliation, and Creation, describes the long-standing embeddedness of TEC in white supremacy and racism: "No church in the United States of America compares to the Episcopal Church for longevity and depth of allegiance with colonial, imperial power."[51] TEC finds its roots in The Church of England, which was fully entangled with the monarchy beginning in 1534 when King Henry VIII broke from the Roman Catholic Church and appointed himself as the head of the Church of England.[52] Spellers describes how this intertwinement continued when the British crown sent explorers and colonizers across the Atlantic in the name of God and instructed to annihilate the indigenous peoples and establish the slave trade on their newly acquired soil.[53]

The Anglicans, however, were not the first Christians in history to proclaim Divine sanction for imperial conquest and enslavement. In his influential work, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, Willie James Jennings reveals the conspicuous and troubling conjoinment of the church and crown in the exploitation and racialization of

[50] As quoted in Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 5.

[51] Stephanie Spellers, *The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline, and New Hope for Beloved Community* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2021), 53.

[52] Ibid., 54-55.

[53] Ibid., 57-61.

darker-skinned people.[54] Jennings demonstrates this theopolitical relationship through a variety of historical narratives, such as that offered by Zurara, the chronicler for Prince Henry of Portugal in the mid-fifteenth century:

> Zurara recognizes [the Guineans'] humanity, their common ancestry with Adam … and asks God in this prayer to grant him access to the divine design to help him interpret this clear sign of God-ordained Portuguese preeminence over black flesh. He seeks from God the kind of interpretation that would ease his conscience and make the event unfolding in front of him more morally palatable.[55]

Zurara concludes his chapter by crafting a soteriological narrative of African captivity, "for [Prince Henry's] chief riches lay in his purpose; for he reflected with great pleasure upon the salvation of those souls that before were lost," thus deluding themselves that they had found riches in God's salvation instead of in exploitation.[56]

Further along in Jennings's argument, he demonstrates how the Protestant Reformation had done little theological "re-forming" of conquest and exploitation. Jennings tells the story of Anglican Bishop John William Colenso who was sent as a missionary to South Africa in 1854.

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[54] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Carter demonstrates the relationship between theology and race by showing, "that the modern invention of race had everything to do with the story of the modern invention of religion; that both of these stories were of a piece with the story of the rise of the modern nation-state as a new form of political economy or sociopolitical governance; and that the so-called Jewish problem was a key subtest in all of this" (76). For both Carter and Jennings, the root of the problem may be found in supersessionism, Christianity's attempt to cut itself off from YHWH's covenant with Israel, and the division between the "superior" Christian Euro-American Occident and racialized Jews as the "inferior" people of the Orient. Carter, *Race*, 4.

[55] Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 18; This also reinforces a point that Jonathan Tran makes regarding enslavers recognizing the humanity of those they enslaved, "The theologically framed view from political economy helps one to see, for instance, that the horror of racial capitalism does not lie in the notion that some identified others as less than human and so enslaved them, a myth that might be guiding orthodox antiracism's preoccupation with identity—as if establishing, securing, and asserting racial identity will protect injured races from further harm, and as if establishing, securing, and asserting racial identity did not permit some to harm others in the first place. Rather, the horror comes in the fact that slavers knew full well that slaves were human (for those with eyes to see, nothing could be clearer) and yet enslaved them. This reminds us that the various rationales given for chattel slavery had little to do with the ontological status of enslaved persons, and everything to do with the inhumanity of the enslavers." Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 18.

[56] Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 19.

Though Colenso shows promise by identifying the religious consciousness of the Zulu people, his universalism "evacuate[s] Christian identity of any real substance," as he fails to see the ways that cultural particularity matters theologically.[57] Through these narratives, Jennings demonstrates how Christianity sought to separate itself from the particular geographical, embodied, economic, cultural, and social realities that give shape to theology to begin with. However, as I previously put forth in my section on the kingdom of God, the people and the places that differ, feel unfamiliar, appear foolish, or even seem scandalous are the exact places to draw near and discover God.[58]

The British explorers who arrived in Jamestown held together similar theological and exploitative commitments as many of their European forebears. Spellers describes how the Anglican explorers exhibited their devotion to God by creating a makeshift house of worship, complete with a fabric canopy-cathedral strung in the trees and branches fashioned into an altar.[59] Unfortunately, no number of daily prayers and celebrations of the Eucharist were enough to disrupt their decimation of the nearby Powhatan Confederacy and the ensuing genocide across Western lands. After seizing the land as their own, the British colonizers quickly instituted the system of chattel slavery as a means for creating unrestrained capital. Those of the wealthy ruling class in the colonies were typically Anglican, which served to amplify Anglican, and eventually Episcopal, justification and dependence on slavery.[60] Many bishops, both in the North

[57] Ibid., 145-147.

[58] See subsection, "Racial Justice as It Relates to the Biblical Text."

[59] Spellers, *Cracked Open*, 57. See also The Episcopal Church, "History of the Church in the United States of America," accessed June 25, 2022, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/who-we-are/history-episcopal-church/american-church/.

[60] The Episcopal Church was established in the U.S. in 1789. Until then, adherents to the Church of England were called Anglicans. The Episcopal Church, "History of the Church in the United States of America."

and South, were slaveholders, and Episcopal churches were often constructed with slave labor. The documentary, *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*, along with *Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History,* exposes the troublesome history of the DeWolf family who profited extensively off of the slave trade while holding numerous positions of leadership in The Episcopal Church.[61] W.E.B. Du Bois offered a stinging criticism of TEC by noting that white Episcopalians had "probably done less for black people than any other aggregation of Christians" and the leadership had lacked the moral courage to stand against racism.[62]

After the Civil War and well into the twentieth-century, TEC continued to perpetuate white supremacy and participate in racial injustice with such actions as insisting that white priests and vestries lead Black Episcopal parishes, forcing Black clergy to sit in the back and remain silent at General Convention, and advertising lynchings in Sunday bulletins.[63] With the majority of the clergy and membership benefitting socioeconomically, until more recently, TEC has largely been unmotivated to dismantle systemic racism.[64]

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[61] *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*, directed by Katrina Browne, Jude Ray, and Alla Kovgan (Traces of the Trade, 2008), http://www.tracesofthetrade.org/; Thomas Norman DeWolf, *Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008); See also Thomas Norman DeWolf and Sharon Leslie Morgan, *Gather at the Table: The Healing Journey of a Daughter of Slavery and a Son of the Slave Trade* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012).

[62] As quoted in Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 20-21.

[63] Spellers, *Cracked Open*, 66.

[64] Episcopal priest and historian, Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., chronicles responses to racism in the Episcopal Church from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement. He names some individuals and small movements, such as The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU) founded in 1959, that sought equality, reconciliation, and integration. During this timeframe, however, TEC largely was resistant to these efforts. Shattuck, *Episcopalians and Race*, 101.

The Archives of The Episcopal Church offer evidence of scattered attempts of racial justice throughout its history.[65] However, it was not until a request to the Executive Council of TEC in 1988 to establish a Commission on Racism that the work of racial justice began more deliberately at the denominational level.[66] In the Commission on Racism's first triennium report, the group reveals initial challenges regarding one of the most basic elements of their work:

> Defining racism caused considerable difficulty. Those who have been oppressed by racism had no difficulty in understanding the definition adopted by the Commission, but many in the Church believed the definition was too condemning of white society. … However, the Commission stands by its definition of racism and believes that abundant historical and academic evidence exists to validate its position and definition. Racial injustices must be confronted and eliminated before we can move on to encouraging and supporting cultural diversity as the new paradigm.[67]

Despite these early troubles, efforts for racial justice have not been deterred. In 1994, the House of Bishops issued a pastoral letter confessing their own complicity in racism and commitment to making the necessary changes in the denomination going forward.[68] In 2003, TEC created its first extensive curriculum designed to help churches begin the work of antiracism, "Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: The Antiracism Training Manual of the Episcopal Church."[69] In 2006, General Convention passed Resolution 2006-A123 that unequivocally declared racism a

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[65] The Archives of the Episcopal Church, "The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice," accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/timelines. Also, Spellers offers the narratives of advocates for racial justice in TEC, *Cracked Open*, 71-86.

[66] The Archives of the Episcopal Church, "Acts of Convention: Resolution 1988-A092," accessed June 5, 2022, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=1988-A092.

[67] The Archives of the Episcopal Church, "Report of the Committee on Racism," 1993: 259-260, accessed June 5, 2022, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/gc_reports/reports/1994/bb_1994-R013.pdf.

[68] Diversity, Social, and Environmental Ministries Team Mission Department of the Episcopal Church Center, "Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: The Antiracism Training Manual of the Episcopal Church," accessed December 17, 2022, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/antiracism_book-revise3.pdf, 146-150.

[69] Chapter Two's subsection entitled, "The Individual as the Image of God?" critiques a prevalent approach in Christian antiracism that speaks of individuals as bearers of the image of God. The phrase "Seeking the Face of God in Each Other" is an example of this approach.

sin and confessed TEC's history of participation.[70] In 2008, TEC held a denominational-wide "Day of Repentance" of complicity in slavery, including a special service held at St. Thomas African Episcopal Church, which is the first Black Episcopal church in the United States.[71] In 2015, TEC elected the first African American Presiding Bishop, The Most Rev. Michael Curry. At the request of Bishop Curry, TEC pledged a long-term commitment of anti-racism and published a resource for churches entitled "White Supremacy, Becoming the Beloved Community, and Learning to Listen" in 2017.[72] The fifty-two-page document explores and names TEC's complicity in maintaining and profiting from white supremacy as well as the call to build beloved community, which will be detailed in Chapter Two. The writers assert the primacy of the practices of storytelling and listening along with the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist as the avenues for becoming beloved community. The current context of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, therefore, has been shaped by centuries-long complicity in exploitation, white supremacy, and elitism along with more recent deliberate steps toward racial justice at the denominational level.

Context of Christianity in the U.S. and Racism

While most of the MREML students do not serve in mainline traditions like TEC, they are ministers of predominantly white and middle to upper class Protestant congregations in the U.S. that have their own histories of embeddedness in white supremacy and are in need of

[70] The Archives of the Episcopal Church, "Study Economic Benefits Derived from Slavery," accessed March 2, 2022, https://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2006-A123.

[71] The Archives of the Episcopal Church, "The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice," accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/timelines.

[72] The Episcopal Church, "Report for the House of Bishops from Its Theology Committee: White Supremacy, the Beloved Community, and Learning to Listen," 2017, accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/bbc_hob_theo_cmte_report_on_white_supremacy.pdf.

participating in racial justice in their communities. In *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, Jemar Tisby traces the development of systemic racism in the United States and the ways that white Christians of all varieties have often been complicit in, and even the primary writers of, racist categories, actions, and policies.[73] Tisby maintains that systemic racism was not accidental or inevitable but was chosen by white Christians at strategic points in history.[74]

In Tran's case study of the Delta Chinese, he reveals how the Baptist missionaries preached a Christianity that was aligned with and even bolstered the Chinese grocery owners' participation in racial capitalism.[75] Additionally, in *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975*, Carolyn Renée Dupont demonstrates that evangelical Christians were some of the most ardent proponents and galvanizers of racial segregation in Mississippi during the mid-twentieth century.[76] Dupont debunks popular misconceptions of white religion as being passive and held captive to a culture of segregation by offering myriad examples of overt evangelical resistance to and sabotage of integration. She demonstrates how the three most influential evangelical denominations in Mississippi, Southern Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, often held so tightly to literal interpretations of the Bible

[73] Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*.

[74] Ibid., 28-29, 57, 59.

[75] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 97.

[76] Carolyn Renée Dupont, *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 4, 6.

and notions of individual salvation[77] that they had convinced themselves that racial hierarchy was the will of God.[78] And more recently, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith performed an extensive study in the late 1990s revealing how white evangelicals frequently believe that black individuals, not societal structures, create and sustain their own challenges.[79] Current voting trends indicate that white Christians in the U.S. more often favor economic policies that inhibit the flourishing of people of color. In his 2020 publication, Robert P. Jones, the founder of the Public Religion Research Institute, concludes that "white Christians are about 30 percentage points more likely to hold racial resentful and otherwise racist views than religiously unaffiliated white people."[80]

Some white Christians might offer a rebuttal to these examples by arguing that they have not been directly involved in the designing and keeping of racist systems and theologies in the U.S. However, Tisby underscores that silent complicity has been harmful enough: "the only wrong action is inaction."[81] Ibram X. Kendi also differentiates between those who deny any participation in racism by claiming they are "not racist" and those who are willing to confess their racism and then actively pursue anti-racism.[82] In other words, white participation in racism

[77] Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green deconstruct the pervasive Western notion of penal substitutionary atonement theory as being derivative of modern anthropological understandings of the individual as self-autonomous and self-legislative. In this, little room is given for systemic evil and the response of corporate justice. Therefore, individual Christians are only responsible for their individual sins and standing before God, and evangelism takes the form of saving the soul of an individual with little to no regard to material or social realities. Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in the New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 41-43.

[78] Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 7.

[79] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 76-80.

[80] As referenced in McGhee, *The Sum of Us*, 248.

[81] Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 184.

[82] Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 8-9.

in the U.S. is inescapable and touches all contexts of MREML students. Though there are differences between students' contexts and TEC, there are plenty of commonalities that make St. Paul's an appropriate place to discover what it might look like for a congregation to discern and join God's mission of justice in one's local context.

Purpose and Project Description

The primary question I seek to explore in the project is: How might a congregation of the most historically powerful, prominent, and affluent church in the U.S. imagine its life in the Jackson, MI community in light of Luke 14 and encounters with people who experience racial injustice?

As a way of illuminating some of the vast literature on the topic of racial justice, Chapter Two explores two key discourses: identarian antiracism and political economic antiracism as well as racial justice and racial reconciliation. Chapter Two also examines two elements of TEC's approach to racial justice: beloved community and the practice of listening. Chapter Three offers a theological framework as outlined previously. Chapter Four details the method and rationale of the project, which is outlined briefly below.

The project took place on Sunday mornings for seven weeks during the summer of 2022. All adults in the congregation were invited to practice listening to God and one another through the practice of Dwelling in the Word in Luke 14 during the Christian education hour. Additionally, on three of the seven Sunday afternoons, three Black leaders (referred to as Conversation Partners in the project) from the congregation's local context hosted Listening Opportunities. After each of the Listening Opportunities, those in attendance completed surveys concerning what they experienced while listening. The same questions were asked after each event. Seven members (referred to as Focus Group Participants) from the congregation were

asked to attend four of the seven Dwelling in the Word practices and two of the three Listening Opportunities.[83] Focus Group Participants were encouraged to practice journaling as a way for further listening and reflection throughout the study. After the seven Sundays, seven participants were divided into two interview groups and asked the same set of questions.

The data from both the surveys and focus group interviews were coded, and the most prevalent themes are presented in Chapter Five. Chapter Six concludes by identifying areas of strength and growth for the congregation while considering possible next steps.

The stated purpose of this research project is to invite the members of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church to discern how God might be calling the congregation to participate in racial justice in Jackson, MI in light of the social reversals found in Luke 14 and the practice of listening to three Black leaders from the community.

Definition of Terms

***Beloved Community*:** A term coined by American philosopher, Josiah Royce (1855-1916), and later picked up by Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King, Jr., and several Christian groups seeking racial justice. The Episcopal Church defines Beloved Communities as those "where all people may experience dignity and abundant life and see themselves and others as beloved children of God."[84]

Discernment: In Christian terms, discernment is the act of paying attention and evaluating how God might be acting and calling an individual or community to respond.

[83] Eight participants were originally asked. Two dropped out partway through the study and one of them was replaced with a member who had been present for all the Dwelling and Listening Opportunities to that point. Therefore, the final number of focus group interview participants was seven.

[84] "Becoming Beloved Community," The Episcopal Church, accessed March 4, 2022, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community/.

Dwelling in the Word: A communal practice of listening and hospitality to the Word of God and to one another (see Appendix D for a detailed explanation).

Economy of God: The notion that all of humankind and creation are ordered and abundantly gifted by God.[85]

Elitism: A group of people located at the top of a stratified society based on self-perceived or others' perceived assets such as wealth, intellect, unique abilities, and/or influence.

Political Economy: Economic structures that are created and sustained by the political process as well as the impact of economic structures on the political realm.

Racial Capitalism: The notion that a capitalistic economy turns people into commodities and, therefore, creates categories of race.

Racial Identarianism: The notion that people are innately born with a racial identity and/or are socialized into a racial identity.

Racial Justice: As will be explored below in Chapter Two's subsections, "Justice (and Love)" and "Undefinable Justice," there is not one set definition of justice, as it is dependent on the parties involved. A starting definition might be "setting things as they should be," but the vision of "should be" and how to go about getting there remains highly subjective.

Racial Reconciliation: The act of bringing two or more racialized groups together again.

Social Reversal: A theme in Luke-Acts, as well as other places in the Bible, where the poor and marginalized are elevated in the kingdom of God and the wealthy and powerful are brought low.

[85] Tran, Racial Capitalism, 15.

White Fragility: Negative emotional responses of white people, such as anger, fear, guilt, argumentation, silence, and withdrawal, when exposed to or confronted by the harm of racism as a tactic for maintaining white social control.[86]

White Privilege: The unfair and unearned social power, benefits, opportunities, and advancements given to people of lighter skin over people of color.

White Supremacy: The notion that people with light skin and of Anglo-Saxon descent are inherently superior to people with darker skin and non-Anglo-Saxon origins. Many white supremacists narrate their status as divinely sanctioned.

Zero-Sum: When one group's gain must become another group's loss, which amounts to the sum of zero between the two groups. This term has been used by antiracist economists to describe how whites will often refuse opportunities for economic gain if another group is also going to benefit and possibly get ahead. The belief is that if Black people gain, then white people will lose as a result.[87]

Basic Assumptions

In order to narrow my focus and engage in the work of this project, it is necessary for me to make some assumptions. First, I make the fundamental observations and assumptions that systemic racism exists in the U.S. and that God is concerned enough about the matter that God will help a congregation discern participation in the work of racial justice in the local community. I assume that systemic racism needs to be overturned, as it does not produce the conditions for human flourishing for anyone involved. I assume that racial justice is not merely a

[86] Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 2.

[87] McGhee, *The Sum of Us*, xxi.

civic matter. Racial justice is part of the mission of God. In other words, I assume that churches should be about the work of racial justice and that the people in St. Paul's Episcopal are generally interested in pursuing racial justice.

I believe and, therefore, assume that God is moving ahead and outside of the church at all times and cares about the flourishing of all people in Jackson, MI and not solely those within the church. As part of this, I assume that Christian communities have much to learn from people and groups who are already invested in and practicing racial justice, whether or not the work comes from shared convictions of faith.

I assume that the practices of listening and asking questions for reflection and discussion produce something meaningful. I assume that more wisdom will be gained from a community exploring and discerning together, rather than one or two leaders seeking to create change from the top down. I assume that the Biblical text speaks to the matter of racial justice from a variety of angles and that Luke 14 contributes something pertinent to the conversation.

In relation to my work with ministry students in the MREML, I assume that conversations of racial justice are occurring or need to occur in their ministry contexts. Though St. Paul's Episcopal Church has a particular historical and geographical locatedness, I assume that acquiring the experience of leading a congregation through practices of listening to God, one another, and those who have experienced racial oppression can translate to a variety of ministerial contexts.

Delimitations and Limitations

Though I desire justice for all people who experience oppression, marginalization, and exploitation, unfortunately this project cannot address injustice in all its forms. I chose to limit the project specifically to racial justice for the Black community for two reasons. As presented

above, The Episcopal Church has been one of the most complicit and advantaged churches in the U.S. in relation to colonization, chattel slavery, and white supremacy. TEC has gained and maintained social and economic capital by exploiting people of African descent. The wealth and educational gap between white Episcopalians and many Black citizens in the U.S. is one of the largest gaps in existence.[88] Second, the racial composition of the city of Jackson is primarily white and Black. There are more opportunities in Jackson to create racial justice for the Black community than any other racialized group. Jackson, MI is also home to one of the largest prisons in the state. As Black men are disproportionately one of the largest incarcerated populations, there is an opportunity in Jackson to focus specifically on racism as it impacts the Black community.[89]

Another delimitation is that listening to and dialogue with the Black community can best occur at this time with Black people who are called, trained, and supported in this difficult work. The project could have been designed so that members of St. Paul's gathered around tables with members of a historically Black church in Jackson. I discerned, however, that a better first step was to listen to Black leaders with whom our clergy already has a relationship and who have experience leading conversations in predominantly white spaces.

[88] While this does not shed light specifically on the gap between white Episcopalians and Black Americans at large, it demonstrates the financial and educational wealth of white members of TEC: "In 1976, [Kit and Fredrica Konolige] report, 48 percent of Episcopalians were top earners (making more than $20,000 a year), while only 21 percent of the general American population made that much. By 2014, 36 percent of Episcopalians were in that top category (more than $100,000)—a higher proportion of wealthy people than any other Christian group, and far more than the 18 percent of the total population who make that much. Similarly, in 1976, about 45 percent of Episcopalians had gone to college, compared with 29 percent of all Americans. By 2014, 56 percent of Episcopalians had finished college or graduate school; while only 27 percent of the general population had obtained those levels of education. In other words, over a period when financial and educational gains decreased for most Americans, members of the Episcopal Church remained comfortably, consistently on top." Spellers, *Cracked Open*, 69.

[89] Ashley Nellis, "The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons," October 13, 2021, accessed December 17, 2022, https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/the-color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons-the-sentencing-project/.

The project was limited by the sheer scope of systemic racism in the U.S. In the grand scheme of the problem, one project cannot address much. Due to this limitation, I did not choose to focus on the *telos* of full mutuality, reconciliation, and communion. The project was focused more on the starting end of the continuum of racial justice and reconciliation with the recognition that there is much work before us. Therefore, the project was limited to listening and discerning one possible next step of racial justice that St. Paul's Episcopal can take in our time and place. Additionally, the scope of the project and potential participation in racial justice was limited by the smaller size of the congregation and older median age of congregants.

As a white, female researcher who has benefitted from socioeconomic and white privilege her entire life, I am limited in my experience and understanding of systemic racism and the ways that people of color have been and are exploited to create capital. I confess that I am held back from going further in this work by my own attachments to wealth and the comforts of privilege. As an individual, I am limited in my imagination and conception of what racial justice can look like in my local community. As a layperson in the congregation, I am limited in terms of decision-making and authority.

Finally, the logistics of the project were limited to a summer timeframe, as the congregation already had other curriculum and events in place for Fall 2022. Summer travel schedules limited attendance at the Dwelling and Listening Opportunities as well as the number of Focus Group Participants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., "Where Do We Go from Here?" 1967[90]

Two Key Antiracism Discourses

Identarian Antiracism and Political Economic Antiracism

As I conceptualized this project, I felt frustrated that it continues to feel like we are in a similar place to where we started, despite how much antiracism work is currently being done in the U.S. Sure, some who are white are becoming more "woke," or more aware of and sensitive to the systemic oppression that people of color endure. While being aware contains more potential for change than being ignorant, the life conditions of many people of color do not appear to be significantly improving. Learning information and changing attitudes and beliefs are certainly helpful steps, but they are not translating into sizable systemic changes. In fact, some might feel that U.S. society is making backwards progress regarding racial justice.[91] As evidenced in protests and a variety of platforms, people of color continue to express legitimate anger towards white people, even white people who are engaged in the work of antiracism. In light of these frustrations and what I have previously witnessed and experienced in my grocery delivery job (see section, "Personal Context of Researcher"), I started to wonder if the relationship white

[90] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003) 578.

[91] Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Anna Brown, and Kiana Cox, "Race in America 2019," *Pew Research Center*, April 9, 2019, accessed December 10, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019/.

people frequently have with wealth might be a sticking point that hinders the work of racial justice.

Identarian Antiracism

In *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*, Jonathan Tran argues that the typical approach of, what he calls, identarian antiracism in the U.S. is impeding our progress. Through his observations and research, Tran concludes that identarian antiracism (or identarianism for short) rests on the mistaken notion that humans possess a racial identity innately through birth and/or socialization.[92] Therefore, identarian antiracism primarily focuses on racial identity from beginning to end while obscuring the racializing force of our political economy.[93] Tran explains,

> Identarian antiracism portrays racism as the personal and systemic denigration of racial kinds by other racial kinds, focused specifically—for better or for worse—on the harm black people suffer at the hands of white people. It seeks to acknowledge and address these denigrations, a task it pursues by investigating the conditions under which they occur. Its constructive vision entails lifting up those who have suffered racism. This commits identarian antiracism to the work of establishing, securing, and asserting racial identity, work which programmatically comes under familiar banners: diversity, inclusion, representation, multiculturalism, and the like. The constructive vision comes with the deconstructive need to subvert, destabilize, and attack racial kinds deemed responsible for harming others (i.e., whites and others party to their racism). As this book shows, the constructive vision along with the deconstructive tasks have the combined effect of further solidifying (even with the metaphysical agnosticism) the reality of race. In other words, identarian antiracism racializes."[94]

Tran uses the example of identarianism's narration of gentrification to demonstrate how identarian antiracism works. Some researchers, such as Derek S. Hyra, explain how

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[92] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 1-2.

[93] Ibid., 4. See also Jonathan Tran, "The Author's Response, Part 2," *Perspectives on Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism: Symposium Essays*, February 17, 2022, accessed August 2, 2022, https://politicaltheology.com/the-authors-response-part-2/.

[94] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 3.

"consumptive whites, enticed by the allure of stereotypically black-branded culture…move in on historically black communities, snatch up property, appropriate culture, and price African Americans out of house and home."[95] Though there is an economic element to this explanation, Tran believes that Hyra and others are too narrowly focused on criticizing those who commodify black culture and are ultimately governed by market logic rather than criticizing the market logic itself.[96] Tran concludes, "At the end of the day it is the persistence and spread of poverty and their antidemocratic antecedents and effects, and their structural and systemic consequences for black life, not the influx of an abstract whiteness, that displaces."[97]

Political Economic Antiracism

In an effort to offer an alternative to identarianism, Tran draws on the work of W.E.B. DuBois and Black Marxists, while also constructing case studies on the Delta Chinese (1868-1969) and Redeemer Community Church in San Francisco (2002-present), to posit that the political economy of capitalism racializes and pits certain groups against one another. He deconstructs identarianism's black/white binary, which deepens racialization by placing everyone somewhere along the continuum between black and white.[98] Tran believes that in asking the questions, "What does racism accomplish? Whom does it benefit? How does it work?" one can get closer to the exploitative and commodifying root of racism.[99] He presses back against identarianism's abstract notions of whiteness that do not often account for the

[95] Ibid., 4.

[96] Ibid., 5.

[97] Ibid., 6-7.

[98] Ibid., 11-12.

[99] Ibid., 294.

material realities of racial capitalism.[100] In a response to his reviewers, he reasserts, "I understand racism as a material problem and propose material solutions."[101] He demonstrates that work related to racial identity is "notoriously unwieldy."[102] Building off of Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous line, "A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will 'thingify' them and make them things," Tran names two parallel cycles at work in racial capitalism: domination, exploitation, and justification along with use, identity, and justification.[103] He elaborates, "[H]ow I use a thing tells me what kind of thing it is and the kind of thing it is justifies my use of it."[104] According to Tran, race is not an ontological category: "Racial identity was invented for the sake of exercising the social control necessary for sustained domination and exploitation."[105] The use, identity, and justification cycle works in such a way that exploitation and racism seem natural, and even good, depending on how the story is narrated.

> Over time, systemic inequality (e.g., in education, employment, healthcare, and criminal justice) presents itself as natural. The naturalness gets put on those suffering inequality, as if natural to who they are—something about their nature—rather than exposing the inequalities and justifications for what they are. What is needed are structures and systems that tell different stories and, equally important, conceptual lenses that help us into those stories.[106]

Despite my concern that Tran's work might be a bit of an overcorrection, which I will discuss below, his work pulls back the curtain on the power of Mammon in our lives: "Those Americans

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[100] Ibid., 6-7.

[101] Jonathan Tran, "The Author's Response, Part 1," *Perspectives on Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism: Symposium Essays*, February 10, 2022, accessed August 2, 2022, https://politicaltheology.com/the-authors-response-2/.

[102] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 12.

[103] Ibid., 16, 74-75, 209.

[104] Ibid., 74.

[105] Ibid., 79.

[106] Ibid., 76, 201.

worried that justice will take away their advantages like nothing more than to talk about identity. They love diversity, inclusion, representation, multiculturalism, and the like because it leaves their stuff—what Jesus in Luke 12 called 'barns and bigger barns'—untouched."[107] Ouch.

To demonstrate racial capitalism, Tran describes the Chinese immigrants who were brought to the Mississippi Delta as cheap labor during Reconstruction to replace the production of the slaves and ensure the U.S. could remain a viable player in the global economy.[108] The Delta Chinese, however, had just enough familial and communal power to overcome the conditions of their exploitation as replacement farm workers. They subsequently turned to exploit the vulnerable conditions (i.e. food deserts) of their Black neighbors by creating the Delta Chinese business model of grocery stores in impoverished Black communities that were abandoned by whites.[109] Tran explores how some identarians have narrated the actions of the Delta Chinese as an effort to "become white," (Tran is tempted to suggest that "only a white person would dream up the idea that everyone wants to be white") and notes that the Delta Chinese stated plainly that their reason for coming to America was to acquire wealth and send money back to their families in China.[110] In other words, the Delta Chinese were not motivated by the identarian notion of whiteness. They were motivated by the economic benefits that the political economy of racial capitalism could provide. Tran identifies the ways that obligation to, and even idolatry of, family took primacy over love of their Black neighbors. The Baptist theology the Chinese inherited from missionaries to the Delta only served to reinforce their

[107] Ibid., 295.

[108] Ibid., 37.

[109] Ibid., 155.

[110] Ibid., 143, 147.

exploitative acts and allegiance to their families.[111] Willie James Jennings's reflections on Ananias and Sapphira in his commentary on the book of Acts could also be said of the primacy of the family for the Delta Chinese:

> The couple has become one of the greatest tools to sustaining the realities of oppression, economic injustice, racism, sexism, and sexual violence by becoming a citadel of ultimate concern for people. The life and well-being of a couple and their children easily command our greatest loyalties and constantly draw us toward supporting policies of governments and practices of corporations that destroy life and are harming the planet. The actions of Ananias and Sapphira in withholding part of their resources is precisely the gesture that seems sensible but opens them to falsehood and resistance to the Spirit of God.[112]

Jennings is not seeking to denigrate the love and care family members offer to one another. Rather, he is highlighting the same dynamic that Tran demonstrates regarding the Delta Chinese and that Jesus asserts in Luke 14:26, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." The problem is not love of one's family but love of one's family over the love of others, because our expression of love to *all* others is ultimately a reflection of our love for Christ. The common conception of the "Christian family" in the U.S. frequently justifies voting and acting against the interests of one's neighbors in favor of providing and maintaining the security of one's own family. Conversely, stories have been told of Christians pouring themselves out so much for their communities that children and spouses have suffered gravely. The invitation is to integrate our love for family with our love for the world that God loves.

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[111] Ibid., 148, 156-157. This, in conjunction with Luke 14:25ff, was one of the more illuminating points of the book for me regarding my grocery shopping job. In hindsight, I see how the desire for my family to enjoy a certain level of material comfort motivated my participation in a space of use and potential exploitation of others. Given my particular circumstances at the time, I do not fault myself for the decisions and actions I made. However, Tran's book has opened me up to consider the other possibilities in the economy of God that we could have explored instead.

[112] Jennings, *Acts*, 55.

Jonathan Tran's Economy of God

Tran argues that *libido dominandi* (desire to dominate) is a distortion of the God-given human desire to "live into the gift-structure of creation," or what he calls the economy of God and deep economy. Through the act of creation and new creation in Christ and the Spirit, creaturely life and the entire cosmos draw our "existence from and within the capaciousness of the trinitarian life which condescends to make room for all things in the deep economy of God."[113] The economy of God creates an ecology of creation and humanity that overflows from abundance. Therefore, scarcity and domination are not fixed realities of creation. Tran offers hope that these pervasive forces are mutable, especially when communities seek to share in the economy of God. Tran relies some on the work of Kathryn Tanner who articulates the necessity of relying on God for participation in the economy of God:

> If it is possible to serve God in exhausting and demeaning work one is currently assigned, how much the better might one serve God in forms of employment more in keeping with God's own efforts to bring about the well-being of all? The world's current economic organization would have to be changed to further God's universally beneficent intentions. Christ in enabling our radical self-reformation is presumably giving us the power to make changes in our economic lives too.[114]

In a few places in Tran's argument, he seems to be heading in a trinitarian direction, "Christian theology…envisions creaturely existence in terms of depth, ever-deepening—involving, revolving, evolving—participation in the divine life as the consummation of creaturely longing."[115] Initially, I thought that the perichoretic, or mutually making-space, life of the triune God would give shape to Tran's presentation of the eschaton and invitation into the

[113] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 15, 172.

[114] Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 201.

[115] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 16.

divine economy. However, Tran's chapter on the economy of God takes an unexpected and semi-narrow theological turn by focusing primarily on what he calls deep incarnation.[116] He draws on Gregory of Nazianzus (ironically, J. Kameron Carter notes that Gregory made theological arguments in support of slave-owning[117]) to demonstrate how Christ's incarnation "reveals what it means for God to be creature and for creatures to bear divinity."[118] By situating the political economy within the "ecotheology" of the incarnation, he asserts that it offers "a fuller picture of the destiny of humankind."[119] Tran leans heavily on the incarnation to make the case of reconciliation, "Just as Christ's incarnation assumes the diversity of creaturely life, so his crucifixion and resurrection respectively recapitulate the full range of creaturely opposition and liberation (Rev. 21:5)."[120] Tran also speaks of restoring creation rather than looking ahead to the eschaton.[121] It is problematic, however, that Tran frequently depicts the incarnation apart from the Trinity. In order to understand the incarnation as the image of God or as the "fuller picture of the destiny of humankind," the Son must be situated within and interpreted in relation to the Father and the Spirit, and Tran fails to expand that part of his argument. Additionally, for as committed as Tran seems to be of critiquing the material realities of racial capitalism, his take on the incarnation frequently leaves the material behind and pushes toward the metaphysical.

Tran then turns to feature the Redeemer Community Church of the historically exploited Bayview/Hunters Point (BVHP) area of San Francisco, along with the church's partnerships with

[116] Ibid., 203-209.

[117] Carter, *Race*, 233.

[118] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 204-205.

[119] Ibid., 206.

[120] Ibid., 208.

[121] Ibid., 206, 208.

Dayspring Partners and Rise University Preparatory School (Rise Prep), to reveal the ways a Christian community and their neighborhood can live more according to God's abundant economy than racial capitalism. This community maintains that there are "better options" at hand for humanity.[122] Tran narrates a variety of stories that demonstrate intentional presence, the sharing of time, generosity, chosen dispossession, sharing in God's abundance, listening, partnerships, community-centeredness, rest, and "smoothing the curve of inequality"[123] to illuminate the cycle of God's economy, which Tran summarizes as: "participation-revelation-reparation."[124] The community of BVHP is discovering that there is more than enough to go around as they seek to resist the zero-sum narrative of racial capitalism. Groups that have historically been pitted against one another in that neighborhood, particularly Black and Asian-American, are beginning to learn how to be stewards to one another with the gifts God has graciously given.[125]

Responses to Tran

Admittedly, there are moments when Tran's critique of identarianism can sound like he is slipping into post racial color-blindness: racial identity does not matter and, in fact, focusing on it makes things worse. Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, convener of Political Theology's review of Tran's book and symposium, wonders if the Christian *telos* Tran presents of the "deracialized

[122] Ibid., 100.

[123] Ibid., 228.

[124] Ibid., 211. These stand in contrast to Tran's identification of the two cycles of racial capitalism: domination, exploitation, and justification and use, identity, and justification.

[125] Ibid., 293.

Promised Land" comes dangerously close to a color-blind kingdom of God.[126] On the one hand, Rodríguez affirms that Tran is not asking people to abandon their racial identity, yet he is rightly concerned that Tran overlooks the importance of racial identity for Black liberationists such as James H. Cone. Rodríguez desires that identarian antiracism and political economic antiracism do not become mutually exclusive. In Tran's response, he appreciates how "[Rodríguez] points to important antiracist efforts and exemplars that embrace racial identity as an indispensable site of political contestation, mobilization, and imagination."[127] Ultimately however, Tran largely recounts the argument he makes in the book and expresses skepticism that the efforts to reclaim racial identity will get us where we need to be.[128]

Other scholars participating in the symposium, Jessica Wai-Fong Wong and Candace Jordan, express additional concern that Tran overcorrects to the point of obscuring personal and psychological racism against individuals.[129] His notion of racial capitalism does not seem to take into account racist beliefs, statements, and actions that seem far disconnected from the exploitative forces that first created them. They assert that racial bias and bigotry have taken on a life of their own that are not always explicitly connected to the political economy. In Tran's response, he indicates that he shares these concerns, "If my racial capitalist approach misses this

[126] Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, "Defending Racial Particularity within Tran's 'Deep Economy' of Grace," *Perspectives on Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism: Symposium Essays*, December 30, 2021, accessed August 2, 2022, https://politicaltheology.com/defending-racial-particularity-within-trans-deep-economy-of-grace/.

[127] Tran, "Part 2."

[128] Ibid.

[129] Candace Jordan, "The Durability of Whiteness," *Perspectives on Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism: Symposium Essays*, January 27, 2022, accessed August 2, 2022, https://politicaltheology.com/the-durability-of-whiteness/; Jessica Wai-Fong Wong, "Beyond the Binary," *Perspectives on Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism: Symposium Essays*, January 13, 2022, accessed August 2, 2022, https://politicaltheology.com/beyond-the-binary/.

individual/personal/psychological element, treating instead only the structural and systemic, then not only has my approach failed to understand racism but more worrying still, every antiracist corrective my approach inspires becomes part of the problem."[130] He then goes on to explain how he sought to take these concerns into consideration in his book:

> My racial capitalist account situates the individual/personal/psychological within an explicit identification-use-justification moral psychology and an implicit theory of concepts, which together serve as my account's philosophical foundation. … I not only take up psychological imaginaries; I attempt to show how racial capitalism materially produces and relies on them. It is only that I do not want to speak exclusively about the individual/personal/psychological. I do not because I think that any account of the individual/personal/psychological that does not tie in systems and structures does not account for how individual/personal psychologies work. Without structures and systems, concepts (psychological through and through) lack the conventionalized forms of life they need.[131]

Though Tran seeks to take into account the individual/personal/psychological realities of racism, I am concerned that he has swung the antiracism pendulum so far in the direction of racial capitalism that we will not know what to do with certain micro- and macro-aggressions related to racial identity when we encounter them. While I affirm that exploitative practices have racialized our society, there are ever-present and powerful "imaginative/psychological 'aftermarket' effects" that will not be undone solely by learning to live differently with one another economically.[132]

It seems possible for one to look out for another person's physical and economic well-being while still thinking or even expressing disparaging comments about any number of things related to the person. Just as it is also possible to think kind and loving thoughts about one

[130] Tran, "Part 1."

[131] Ibid. Ultimately, the imaginative/psychological realities of racism are not Tran's primary project. He is not denigrating them as much as he is taking on the larger project of racial capitalism's political economy.

[132] Wong, "Beyond the Binary."

another without taking actions to improve the material conditions of their lives, which is a dynamic that appears to be at work at St. Paul's and in many Christian communities in the U.S. I realize that neither of these options represent how Tran envisions us participating in the economy of God, but overemphasis on one direction with the diminishment of the other will continue to stagnate the work of antiracism. Moving forward, we must attend to our racist ideologies and attitudes along with our economic practices in order to make progress regarding racial justice.

Zero-Sum Paradigm of Racism

While Heather McGee does not use the same terminology as Tran, in *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, she too exposes the racializing power of capitalism. She consistently demonstrates how we are *all* suffering in some form under the thumb of systemic racism.[133] At the foundation of her argument is that white people in the U.S. have created and/or perpetuate this universal suffering through a "zero-sum" paradigm, where one group refuses opportunities for economic gain if another group is also going to benefit and possibly get ahead.[134] This is founded on the false notion that whites will lose out in proportion to whatever gains the Black population experiences—thus a zero-sum between the two. She convincingly shows that preventing other racial groups from socioeconomic gain is often a greater motivator for white Americans at the voting booth than economic self-interest.[135] McGhee uses the literal draining and covering over of public pools

[133] McGhee, *The Sum of Us*, xi, xix.

[134] Ibid., xxi.

[135] Ibid., xvii-xix.

during the Civil Rights era as a metaphor of this paradigm: "Public goods, in other words, are only for the public we perceive to be good.[136]

What is eye-opening, however, is that McGhee demonstrates how whites statistically lose out at a higher percentage rate (frequency) than people of color in many cases.[137] However, this is not to diminish the sufferings of Black and Brown people. McGhee demonstrates clearly that the economic disparities of people of color are deeper and more constraining than that of whites. White people have the privilege of voting against their own economic interests, because they often have opportunities and safety nets elsewhere. Nonetheless, McGhee repeatedly asks, "Why would you *not* put policies in place that could benefit millions of people, both white and black?"

McGhee leaves no economic area of the U.S. untouched. She methodically works through the issues of education, healthcare, housing, labor unions, democracy, segregation, and environmental concerns to show how racism undergirds and shapes each economic area and how each shapes racism. McGhee uncovers the strategy of "dog-whistle politics," which employs rhetoric that seems polite and not-racist on the surface, but racist stereotyping and gaslighting are embedded in the message and clearly understood by adherents.[138] This tactic enables whites to keep the system of racism at work while being able to deny its existence and avoid responsibility. Through her examples of dog-whistle politics as well as countless other strategies,

[136] Ibid., 23-28, 30.

[137] Ibid., 53-60. The rural healthcare system in conservative states like Texas is one clear example of this: "Texas leads the country in rural hospital closures, with twenty-six hospitals permanently closing or whittling down services since 2010. … if you make as little as four thousand dollars a year, you're considered too rich to qualify for Medicaid in Texas, and even that has exclusions. … Failing to insure so many people leaves a lot of unpaid medical bills in the state, and that drains the Texas hospital system. The conservative majority in the Texas legislature has been so opposed to Medicaid that they shortchange the state's hospitals in compensating for the few (mostly pregnant women) Medicaid patients they see. Then, by rejecting Obama's Medicaid expansion, they lose out on federal money that would insure about 1.5 million Texas citizens" (54-55).

[138] Ibid., 32, 50.

it becomes clear that the political economic subjugation of people of color is incredibly deliberate.

The Theological Possibilities of the Solidarity Dividend

Though not framed theologically, McGhee offers good news that resembles Tran's depiction of communities who share in the economy of God. Throughout the book, she weaves in compelling stories of people joining together across color lines in what she calls a "solidarity dividend" to create new ways of flourishing for everyone.[139] McGhee recommends filling the pool of public goods and making them available to everyone while also recognizing that there is not a one-size-fits-all economic solution.[140] In other words, in the effort to create flourishing for all, particular attention must be paid to groups of people who are starting from the point of generational oppression and exploitation. Her suggestions stand in contrast to Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith's findings of meritocracy in *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*:

> The contemporary Evangelical perspective, like that of its ancestors, is one that strongly supports a laissez-faire capitalism. Individuals should be free to pursue their own ends, and rewards should be distributed based on effort. A meritocracy is both a goal and what America already is. As a result 'Most Americans believe that opportunity for economic advancement is widely available, the economic outcomes are determined by individuals' efforts and talents (or their lack) and that in general economic inequality is fair.'[141]

In her research and interviews, McGhee also discovered that in order to reach the solidarity dividend, the zero-sum narrative must be replaced with narratives that demonstrate "that we truly

[139] Ibid., 128-130, 271.

[140] Ibid., 271.

[141] Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 110. Authors reference James R. Kluegel and Eliot R. Smith, *Beliefs about Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be* (Hawthorne: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986), 37.

do need each other."[142] She urges the American public to practice more truth telling and work together to begin writing a new story.[143]

While clearly concerned about the economic disparities and exploitation of racial capitalism, McGhee appears less concerned than Tran about drawing sharp distinctions between identarian antiracism and political economic antiracism. Tran's disparagement of the work of identarianism distracts the reader with the perplexing work of trying to untangle something that cannot be untangled. Alternatively, McGhee effectively exposes the interrelatedness of identarianism and the political economy and highlights more clearly the ways that all suffer in current U.S. conditions. Tran emphasizes how capitalism exploits and racializes non-white populations, but he does not frequently elaborate on the negative impacts that racial capitalism has on the white population. Because of this, Tran's white readers might be less compelled to participate in the divine economy than McGhee's white readers would be compelled to aim for a solidarity dividend. In other words, the whites in Tran's framework might be motivated more by compassion and benevolence,[144] while McGhee motivates through the narratives of mutuality and communal flourishing.[145] Like King's "inescapable network of mutuality," white people also need the healing that comes from the solidarity dividend McGhee proposes.[146]

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[142] McGhee, *The Sum of Us*, 271.

[143] Ibid.

[144] One of Tran's respondents asks, "Does Redeemer's microecology build economic power for those it seeks to serve, and if not, is Redeemer's microecology just benevolent capitalism?" Aaron Stauffer, "Attuning the Church, Debating What Lies Beyond Racial Capitalism," *Perspectives on Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism: Symposium Essays*, January 6, 2021, accessed August 2, 2022, https://politicaltheology.com/attuning-the-church-debating-what-lies-beyond-racial-capitalism/.

[145] In Tran's framework of God's economy, I believe he is ultimately after mutual flourishing shared in the life of God. What I am noticing here are the different methods that he and McGhee use. I am concerned that readers unattuned to mutuality will seek to embody his work primarily through charitable actions.

[146] King, "Letter From Birmingham Jail."

As mentioned above, Tran makes an incarnational argument for participation in the divine economy that is fairly devoid of trinitarian rootedness. He affirms that Christ is the image of God, which is true (Colossians 1:15-20), yet for Tran, the incarnation of Jesus itself reveals this image rather than a trinitarian casting and imaging of Jesus's life, death, resurrection, ascension, and gifting of the Spirit. Focusing primarily on the incarnation leaves less room for the mutuality and indwelling of the Trinity.

The downward movement of the incarnation has been used to construct a series of sendings that has historically been problematic for the church's relationship with the world. David Fitch and Geoffrey Holsclaw describe their view of incarnation-centered mission as an ongoing event: "the Incarnation of God into history continues in the Father and the Son sending the Spirit as an extension of the Son's presence through the church–the Body of Christ."[147] This view of mission subordinates the Spirit below the Father and the Son, which can lead the church to view itself above the world. In striving to embody this incarnational approach, Christians can become unidirectional or hierarchical—*we are the hands and feet of Jesus bringing all the goods to the poor*. Tran does not cast his argument in these terms, but incarnational ministry often has become patronizing "hands and feet-ism" in Western Christianity. There is little to no mutuality in this approach, as the poor are regarded as having nothing to offer the greater community.

Furthermore, some interpret an incarnational passage like Philippians 2:5-11 as the call to become poor themselves. While some Christians have done humbling and significant work in this regard, I wonder what it would look like if the Trinity informed humanity's relationships with one another. What if the poor were not people to become or recipients of the things the

[147] David E. Fitch and Geoffrey Holsclaw, "Mission amid Empire: Relating Trinity, Mission, and Political Formation," *Missiology: An International Review* 41.4 (2013): 396.

wealthy assume they desire, but people with gifts to offer that contributed to the flourishing of the whole community?[148] And what if we were not content with joining the poor but changing structures so that no one has to be poor in the first place? It is possible that new arrangements of social and economic human relationships could come closer to humanity bearing the image of God.[149] As I will explore in Chapter Three, McGhee's solidarity dividend that focuses on communal flourishing might be closer to a vision of the communal *imago Dei* (image of God) than Tran offers.

Christian Racial Justice and Christian Racial Reconciliation

Whatever I had read as a child about the saints had thrilled me. I could see the nobility of giving one's life for the sick, the maimed, the leper. But there was another question in my mind. Why was so much done in remedying the evil instead of avoiding it in the first place? Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves, but to do away with slavery?"

– Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage*, 1948[150]

Come, all of you and gather around the table.
Bring with you the heavy luggage society has unfairly packed for you,
the bags overflowing with barriers you have somehow ingeniously figured out how to navigate.

Or if your bags are a bit less heavy,
or are filled to the brim with privilege passed down like an heirloom,
bring them too.

[148] In this, I do not want to be misunderstood as disparaging the significance of the incarnation and the call to solidarity with the poor. In Jesus's poverty and suffering, he embodied ultimate solidarity with humanity. Many Christians in history have imitated Christ in this manner (e.g. St. Francis, St. Clare, Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day). There are other Christians, however, who have heeded the call to share generously with others while not becoming impoverished themselves. In Luke and Acts, there are calls to sell all possessions (Luke 14:33; 18:22) and calls to share possessions while supporting others with the gifts one has received (Luke 3:10-14; 8:1-3; 19:1-10) with an ultimate goal of mutual flourishing for all (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37).

[149] See "The Great Reversal of Luke-Acts."

[150] As quoted in Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and Enuma Okoro, *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 513.

Do not fret if you feel your cup is empty
or if your china is encrusted with gold,
for today, we'll treat this table as an equalizer.
Today, honest conversation and selfless action will be the food that nourishes us.

Before we sit, let us pass our stories around like bread.
Take a piece for yourself, but always be conscientious;
ensure there is enough to go around,
for some know,
there is not always enough to go around.

– Bobby LeFebre, "Table," 2020[151]

In this project, it is important to name the distinctions and relationship between Christian racial justice and Christian racial reconciliation, for the two are sometimes used interchangeably, justice is glossed over in the hasty pursuit of reconciliation, or reconciliation is misused as a Christian guise for togetherness, at best, and assimilation, at worst.[152]

Justice (and Love)

In identifying the complexities of justice, Miroslav Volf emphasizes in *Exclusion and Embrace* that there is not one universal definition of justice, as all people are coming from various social locations and perspectives.[153] To assert one's definition or understanding of God's justice over another's definition only creates more injustice and less peace. After critiquing three dominant approaches of dealing with clashing justices, Volf offers an alternative, "suggesting that agreement on justice depends on the will to embrace the other and that justice itself will be

[151] As quoted in Richard T. Lawson, III, "Too Deep for Words Alone: Principles for Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision," *Anglican Theological Review* 103.4 (2021): 468-469.

[152] In seeking to be concise, I will frequently use the terms of "justice" and "reconciliation" without the qualifier of "Christian" in this section, though they will remain rooted in the Christian faith and discourse regarding racism.

[153] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 195-201.

unjust if it does not become a mutual embrace."[154] In order for two parties to come to an agreement on justice, they must ultimately desire embrace; yet it is conversely true that genuine and lasting embrace necessitates justice.[155] Hak Joon Lee reflects on the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and describes how he held a similar interconnected dynamic between justice and love: "Justice receives from love a moral vision, horizon, and motivating energy for moral actions, just as love is concretized through justice in every relationship. Without the guidance of love, the norms of justice are abstract and fragmented."[156]

As people and groups explore justice together, Volf recommends the practice of "double vision" where one creates space in her or himself to see the world and their own self through the eyes and experiences of the other.[157] Volf points to the often used image of *Justitia,* blindfolded and holding scales in her left hand and a sword in her right hand, that gives Americans the sense that justice is impartial and takes no special interest in the people or matters of dispute.[158] Volf contrasts *Justitia* with God who is highly interested and partial, especially with those who have "no standing in society."[159] Love, relationship, and mercy give shape to God's justice.[160] Volf's call to double vision has informed the practices of listening in this project, especially the Listening Opportunities with three Black leaders who are connected to the St. Paul's community.

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[154] Ibid., 197.

[155] Ibid., 216.

[156] Hak Joon Lee, "Community, Mission, and Race: A Missiological Meaning of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Beloved Community for Racial Relationships and Identity Politics," in *Can "White" People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, eds. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 213.

[157] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 213, 220.

[158] Ibid., 220.

[159] Ibid., 221.

[160] Ibid., 220-221, 224.

Though these three individuals certainly do not represent the experiences of all people of color, by dedicating time to attentively listen, the St. Paul's community was disrupted out of our typical perspectives and invited to consider the complexities of racial justice.

Undefinable Justice

When I submitted my project proposal to the Institutional Review Board at Lipscomb University, my reviewer requested that I define racial justice for my participants. In light of the research I had done, I contested that there is not one definition of racial justice. Therefore, I designed my project in such a way that our congregation may begin discerning with a few Conversation Partners and through scripture what racial justice might look like in our time and place. I composed my purpose statement as follows:

> The purpose of this research project is to invite the members of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church to discern how God might be calling the congregation to understand and participate in racial justice in light of the social reversals found in Luke 14 and the practice of listening to three Black leaders from the community. Racial justice takes a variety of definitions in our society, and part of this project is to discern together what racial justice means for St. Paul's and the Jackson community.

A difficulty of this section of the paper is that I cannot offer one simple definition of racial justice. I will, however, share a few words and phrases that appear often in discourses related to participation in God's justice: demonstrate compassion (lit. "with-suffering") that seeks to understand; practice truth telling and truth listening; speak and embody apology; strive for mutuality; commit to alleviate suffering, no longer harm, and repair harms that have been done; eradicate oppressive and unjust systems; embrace and honor particularities while resisting assimilation; and seek flourishing for all. None of these delineate or encompass racial justice. Instead, they are practices and postures that have the capacity for discerning and creating a sense of justice together.

Racial Reconciliation as Togetherness?

In *I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation*, Chanequa Walker-Barnes begins her discussion on racial reconciliation in an unexpected place, the 1990s predominantly white evangelical men's movement, Promise Keepers (PK).[161] She tells how PK made their sixth promise the theme in 1996, "A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity" along with a push for greater diversity in leadership, conference speakers, and attendees.[162] At the 1997 "Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men" event on the National Mall, the PK founder announced the lofty "goal of eradicating racism in the church by 2000."[163] Though an admirable goal, PK experienced so much backlash and resistance that the movement essentially died.[164]

Walker-Barnes uses this example to indicate that the evangelical teaching of reconciliation is based on the idea that racial separateness, specifically in Christian worship, is the "problem" with the logical solution of "togetherness."[165] Many have heard Martin Luther King, Jr.'s often quoted critique of Christianity in America: "I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies, that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the

[161] Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices of My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 3-10. See also Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*.

[162] Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices*, 4.

[163] Ibid., 5.

[164] Ibid., 6.

[165] Ibid., 7.

most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hour, in Christian America."[166] In these understandings, the well-intended response is to bring people together in diverse worship gatherings.

In *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* by Jennifer Harvey, she examines the complexities of King's eleven o'clock statement. She considers the ways that many white Christians are troubled that they do not embody their own beliefs and values and move anxiously towards their vision of reconciliation, which is viewed as worshiping together.[167] She critiques what she calls the reconciliation paradigm: "This paradigm laments the reality of racial division (or separation) in our churches and faith communities. It sees this division as a primary indication of racism. This paradigm thus advocates a pursuit of just, racial togetherness across lines of racial difference as a central ethic in Christian life through which racism will be eradicated.[168] Harvey identifies the Civil Rights Movement's (CRM) efforts for integration as well as misunderstandings of King's usage of the term, "beloved community," as formative of contemporary white Christian efforts for racial reconciliation.[169]

Harvey leans on Black Power's distinctions between segregation and separation and reveals how integration bears more similarities to segregation than one might think.[170] In both segregation and integration, the power-holders of society (whites in this case) control who is in,

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[166] The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project, "Interview on 'Meet the Press' [17 April 1960]," Online King Records Access at Stanford University, accessed September 4, 2022, http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol05Scans/17Apr1960_InterviewonMeetthePress.pdf.

[167] Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 18.

[168] Ibid., 38.

[169] Ibid., 30-37.

[170] Ibid., 108. Harvey indicates that our current focus on diversity and inclusion might be analogous to some interpretations of the integration efforts of the CRM.

who is out, who may use and not use their voice, and how the integration occurs.[171] A problem, however, with many Christian communities that seek racial togetherness is that it very often occurs on the terms of the white constituency. Even the most racially aware and sensitive white Christians bear a social power that cannot easily be shed. Harvey posits separation as distinct from segregation and forced integration, because separation is the "self-chosen and empowered decision to separate and to create Black-only environments where Black people, rather than white people, are the decision makers."[172] Though the notion of separation might feel not-Christian, it appears to be a necessary component of healing and ultimate reconciliation in our current time and space.

Reconciliation in Full (and Not Yet)

It has been noted that the root of the word reconciliation means *to bring together again*, which prompts many people of color to question how we can bring together people (i.e., whites and Blacks in America) who were never together in the first place, at least, not ever on Western soil. In an eschatological sense, it is true that reconciliation entails togetherness or communion. Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice affirm in *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace, and Healing* that Christian reconciliation is moving *towards* something, and that something involves all of us, who were formerly far off from God and one another, eventually sharing in full communion together gathered in the life of God.[173] God is the ultimate reconciler

[171] Ibid., 106-107.

[172] Ibid., 107, 103. The Black Power movement started from this notion of separateness, which they defined as the "particularist ethic."

[173] Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace, and Healing, Resources for Reconciliation* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2008), 26, 33, 58, 69; Walker-Barnes also offers a definition of racial reconciliation cast in eschatological terms, "Racial reconciliation is part of God's ongoing and eschatological mission to restore wholeness and peace to a world broken by systemic injustice." Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices*, 10-11.

of all things.[174] Reconciliation is God's gift to humanity and creation to receive and participate.[175] The fact that reconciliation belongs to and is given by God in God's abundant economy is truly good news. Even in the grimmest of circumstances, we can have hope in God's Spirit of reconciliation who is always moving ahead and beyond what humans can imagine.[176]

Though we may have immense hope that God can pour out the gift of unexpected and unimagined reconciliation, Katongole and Rice also speak about reconciliation as a journey that will not be complete until the eschaton.[177] Until humanity is able to share in full communion with one another and God, there is justice work to be done, such as compassionate listening, apology, repair, space for particularity, and efforts for communal flourishing. Justice and reconciliation appear to work cyclically as they mutually inform and shape the next iteration of the other. Reconciliation is a work in progress and entails a variety of temporary arrangements until God's reconciliation comes in full. Miroslav Volf considers, "The crucial question, therefore, is not how to accomplish the final reconciliation. … but *what resources we need to live in peace in the absence of the final reconciliation*."[178]

Katongole and Rice offer a story that seems instructive for the Promise Keepers example above. They tell of a woman named Angelina Atyam whose fourteen-year-old daughter was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda in 1996.[179] Instead of perpetuating

[174] 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

[175] Katongole and Rice, *Reconciling*, 43.

[176] The communion and reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles that God's Spirit enacts in Acts 10 is a paradigmatic narrative for God's reconciling work.

[177] Katongole and Rice, *Reconciling*, 47.

[178] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 109, emphasis original.

[179] Katongole and Rice, *Reconciling*, 23.

the cycle of violence and revenge, Atyam and some other mothers formed the Concerned Parents' Association and offered unconditional forgiveness to the captors.[180] Though I do not know Atyam's full story, I suspect that the peaceful request for the return of the kidnapped children within the context of unconditional forgiveness did not entail Atyam and her daughter now living in full communion with the kidnappers. From one angle, the daughter, who now bears deeply inscribed trauma, should not be expected to break bread with her captors, no matter how repentant her captors appear to be. While communion is the vision of the eschaton, it seems as though the expression of reconciliation for Atyam and her daughter is the commitment to forgive and not retaliate. Reconciliation in this instance likely does not involve a shared and trusting life together (yet).[181]

Though many white people might feel like a story about an African woman's daughter being kidnapped from her is extreme compared to racism today in the U.S., the story is more analogous to our current context than some would care to admit. Full communion is the *telos* of Christian reconciliation, but it is harmful to expect people who have been, and continue to be, systematically oppressed to gather in meaningful fellowship with those who either actively or passively participate in oppression. Just as Angelina and her daughter should never be pressured

[180] Ibid., 37.

[181] In the section, "Paradise and the Affliction of Memory" in *Exclusion and Embrace* (131-140), Volf wrestles with the popular Christian notion of "forgive and forget." He wonders if it is possible for the past to fully be redeemed without some level of forgetting, "As long as we remember the injustice and suffering we will not be whole, and the troubling and unanswerable 'open question' that craves resolution in an impossible harmony will keep resurfacing" (134). Yet, to forget too soon, is to run the risk of further harm to the victims, "The memory of sin must be kept alive for a while, as long as it is needed for repentance and transformation to occur." Volf eventually works forward to conclude that in the final redemption, the last act must be nonremembering. Until then, some level of memory will be and must be kept intact, "as long as the Messiah has not come in glory, for the sake of the victims, we must keep alive the memory of their suffering; we must know it, we must remember it, and we must say out loud for all to hear. … For ultimately, forgetting the suffering is better than remembering it, because wholeness is better than brokenness, the communion of love better than the distance of suspicion, harmony better than disharmony. We remember now in order that we may forget then; and we will forget then in order that we may love without reservation" (138-139). For Miroslav Volf's expanded reflections and argument, see *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006).

to share life with anyone associated with the LRA, white Christians need to be more mindful of the safety and trust necessary to gather in community. There is simply too much racial justice work to be done that involves reparation, liberation, healing, and building trust to expect the communion and togetherness of reconciliation to occur at this time. Certainly, some pockets of multiracial communities are finding ways to worship and share life together, but that is often the exception and not the norm. Therefore, I have chosen to use the language of racial justice instead of racial reconciliation in this project. If racial reconciliation was placed on a continuum that is a mile long, we might be at the half inch mark with many steps of justice to be taken between here and the end.[182]

While recognizing that racial reconciliation is not the immediate vision, I do not want to be misinterpreted as dismissing its importance. *God will reconcile all things*, and I look forward to the day when all of humanity and creation can share in pure communion together with God. Likewise, in deconstructing the reconciliation paradigm, Jennifer Harvey is not belittling of reconciliation itself, "One reason why I am eager to demonstrate the problems with the reconciliation paradigm, and argue instead for a reparations paradigm, is precisely because reconciliation *is so desirable*."[183] She consistently affirms her longings for deep community across all kinds of differences. Harvey's proposal of a reparation paradigm involves work in three areas: understanding race as a social construct while also recognizing it as a pervasive reality in American society, "insist[ing] on a particularist ethic…that acknowledges our real differences as the only places from and through which we can understand and reconfigure our

[182] In naming this reality, I do not want to be mistaken as advocating for the often-critiqued approach of gradualism. It seems as though there is a difference between gradualism so that "no one gets hurt," and the recognition that there is so much racial justice and repair work that needs to occur that we cannot be naive in thinking that substantial change will come quickly.

[183] Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 37, emphasis original.

relationships to one another," and demonstrating apology by seeking to repair unjust structures and forming a strategy for "ceasing to harm again."[184]

Individualism and Racial Justice and Reconciliation

Due to the pervasive influence of evangelicalism in the U.S., it is important to name another key element that shapes prevalent understandings of racial justice and reconciliation. Walker-Barnes identifies that the evangelical emphasis on the individual's personal relationship with God translates to individuals seeking racial reconciliation only at the interpersonal level instead of the systemic level.[185] In other words, as long as one is being friendly (or not being outwardly unkind) to people of color, one is doing the work of reconciliation. For many evangelicals, any structural or systemic ills are considered matters of the government. Walker-Barnes rightfully presses back against this approach, "Indeed, womanists reject the outright notion that reconciliation can be reduced to interpersonal relationships because we are fully aware that *power* structures relationships. We refute the notion that mere intercultural contact will reduce prejudice and increase harmony."[186] Therefore, "Any reconciliation that does not liberate and heal the oppressed from the consequences of oppression is not reconciliation at all."[187] For anyone who has suffered and/or continues to suffer grave injustices and stifling oppression, reconciliation is not possible without the oppressors (regardless of being active or passive oppressors) actively working to repair harms that have been done and changing societal

[184] Ibid., 146-147, 124.

[185] Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices*, 8. See also Emerson and Smith's white evangelical tool-kit of accountable freewill individualism, relationalism, and antistructuralism. Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Race*, 76-80.

[186] Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices*, 14-15.

[187] Ibid., 183.

conditions so that all people may flourish. Simply worshiping in the same space will not bring racial healing and justice, as Thurman attests from his work with the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples.[188]

The Individual as the Image of God?

In reading a variety of sources for this research project, it has struck me how often Christian writers on antiracism issue the call "to regard each person as bearing the image of God."[189] As an example, Episcopal priest Kelly Brown Douglas reflects this pattern when she utilizes Daniel Day Williams's definition of justice, "'God's justice is manifest in [God] working to put down the unrighteous, expose idols, show mercy, and achieve reconciliation in the new order which expresses [human beings'] dignity as the bearer of the divine image.' God's justice means a restoration of the sacred dignity of all people. This begins with the crucified class of

[188] Kipton Jensen, "The Growing Edges of Beloved Community: From Royce to Thurman and King," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 52.2 (2016): 246.

[189] Some examples from my research: "Moreover, racial reconciliation must take up the even more difficult work of restoring the capacity of racial/ethnic minorities to view themselves as being made in the image of God who want us to delight in the color purple." Walker-Barnes, *I Bring the Voices*, 184. In Heather McGhee's phone interview with Jim Wallis, "We Christians, in fact—British and American—were the ones who decided that we couldn't do to Indigenous people and kidnapped Africans what we were doing, if they were indeed people made in the image of God. So, we said they weren't. They weren't humans made in the image of God. What we did is we threw away *imago Dei*. We threw it away to justify what we were doing." McGhee, *The Sum of Us*, 248. Adam Russell Taylor's grounds the first two on his list of beatitudes for beloved community, equality and radical welcome, on the basis of individuals bearing the image of God. Taylor, *A More Perfect Union*, 60, 120, 159. David P. Leong, "Homelessness is about particular people created in the divine *imago Dei*, beloved with dignity, beauty, and agency." David P. Leong, *Race and Place: How Urban Geography Shapes the Journey to Reconciliation* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2017), 118. John M. Perkins, "When we realize that we bear God's image and that He lives in us, we want to draw closer to Him—and to His love. As His love grows in us, it overflows to others. We feel more of His love for others with the knowledge that He bore our sins and the sins of the world. His identification with us and our identification with Him make His love through us go out to the pain of others. As we bear that pain, it becomes redemptive to the person who is suffering. Our joy is filled in the fact that we can identify and empathize with that pain. Our ability to endure that pain stretches. We take His cross upon us. His burden is easy and the yoke is light. And through this we've expanded our ability to carry pain. That's why the disciples could say that they counted it a joy to suffer shame for His name. That's what being incarnational is about." John M. Perkins, *Dream With Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 94. Hak Joon Lee, "In particular, racism negates the core moral teachings of the Bible: the *imago Dei* (the source of human dignity) and the freedom, equality, and kinship of humanity. It violates the transcendental worth, equality, and interdependence of humanity intended by God." Lee, "Community, Mission, and Race," 215.

people."[190] While there are helpful components of justice offered here, Douglas and others appear to make the case for racial justice from an individual conception of the image of God, especially when descriptors such as dignity and worth are employed. I will explore this more theologically in Chapter Three, but for now, it might be sufficient to ask: How does an individual bear the image of the Triune God who exists and creates humanity as a divine community of one?

In my critique, I want to clarify that it is not harmful or heretical for Christians to encourage other Christians to treat each person with kindness, love, dignity, and respect because each one bears the image of God. Understandably, scriptures such as Matthew 25:31-46 and Hebrews 13:1-2 have given shape to the directive to treat others as bearers of the image of God. I can see why Christians have sought to leverage the practice of Christian reverence and honor of God for the sake of racial justice and reconciliation, and I suspect this approach has done significant good. It seems as though fearing and reverencing the presence of God in a person, at the least, has the potential to give someone pause before they say or do a harmful thing to another human being. Particularly in evangelicalism's proclivity for fearing God, this might be a decent strategy.

I wonder, however, if the approach of individual human beings bearing the image of God ultimately ends up undermining efforts of antiracism. As Walker-Barnes notes above, racial reconciliation in this approach pertains to individual interactions. One at a time, the individual seeks to love and respect other racialized individuals as one encounters them. And, it turns out, this does not often occur in many racially and ethnically divided communities in America. In

[190] As quoted in Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015), 197.

order to make significant progress using this approach, a person would need to drastically alter their geographical, social, and economic patterns (which is certainly not a bad suggestion). Furthermore, in order to regard another person as a bearer of the image of God, it does not necessitate a meaningful encounter. A person can look from a distance and be mindful of God's presence in the other while remaining distanced. It also seems as though the notion of the individual created in God's image has the potential to create color blindness, as people seek only to see God in the other and nothing particular or unique about the person.

As it has often played out, "treating" another person as an image bearer has had less to do with actively working to create conditions of liberation and flourishing and more to do with avoiding any words or actions that would offend the presence of God in the other. If we view the other person as bearing the image of God, and if that God is understood as a fully self-sufficient and self-contained God, then there is little to draw one near the other. The all-powerful God in another person does not need help, right? And if this God resides in the other person and also resides separately and completely in me, then there is little reason for interaction and mutuality. We do not need or desire one another. An individualistic conception of the image of God permits passivity.

Imaging God at the Table

I want to consider how the work of racial justice and reconciliation might change when one recalls that humankind was created by and in the image of the Divine community for the sake of community (Genesis 1:26-27). As Christians, bearing the image of the triune God entails seeking God's Spirit in order to remain open to the other, make space for mutual self-offering and receiving, and seek the unity of differentiation. Womanist scholar, Ineda P. Adesanya, puts racial justice in trinitarian terms:

> Like perichoresis, communality embodies a spirit of togetherness, cooperation, solidarity and interdependence that exists among members of a beloved community. The indigenous characteristic of African-American believers reflects an authentic holism that acknowledges the importance of the whole community and the interdependence of its individual members.[191]

Here, it might be helpful to use fifteenth century Andreĭ Rublev's icon entitled *The Trinity* or *Hospitality of Abraham* (see figure 2.1) to pull together how I conceive of the Trinity with the title of this paper, "Table of Belonging."

Figure 2.1: *The Trinity* by Andreĭ Rublev (approximately 1430 CE)[192]

The icon depicts the unity of the Trinity in three similar appearing divine figures gathered around the table while also maintaining their own distinctions. Though scholars make various interpretations of the icon, many believe that the Father is on the left in the more translucent robe, the Son is in the middle, and the Holy Spirit is on the right.[193] The front of the table with the chalice remains open, and it is frequently postulated that the rectangle on the front once held

[191] Ineda P. Adesanya, "The Ideal Beloved Community: The Perichoretic Nature of the Trinity Reflected in The Communal Nature of African-American Believers as a Qualitative Model for the Ideal Beloved Community," *American Baptist Quarterly* 35.2 (2016): 139.

[192] Andreĭ Rublev, *The Trinity*, Art in the Christian Tradition, Vanderbilt University Divinity Library, accessed September 30, 2022, https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=58465.

[193] *The Living God: A Catechism for the Christian Faith*, vol. 1, trans. Olga Dunlop (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 62.

a mirror for the viewer to see him or herself as a guest at the table. Orthodox priest and scholar, Andrew Louth, takes notice of the mutually respecting, yielding, and affirming gestures of the three figures as a demonstration of the doctrine of *perichoresis*.[194]

If one considers Genesis 18:1-15 as inspiration for this icon, the table and figures depict Abraham's offering of a meal under the Oaks of Mamre to the three visitors named in the text as "the Lord." Perhaps more than any other place in scripture, this text communicates the mystery of the three-in-one God, as it moves fluidly between the plural and singular. The table in Genesis 18 is the location where Abraham, Sarah, and their servants lavishly host the Lord *and* where the Lord hosts Abraham and Sarah with the good news that she will soon bear a son (though Sarah is understandably unsure if this is *good* news). The gifts of the day are offered mutually.

The table also appears in other texts of the Bible, particularly in Luke-Acts. Chapter Three chapter explores Luke's use of the table, but it is helpful here to note that Jesus disrupts ancient social conventions of the table and transforms it into a place of boundary transgression, intimate communion, and belonging. Furthermore, Jesus rearranges the table and establishes himself as the host while simultaneously being one who serves (Luke 22:7-30). Specifically in the Dwelling in the Word passage selected for this project, Luke 14, Jesus unseats the religiously and economically powerful Pharisees from the host position and rearranges the table in alignment with the kingdom of God. When God is host of the table, there is plenty of food to go around, no person is honored above another, and those that have been most excluded from society are brought near. The invitation to God's table remains open to all, but those who continue to be attached to privilege and possessions might miss out. If the communion of Jews and Gentiles in Acts 10 and the ensuing discernment around table practices is brought into the

[194] Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 31.

frame, the table is also a location where cultural and ethnic distinctions remain. The table does not serve as a place of assimilation or homogeneity. Rather, God invites all people to commune exactly as they are. Theologically as well, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not lose their distinctions as they dwell in communion as one.

Therefore, my research has revealed that the image of God is at stake in antiracism discourses. In the context of this project, God's table of belonging is one way to imagine humanity bearing together the image of the triune God. The table is the place where God rearranges humanity around God's hosting and abundance and where human relationships are not shaped by scarcity and exploitation. At God's table, humanity can mutually care for one another and relinquish the self-interest and fear that often keep people apart. In this regard, we are all swept up in bearing the image of God together and need proximity and mutuality with people who are different from us. I do not bear the image of God on my own. The stranger I pass on the street does not bear the image of God on their own. Instead, we bear God together through meaningful encounters that seek the good and flourishing of the other.[195]

As we look around our neighborhoods, it is not too hard to see that humanity is far from bearing the image of God that God created. We have created systems of exploitation and social stratification that need to be dismantled as we seek to bear the image of God collectively. We have work to do when it comes to removing the barriers we have put in place that keep people from sharing in God's table of belonging and abundance. If we use the image of a table, people of color in the U.S. often find themselves so far from the white-dominated and hosted table that it is difficult to imagine pulling up a seat. A call to white Christians, therefore, is to relinquish

[195] While the image of God is not made explicit, Ephesians 2:11-22 reinforces this notion of God's rearrangement of all of humanity (both Jews and Gentiles) as the household or dwelling place of God.

our hosting of the table and our white imaging of the godhead and to pull up a seat alongside our neighbors at God's generous table of belonging. "Is this the table we desire to join?" is the question in Luke 14 and continues to pursue white Christians today, if we have ears to hear.

Two Key Components of The Episcopal Church's Attempts at Racial Justice

The Beloved Community is a realistic vision of an achievable society, one in which problems and conflict exist, but are resolved peacefully and without bitterness. In the Beloved Community, caring and compassion drive political policies that support the worldwide elimination of poverty and hunger and all forms of bigotry and violence. The Beloved Community is a state of heart and mind, a spirit of hope and goodwill that transcends all boundaries and barriers and embraces all creation. At its core, the Beloved Community is an engine of reconciliation. This way of living seems a long way from the kind of world that we have now, but I believe it is a goal that can be accomplished through courage and determination, and through education and training if enough people are willing to make the necessary commitment.

– Coretta Scott King, *My Life, My Love, My Legacy*, 2017[196]

Beloved Community is the community that loves as God intends: where truth is told and hierarchies of human value are dismantled, where each person and culture is protected and honored as an equally beloved part of the human family of God, and where we counter human selfishness—the true root of sin and racism—with the selfless love of Jesus.

– The Episcopal Church, "Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are," 2017[197]

Beloved Community

As mentioned in the above subsection, "Racial Reconciliation as Togetherness?," Jennifer Harvey indicates that there has been a misunderstanding in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s usage of the term, "beloved community." Because the Episcopal Church utilizes the phrase

[196] As quoted in Taylor, *More Perfect Union*, 57.

[197] The Episcopal Church, "Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are: An Episcopal Resource for Individuals, Congregations & Communities Seeking Racial Justice, Healing and Reconciliation," updated May 2022, accessed December 18, 2022, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/05/Becoming-Beloved-Community-Where-You-Are_2022.pdf.

"Becoming Beloved Community" to capture the denomination's vision and intent for racial justice and reconciliation, it seems appropriate to explore the history and uses of the term.[198] Put succinctly, beloved community is "a human community built on [or ordered by] love."[199] It is not always limited to Christian community, though Christian understandings of love are certainly found within beloved community. Scholars are quite varied regarding how King and others have intended the term, which gives credence to Harvey's observation of its misconstrual since the CRM. What is offered here is a brief overview of beloved community with the recognition that the phrase deserves its own volume.

Josiah Royce

Contrary to popular belief, King was not the first in history to speak of beloved community. The phrase is traced to the 1913 publication, *The Problem of Christianity: The Christian Doctrine of Life,* of American philosopher, Josiah Royce (1855-1916), which he understands as "the principle of all principles" and the "saving absolute."[200] Influenced largely by G.W.F Hegel, Royce was one of the earliest proponents of absolute idealism in America and is considered a personalist, even if he did not identify himself as a personalist.[201] In response to WWI, Royce was one of the founders of the pacifist organization, The Fellowship of

[198] The Episcopal Church, "Becoming Beloved Community," accessed June 2, 2022, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community/.

[199] Jensen, "Growing Edges," 242; Walter E. Fluker, "They Looked for a City: A Comparison of the Idea of Community in Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 18.2 (Fall 1990): 39.

[200] Ibid., 240.

[201] Kelly A. Parker and Scott Pratt, "Josiah Royce," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed October 3, 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/royce/; Gary Herstein, "The Roycean Roots of the Beloved Community," *The Pluralist* 4.2 (2009): 98-99.

Reconciliation, where some of their earliest publications utilized the phrase beloved community.[202]

Royce was influenced somewhat by Calvinism, though he was not a proponent of organized religion and creeds and did not belong to any particular church.[203] Despite his resistance to church, scholars conclude from his writings that "it is not the incarnation of God in Jesus but rather the incarnation of the Spirit in the living church that Royce emphasized: 'the Church, rather than the person of the founder, ought to be viewed as the central idea of Christianity.'"[204] For Royce, this "living church" is not necessarily the institutional or organized church. Royce relied heavily on the apostle Paul for his imagination of the "graced community" and "maintained that only the Christian model of the loyal community successfully combines the true spirit of universal interpretation with an appreciation of the 'infinite worth' of the individual as a unique member of the ideal Beloved Community, the Kingdom of Heaven."[205] Royce viewed the beloved community as somewhat synonymous with the Kingdom of Heaven, yet it is unclear what Royce envisioned regarding that kingdom. Royce did not often speak explicitly of the Holy Spirit, but he did believe there was some sort of divine spirit guiding and enacting the beloved community. In other words, for Royce, beloved community is more than human beings joining together for a common cause. There is a divine empowerment and reality to it.

[202] Taylor, *More Perfect Union*, 58.

[203] Parker and Pratt, "Josiah Royce;" Herstein, "Roycean Roots," 97.

[204] Parker and Pratt, "Josiah Royce."

[205] Ibid.

Royce believed that one's loyalty to the beloved community and resistance to the selfishness of the individual was a transformative or transfiguring experience, hence his "saving absolute" description of beloved community.[206] When one renounces their selfishness for the greater cause of the community, one transforms from individual to person.[207] Although Royce did not use the term *agape* as some others have used in conjunction with beloved community, Royce understood loyalty as the manifestation of love: "by loyalty I mean the *practically devoted love of an individual for a community*."[208] For Royce, the beloved community excludes no one and "The overflowing love of and for the community of Christian lovers is so great that it would betray the spirit of that community not to bring those who are not yet members of the community within its fold."[209] It is clear that Royce emphasized inclusion, however, scholars are critical of the ways that Royce was not overt regarding the inclusion of women and people of color.[210]

Howard Thurman

Howard Thurman is also known for using the phrase, and it appears the most explicitly in his 1966 essay, "Desegregation, Integration, and the Beloved Community."[211] Nonexclusionism was fundamental for Thurman's conception of beloved community, and he believed that the genius of nonexclusionism, or "fellowship," as he often said, could be found in Christianity.[212]

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[206] Jensen, "Growing Edges," 241.

[207] Ibid., 242.

[208] Herstein, "Roycean Roots," 96, emphasis original.

[209] Ibid., 98.

[210] Rufus Burrow, Jr., "The Beloved Community: Martin Luther King, Jr and Josiah Royce," *Encounter* 73.1 (Fall 2012): 49.

[211] Jensen, "Growing Edges," 249.

[212] Ibid., 246.

Like Royce, Thurman's beloved community was enabled by a divine source and driven by his foundational theological belief "that God is opposed to whatever divides and separates."[213] In 1971, Thurman identified the beloved community as demonstrating a "harmony that transcends all diversities and in which diversity finds its richness and significance."[214] Thurman critiqued the legal efforts for integration for being insufficient for creating "dynamic integration" or beloved community. Instead, he believed that "Meaningful experiences of integration between people are more compelling than the fears, the inhibitions, the dogmas, or the prejudices that divide. If such unifying experiences can be multiplied over an extended time, they will be able to restructure the entire fabric of the social context."[215] This assertion was shaped largely by his experiences in The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, a place where community and dynamic integration was freely chosen and not brought about through policy or coercion. Thurman maintained the sense that humans were personally responsible for bringing beloved community to pass, yet it is also something that manifests itself beyond human efforts.[216]

Martin Luther King, Jr.

One of the first instances of Martin Luther King, Jr. using beloved community was in his speech at the end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in December 1956: "It is true that as we struggle for freedom in America we will have to boycott at times. But we remember that as we boycott that the boycott is not an end within itself. … [The] end is reconciliation; the end is

[213] Howard Thurman, *The Growing Edge* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1956), 65.

[214] Jensen, "Growing Edges," 246.

[215] Ibid., 250.

[216] Ibid., 251.

redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community."[217] King's beloved community utilizes the practice of nonviolent resistance to rearrange and dismantle power relations and unjust structures envisioned by the kingdom of God.[218] He maintained that "love is the most durable power in the world."[219] Scholars have frequently asserted that "the concept of beloved community is the chief regulating principle of King's theological social ethics."[220] Hak Joon Lee describes King's notion of beloved community:

> Informed by his Christian faith (especially Jesus' Sermon on the Mount), King's idea of racial reconciliation is predicated on a just, equal, interdependent relationship among different races through the confession of sins, implementation of justice, forgiveness, and love. King's idea of the beloved community envisions a fully reconciled community that overcomes all sorts of conflicts, alienations, and enmities, including race.[221]

King later termed beloved community as "the great world house,"[222] indicating that King did not conceive of this community as exclusively residing within the church, though he did believe that beloved community was thoroughly Christological.

At times, beloved community for King seemed eschatological and only partially achievable in human history, and at other times he seemed quite hopeful that beloved community would be fully achievable at some point.[223] King's realism of the powers of human and societal sin was constantly held in tension with his belief that persons working in conjunction with God

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[217] Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 48.

[218] Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 80.

[219] Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 87.

[220] Burrow, "The Beloved Community," 44.

[221] Lee, "Community, Mission, and Race," 207, n. 1.

[222] Jensen, "Growing Edges," 253.

[223] Burrow, "Beloved Community," 44-45. See also Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 32.

can bring about beloved community.[224] Similar to Royce and Thurman, beloved community is ultimately God's working and cannot be done by humankind alone.[225] Lee's essay puts King's beloved community in missional terms by asserting that beloved community is ultimately the *missio Dei*, which "not only makes the communal-political engagement and social witness an integral—not optional—part of Christian mission but also delineates how Christians missiologically approach public issues."[226] Harvey utilizes James Cone's conclusion that King was closer to Malcom X than to white Christians to explain why contemporary white Christians often misunderstand and misappropriate King's beloved community: "To put it bluntly, few white Christians embrace Malcom X."[227] White Christians often desire the togetherness or inclusion of reconciliation without any of the uncomfortable socioeconomic relinquishment and rearrangement that must occur through justice.

Comparing Thurman and King

Both Thurman and King spoke of a triadic relationship between God, persons (individuals), and the world, yet the two conceived of them differently. Known for having a mystical side to his spirituality, Thurman's relationship between God and the individual (termed "the creative encounter") takes priority over the individual's relationship with the world or human society.[228] For Thurman, attending to the individual's inner spiritual life cultivates love and prepares her or him for community and the work of social transformation. Additionally,

[224] Burrow, "Beloved Community," 45.

[225] Lee, "Community, Mission, and Race," 210.

[226] Ibid., 207.

[227] Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 32-33.

[228] Fluker, "Looked for a City," 40, 44.

whatever the person seeks "without" (out in the world) may be found within, because "the beyond is within," which leads one to wonder if the person actually needs other human beings in order to experience the beloved community for Thurman.[229]

Regarding evil, Thurman identified that individuals have personal barriers to community, such as fear, deception, and hate, that must be overcome through spiritual discipline.[230] King saw evil as having both personal and social dimensions and named those evils as poverty, racism, and war.[231] Because evil was larger and more pervasive than the individual, King frequently emphasized the cooperation between persons and God and the gift of God's grace to collectively overcome these evils.[232] King believed that the triad between God, the person, and the world are in an equal and creative relationship, which creates the ideal human society, beloved community.[233] King resists seeing the public sphere as existing separate from the person and God, as the world is a location in which God also resides and takes concern.

Walter Fluker notes an important theological distinction between Thurman and King, which may provide even more context for their different triadic relationships, "Thurman's vision of ultimate reality is theocentric, while King's perspective is Christocentric."[234] Thurman sought to counter the anthropocentrism that was prevalent in Western theology and society by reorienting Christians towards a more cosmic God who orders and sustains all of life.[235] Though

[229] Ibid., 40-41.

[230] Ibid., 45.

[231] Ibid., 45-46.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid., 41.

[234] Ibid., 42.

[235] Ibid.

Thurman was a Christian, he was reluctant to speak of Jesus as God, and he did not often emphasize the trinitarian life of the Father, Son, and Spirit.[236] Thurman believed that encounters with the Divine could help a person realize their "inherent worth and dignity as a child of God."[237] He regarded worship as the religious experience that occurs between the individual and God and then is shared as a collective experience.[238] Thurman's heavy emphasis on the individual's identity being discovered in God alone works in similar ways as the notion of the individual bearing the image of God on their own. A person does not necessarily need community with others when they can find wholeness in a cosmic God. While Thurman intended for the realization of one's worth and dignity as a child of God to drive one into the world in love, it is possible that his dualism between God and the world ultimately undermined his hopes for fellowship.

For King, however, Christ was the centerpiece:

> Christ is the *source* of the norm of the beloved community. The redemptive love of God, revealed on the cross of Christ, is King's answer to the possibility of achieving community within history. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the symbol of the power of God and of the ultimate defeat of the forces which block the realization of community. The Holy Spirit is the continuing community creating reality that moves through history. Thurman, on the other hand, sees Jesus as an *exemplar* of the possibilities of the committed individual in the quest for community.[239]

Though Fluker names King's theological framework as Christocentric, his Christology is clearly trinitarian. The Father, Son, and Spirit are all present in Jesus's death and resurrection, and King depicts the cross as the ultimate showing of God's love and solidarity with humanity that put an

[236] Ibid., 46.

[237] Ibid., 46-47.

[238] Ibid., 48-49.

[239] Ibid., 42-43.

end to the sin of violence and age of death.[240] Viewing the cross in this regard has different implications than prevalent Western evangelical atonement theology that asserts that Jesus died on the cross to save individuals from their sins and, therefore, appease the wrath of God.[241] The cross for King is a place of joining, reconciliation, and ultimate defeat of the powers that seek to divide and oppress.

Also notice the contrast between King and Thurman. For Thurman, Jesus is simply an example of how a person may have personal devotion to God that empowers them for connection and community. For King, however, the Son and the Spirit are not simply demonstrating a model of community, they have created it through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and are continuing to create it anew. Because of the peace-making and reconciling capacities of the cross for King, the individual and the community need one another, and worship is "a social experience in which persons from all levels of life realize the oneness and unity of God and the human family."[242]

Hak Joon Lee maintains that "The idea of the beloved community as God's purpose reflects God's person and character….The idea of God's personhood is important in King's theology because only a person can enter fellowship and form a community."[243] Lee also traces King's emphasis on the human family of God to the African belief that a person becomes a person in the context of community and then later to Black Church's notion of "the parenthood of God and kinship of humanity."[244] Realizing one's identity is found in the community of the

[240] Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 85.

[241] Baker and Green, *Scandal of the Cross*, 32.

[242] Fluker, "Looked for a City,"48.

[243] Lee, "Community, Mission, and Race," 209-210.

[244] Ibid., 208-209.

human family that God creates, contrasts Thurman's notion of the person having an encounter with God and realizing they are a child of God. King's conception of human identity that is bound up within the larger identity of the body of Christ mobilizes the church in the world in ways that Thurman's theological construct falls short. For King, "beloved community depends on a theological, one might say ecclesiological, event. In other words, the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind radiates out from the fellowship of the faithful."[245] The great event of the cross remains at the center empowering the "new social space" of the beloved community.[246]

John M. Perkins and Christian Community Development Association

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movements, many organizations and churches have sought beloved community in a variety of forms. Most notably, evangelical pastor and activist, John M. Perkins, and his organization, Christian Community Development Association, have taught churches how to build beloved community with neighbors living in challenging conditions.[247] Born only eighteen months after King, Perkins endured similar experiences of racial oppression and was compelled to participate in efforts for building beloved community during the CRM. In the late 1960s Perkins began to notice the evangelical church's lack of participation in racial justice: "One of the greatest tragedies of the civil rights movement is that evangelicals surrendered their leadership in the movement by default to those with either a bankrupt theology or no theology at all, simply because the vast majority of Bible-believing

[245] Marsh, *Beloved Community*, 50.

[246] Ibid., 50.

[247] Perkins has been instrumental in shaping new monastic movements, such as The Simple Way community in Philadelphia, PA led by Shane Claiborne and the Rutba House in Durham, NC led by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 23-25, 79-80.

Christians ignored a great and crucial opportunity in history for genuine ethical action."[248] Perkins differs from many evangelicals, as he proclaims the good news of the gospel that pertains the whole person, not just one's spiritual standing before God.[249] In light of his own experiences under a burdensome economic system, Perkins has been passionate about improving the conditions of all who are pressed down and was instrumental in launching a number of ministries and initiatives to develop communities of flourishing.[250]

Beginning in 1960, Perkins and Vera Mae, his wife and partner in ministry, spent twelve years in the extremely impoverished town of Mendenhall, MS building their first community, Mendenhall Ministries.[251] The community included a day-care center, youth program, church, adult education program, thrift store, and health center. They also opened their facilities to civil rights activists and created greater voter access for the Black residents of Mendenhall.[252] In the early months of 1970, Perkins was jailed twice and beaten horrifically during his second jailing.[253] Rather than responding vengefully, Perkins compassionately saw what hatred had done to the white men who had beaten him, "On the floor of the Brandon Jail, I realized the extent of the damage that racism had inflicted on white people. I vowed never to hate white people. Instead, I made a commitment to work for reconciliation, to love white people even if they hated

[248] John M. Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1976), 99.

[249] Ibid., 103.

[250] Ibid., 117.

[251] John M. Perkins, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 14.

[252] John M. Perkins, *A Quiet Revolution: The Christian Response to Human Need* (Pasadena: Urban Family Publications), 70.

[253] Perkins, *Let Justice*, 125-162.

me."[254] Similar to the thesis of James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Perkins meditated on Jesus's astonishing forgiveness to the lynch mob that had tortured and murdered him and was able to find a way out of his own spiral of hatred for whites.[255] Perkins spoke of this as "a second conversion of love and forgiveness," as his desire for justice and liberation for the Black community became bound up with the liberation he believed white people needed.[256]

By the early 1970s, Mendenhall Ministries was thriving with the leadership of young adults who had grown up in the community and had learned from the Perkinses. Therefore, the Perkinses felt the freedom to move to Jackson, MS, where they started a similar ministry called Voice of Calvary Ministries (VCM).[257] It was in Jackson where their work became more visible and VCM was viewed as a model for Christian community development, especially for the ways that blacks and whites worked alongside one another for the betterment of their community.[258] Perkins's learnings in both Mendenhall and Jackson became the inspiration for a movement that eventually became known as the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) and was established in 1989.[259]

CCDA was founded on the three Rs of relocation, redistribution, and reconciliation along with other core components such as leadership development, listening to the community, being church-based, having a holistic approach, and empowerment in the Holy Spirit.[260] Though

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[254] Wayne Gordon and John Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods Whole: A Handbook for Christian Community Development* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2013), 23. Perkins, *Let Justice*, 158.

[255] Perkins, *Let Justice*, 194-196.

[256] Marsh and Perkins, *Welcoming Justice*, 36.

[257] Perkins, *Beyond Charity*, 15.

[258] Ibid., 15.

[259] Ibid., 17.

[260] Gordon and Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods*.

CCDA did not often use the term beloved community in early literature, these eight values work together to stimulate beloved community in hard-pressed neighborhoods. Perkins believes the three Rs offer "a social agenda more radical than any advanced by the Civil Rights movement. In Perkins's three Rs we find a trinity of disciplines that illuminates the areas where the Civil Rights movement failed to deliver on its most basic promises: solidarity with the poor, minority economic power, and racial reconciliation."[261]

The priority of and commitment to relocation sets CCDA apart from many other ministry efforts in economically strained communities. Informed by the incarnation, CCDA's relocation calls Christians to leave behind the comforts of suburban neighborhoods and become part of the community they hope to see transformed, "To put it another way, relocation transforms the pronouns *you* and *them*, *yours* and *theirs*, to *we*, *us* and *ours*."[262] Relocation invites a new view of the world, "a view from below."[263] CCDA does not always use missional vocabulary to speak about their work, but the relocators are trained to have the humble posture of learners, participants, and neighbors, rather than to show up seeing themselves as the saviors of a community. The hope is that relocators will become such a part of the community that they will seek the same kind of holistic flourishing for their neighbors as they would for themselves and their own families.[264] Living in the community and depending on the indigenous residents builds trust in ways that cannot occur when people commute into a neighborhood and volunteer for a

[261] Charles Marsh and John M. Perkins, *Welcoming Justice: God's Movement Toward Beloved Community*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 41. Marsh, *Beloved Community*, 174.

[262] Gordon and Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods*, 49.

[263] Marsh, *Beloved Community*, 174.

[264] Gordon and Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods*, 49.

few hours at a time.[265] Associated with the commitment to relocation, CCDA invites the indigenous residents of the neighborhood to be returners and remainers, so that the community may develop sustainable leadership from within.[266]

Perkins's view is that, "The Bible is irrevocably social … not by implication but by direct intention."[267] Therefore, the second foundation of CCDA, redistribution, focuses primarily on economic opportunity, the cultivation of justice, and observable changes in public policies.[268] The term redistribution is somewhat misleading, as some might assume it is about pouring money and resources into the community. While resources may be helpful, the leaders of CCDA clarify that the word exchange, reciprocity, or mutuality are better ways of understanding redistribution, because they "assume that everyone has something of value to contribute to the life of the community."[269] CCDA resists patronization and emphasizes receiving the gifts of loyalty, fragility, creativity, holiness, and leadership that are easily found in poor communities when people make the effort to know their neighbors as they would like to be known themselves.[270] Similar to Tran's description of Redeemer Community Church, "Perkins imagined the Christian community as a distinctive social order that models the redistribution of wealth in more demanding ways than any capitalist economy."[271]

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[265] Perkins, *Beyond Charity*, 32.

[266] Gordon and Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods*, 48.

[267] Marsh, *Beloved Community*, 169.

[268] Gordon and Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods*, 76-77; Marsh, *Beloved Community*, 175.

[269] Gordon and Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods*, 81.

[270] Marsh, *Beloved Community*, 176.

[271] Ibid., 175.

Perkins maintains that the first two practices of relocation and redistribution are key for building towards the third one, reconciliation. If Perkins could sum up the gospel in one word, it would be reconciliation, which occurs on several levels: people with God, people with people, and people groups with other people groups.[272] In one of his final books, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love*, Perkins critiques churches in the U.S. for not taking racial reconciliation seriously enough, while also recognizing that the church cannot achieve any sort of reconciliation without God.[273] Perkins defines "biblical reconciliation as the removal of tension between parties and the restoration of loving relationship," while emphasizing the practice of listening as one critical way of cultivating reconciliation.[274] Reconciliation must also involve those in power refusing further injustices and committing to right what has been made wrong.[275] Unlike many evangelical churches and movements, Perkins's understanding of reconciliation involves radical and costly actions rather than "feel-good" togetherness.[276]

While some might want to categorize Perkins's work under social or liberation theology, Perkins has remained committed to evangelicalism's emphasis on having a personal relationship with Jesus as one's motivation for seeking the healing of society.[277] Different from many evangelicals, however, he views the "Bible as the comprehensive divine plan of human liberation with resources for counter-cultural action and community building."[278] He believes that Jesus's

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[272] Gordon and Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods*, 62.

[273] John M. Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 16.

[274] Ibid., 17; Gordon and Perkins, *Making Neighborhoods*, 66-67.

[275] Marsh, *Beloved Community*, 176.

[276] Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 81.

[277] Marsh, *Beloved Community*, 181.

[278] Ibid., 181-182

message was explicitly economic, and the gospel intends for liberation in all forms, including spiritual, physical, economic, and social. He critiqued evangelical white Christians for their lack of attending to the whole gospel and maintained "that the only credible apologetic of the Christian faith is its capacity to heal the distressed earth and its broken communities."[279] Over time, Perkins began to describe the counter-cultural practices of the Christian community as "prophetic" and believed American capitalism was one of the greatest threats to the church.[280] Perkins's conception of beloved community appears to be more connected to Christian community than Royce, Thurman, and King. Perkins could not venture far into participating in racial justice and reconciliation efforts without talking about Jesus, and he could not venture far into proclaiming the gospel of Jesus without talking about racial justice and reconciliation. For him, the love of Christ shared in Christian community creates an "'an alternative Kingdom' amidst the harsh and unforgiving structures of the dominant social order."[281] That alternative kingdom, however, is not confined to a church building but emerges by the power of the Holy Spirit as people give their lives over to Christ's way of love.

The Episcopal Church

Some mainline denominations have also utilized beloved community as shorthand for their response to God's call of racial justice and reconciliation.[282] Beloved community first surfaced in official publications of The Episcopal Church at the 1994 General Convention. The

[279] Ibid., 186.

[280] Ibid., 180-181.

[281] Ibid., 186.

[282] The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. began using the phrase in 1999. Antiracism Committee of the Presbyterian Women Churchwide Coordinating Team, "Becoming the Beloved Community: Antiracism Resource Packet," 2010, accessed October 24, 2022, https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/becomingbeloved.short_.pdf.

convention passed a resolution entitled, "Establish Overcoming the Sin of Racism as a Priority in Parishes," stating,

> That in this Decade of Evangelism, we consider as an evangelical priority the overcoming of the sin of racism in our parishes, which sin prevents us from becoming the beloved community to which our Lord Jesus Christ calls us in the Baptismal Covenant; and urge that diocesan Commissions on Racism report to the Executive Council on the progress in these areas prior to the 72nd General Convention.[283]

The terminology was redeployed in 2016 when the first African American presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church in the U.S., the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, commissioned the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops to "advance the cause of the beloved community."[284] In May 2017, the House of Bishops and House of Deputies presented a vision entitled, "Becoming Beloved Community: The Episcopal Church's Long-term Commitment to Racial Healing, Reconciliation, and Justice."[285]

The 52-page report begins by naming the sin of white supremacy driven by the twin narratives of *anti-blackness* and *Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism*.[286] The next section of the document is entitled, "Defining the Beloved Community," though it is more of a brief review of Royce, Thurman, and King with no definition provided. The Episcopal Church's more condensed document entitled "Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are," offers the following definition:

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[283] The Archives of the Episcopal Church, "Acts of Convention: Resolution 1994-A047," accessed June 1, 2022, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=1994-A047.

[284] The Episcopal Church, "Report for the House of Bishops from Its Theology Committee: White Supremacy, the Beloved Community, and Learning to Listen," 2017: 1, accessed March 2, 2022, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/bbc_hob_theo_cmte_report_on_white_supremacy.pdf.

[285] The Archives of the Episcopal Church, "Reports to the 79th General Convention," 2018: 1086. accessed June 1, 2022, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/gc_reports/reports/2018/bb_2018-R050.pdf.

[286] The Episcopal Church, "Report: Beloved Community," 1-11.

> Beloved Community is the community that loves as God intends: where truth is told and hierarchies of human value are dismantled, where each person and culture is protected and honored as an equally beloved part of the human family of God, and where we counter human selfishness—the true root of sin and racism—with the selfless love of Jesus.[287]

The 2017 House of Bishops document next moves to ground beloved community theologically and missionally, "In Christ the entire cosmos is being reconciled to God, forming all creation into a beloved community. This great work of atonement is the mission of God, and the Church is called to participate in this mission."[288] From this assertion, TEC does not limit beloved community to the church alone. Beloved community is more cosmic in scope occurring anywhere the reconciling presence of God can be found.

The House of Bishops name the practice of listening as "an imperative first step toward beloved community" along with the importance of honest story-telling about ourselves as a denomination and nation.[289] About the practice of story-telling, the writers describe how, "One story leads to another story as a communal story gets told. Conversation leads to communion and, if it's deep enough, it also leads to conversion."[290] In addition to the promising ways that story-telling and listening transform neighbors into beloved community, the House of Bishops affirm the two sacraments of baptism and the eucharist as unifying and identity forming practices that can bring about reconciliation and healing.[291]

In the wake of the House of Bishops' document, TEC selected four ongoing commitments that are grounded in the baptismal covenant of the church: Telling the truth about

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[287] The Episcopal Church, "Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are."

[288] The Episcopal Church, "Report: Beloved Community," 15.

[289] Ibid., 15-19, 24-38.

[290] Ibid., 24.

[291] Ibid., 20-23.

our churches and race (truth-telling); Proclaiming the dream of beloved community (proclaiming); Practicing Jesus's way of healing love (formation); Repairing the breach in institutions and society (justice).[292] Several guiding questions accompany each of these four commitments, and it is clear that engagement with neighbors is necessary in the work of racial healing.

Conclusion

Though the individuals and groups who have employed the phrase beloved community have used a variety of words and images, the vision is essentially one of reconciliation and communion of all of humankind and creation with God. Not one person is to be excluded from beloved community. Therefore, beloved community does not only occur tucked away behind church walls. It is more all-encompassing and necessitates some sort of socio-political engagement in order to create just conditions for all. Beginning with Royce and advancing through TEC, the formation of beloved community is dependent on selflessness. For Christians, the cross enables and empowers humans to give up ourselves for the flourishing and union of all. It is through this act of relinquishing selfishness and choosing the greater good that persons discover their true identity. Lastly, beloved community is a completely joint endeavor between humankind and divine power. Humans cannot bring about beloved community entirely on our own, yet God does not bring it into existence without human participation.

Imperative First Step of Listening for Becoming Beloved Community

In chapter two of James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, he criticizes one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, Reinhold Niebuhr, for his failure to connect

[292] The Episcopal Church, "Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are."

the crucified Jesus to the lynchings of people of color.[293] Both the cross and the ills of racism were central themes of Niebuhr's work, but he never connected them in ways that were obvious to those in the Black community: "Despite all Niebuhr's writing and speaking about racism, he expressed no 'madness in his soul,' no prophetic outrage against lynching."[294] Cone concludes that Niebuhr's blindspot was born out of his complete lack of listening and friendship with Black activists and theologians: "Niebuhr, in contrast, slowed little or no interest in engaging in dialogue with blacks about racial justice, even though he lived in Detroit during the great migration of blacks from the South and in New York near Harlem, the largest concentration of blacks in America."[295] Niebuhr exposes how theology and practices are shaped by the voices one centralizes and the importance of listening to the oppressed for seeing God and the world more rightly.

The leaders of the Episcopal Church posit the first step for moving away from the sin of white supremacy is to listen to those who have been silenced as well as to God through the narratives of scripture and the liturgy, which is why this project incorporates the practices of listening to three Black leaders and scripture.[296] In de-centering long-held white perspectives, TEC calls white members to open ourselves to the perspectives of those who experience oppression and injustice. It cannot be assumed that reading a few books on racism prepares a community for engagement in racial justice. The meaningful encounter and practice of listening signals both to the oppressed and the white community that white perspectives no longer hold the

[293] Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 30-64.

[294] Ibid., 56.

[295] Ibid., 42, 52.

[296] The Episcopal Church, "Report: Beloved Community," 15-16.

center. Mary Clark Moschella deems listening as "a primary duty of love," and it is a substantial way that predominantly white churches can demonstrate love to the Black community.[297]

Listening is part of the beloved community's call to selflessness and is a gift to those invited to share, because "The power to speak, to tell one's own story, is integrally related to the power to change."[298] Studies have shown that historically silenced people begin to gain a greater sense of self and empowerment as they hear their own voice and are attentively listened to by others.[299] Eric H.F. Law reveals how the invitation to another to share their story is an act of giving away power, which is necessary for a denomination that has wielded immense power since the beginning.[300] Emily Reimer-Barry asserts that listening should become the default practice of the church, "The church should be a listening church as often as it is a preaching church; indeed, the praxis of listening should be prior."[301]

Listening breaks open a space that cannot be easily closed once it is opened. As Elizabeth Conde-Frazier maintains, "When the unspeakable is spoken, it can no longer be denied."[302] Both the speaker and the listener do not remain the same in light of the practice of listening. In reflecting on Peter and the early Jewish Christians' inclusion of the Gentiles, Mark Love affirms the transformative power of the encounter, "It usually takes a new experience, one that we can't account for within our typical frameworks of understanding, to startle us into a new perception of

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[297] Moschella, *Ethnography*, 144.

[298] Ibid, 151.

[299] Ibid., 153-155.

[300] As referenced in Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 179.

[301] Emily Reimer-Barry, "The Listening Church: How Ethnography Can Transform Catholic Ethics," in *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, eds. Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2011), 117.

[302] Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *Many Colored Kingdom*, 180.

things."[303] The practice of listening to voices that have been silenced affords white people with new encounters that alter perception. The practice of listening forces a shift in perspective, as "Prior interpretations or judgements must be suspended in the process of attending…We must go beyond the sense of something sounding foreign, which causes us to think it is wrong rather than simply different."[304] Jonathan Tran describes how Redeemer Community Church in San Francisco employs thick descriptions of the deep economy of God as a way of countering the prevailing narratives that indicate systemic inequality is normal and natural.[305] Through the practice of listening to the other, "We were enabled to see more clearly that what we considered 'normative' perspectives are not normative but rather cultural constructions."[306]

Liberation theologians, Pedro Casaldáliga and José María Vigil "hold the conviction that only from a vantage uniquely available to oppressed peoples can one see the world as it truly is."[307] In commenting on the catchphrase, "trust Black women," Heather McGhee posits, "it's that the social and economic and cultural conditions that have been imposed on people at the base of the social hierarchy have given us the clearest view of the whole system. We can see how it's broken and all those who are broken by it."[308] The theology and the practices of TEC have been primarily shaped by the white experience. If the only way to see the world rightly is to see through the perspectives of those pushed to the margins, then TEC is operating with minimal

[303] Mark Love, *It Seemed Good to the Holy Spirit and to Us: Acts, Discernment, and the Mission of God* (forthcoming), 177.

[304] Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *Many Colored Kingdom*, 185.

[305] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 201.

[306] Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *Many Colored Kingdom*, 188.

[307] Tran, 205.

[308] McGhee, *The Sum of Us*, 279.

understanding and wisdom. As Christians, we affirm that the crucified God continues to be located among the crucified of today. If we only avail ourselves to the dominant voices and experiences, however, our theological beliefs are anemic. White members of TEC need to open ourselves to the perspectives of the oppressed so that we may see God more clearly.

Episcopal churches have gotten away from the original meaning of the word parish and frequently use parish as another word for congregation or group of church members. The Parish Collective is seeking to redeem the original usage of the word to mean "all the relationships (including the land) where the local church lives out its faith together."[309] The members of St. Paul's know very few of the people who reside nearest the building. David P. Leong recommends,

> As the church embraces its identity as a *placed* people, and not simply a building or a set of programs, listening locally becomes a fundamental practice of a parish whose posture is oriented toward the people in the neighborhood. … The more local a parish becomes, the more listening becomes a natural byproduct of friendship and mutuality. Christians listen not for a particular result or outcome but because in being fully present to one another by the Spirit, we see each other in the image of community for which we were created.[310]

Jemar Tisby cautions against using people of color as projects or sources for information, "They are real people with whom to pursue a meaningful friendship."[311]

Admittedly, the three Listening Opportunities with Black leaders from the community is more project-related than organically relationship-related, other than the pre-existing relationships between the rector and three individuals. There seemed to be little way around this given the lack of meaningful relationships already in existence between St. Paul's and our Black

[309] As quoted in Leong, *Race and Place*, 118.

[310] Ibid., 119.

[311] Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 195-196.

neighbors. Where does a community begin listening without relationships, but where do relationships begin without the practice of listening? The hope is that the practice of listening to the three Conversation Partners will be the beginning of the shifting of perspectives in St. Paul's. Through listening, a predominantly white group of people will realize how little we truly understand and will be sparked to make listening to our neighbors a way of life.

CHAPTER THREE: THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The theological framework for participation in racial justice will begin with the narrative of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), move to the great reversal of Luke-Acts, pull up a seat at Jesus's table in Luke 14, and proceed into the world empowered by God's Spirit of abundance and communion. The tower of Babel reveals humans arranging themselves above others in an effort to be like God and God's subsequent rearrangement of humanity. The people of Babel display this hegemonic arrangement through language and land exploitation, and I will make connections to The Episcopal Church's similar historical pursuits. I will suggest that God's scattering of humankind is the beginning of God's great reversal revealed in scripture, particularly in Luke-Acts. The Babel narrative reveals that the way for humankind to be like God, or to embody the *imago Dei*, is not through hegemonic practices. Just as the three Persons of the triune God do not display hierarchy and domination, humanity is called to bear the same image of mutuality. The bringing low of Babel and scattering of humanity appears to bring creation one step closer to imaging God.

The great reversal of God's kingdom in Luke-Acts displays human relationships ordered within God's reign and provision. In God's reversal, the exalted are brought low and the lowly are lifted. Therefore, the social and economic arrangements of the powerful have no place in the economy of God's kingdom. Particularly, Jesus's table practices and teachings in Luke 14 signal God's abundance and generosity as the supreme benefactor. Through the healing of the man with dropsy, Jesus also extends healing to those more attached to wealth than to God's provision. God's lavish hosting offers a vision of newly ordered human relationships and is

instructive for white, affluent churches forming new relationships with neighbors who experience economic racial injustice.

In Acts, the Spirit that is gifted and poured out on all flesh is a further manifestation of God's abundance. The Spirit empowers the formation of human communities where "there [is] not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34), which stand in stark contrast to those in Acts who look after their own interests above the other.

The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)

The Way to Speak

The Episcopal Church, as well as many other expressions of Christianity in the United States, might find a beginning point on the ancient plains of Shinar.[312] Soon after the narrative of the flood (Genesis 6-9), the narrator describes humanity, "the whole earth," as having one language, migrating, and settling into a land that they take as their own (Genesis 11:1-2). The story is a jarring change from the preceding genealogy material, which indicates that humanity has already divided into multiple languages and nations (Genesis 10:5, 20, 31). The seeming contradiction is no problem for the writer of Genesis 11, however. For this narrative and these occupants, they possess *the* way to speak. The other languages in and around Shinar are silenced by the one that has descended upon the land.

In *The Christian Imagination,* Willie James Jennings describes the dynamic of language subjugation in European colonization in a manner that can also be said of the new inhabitants of Shinar, "The offspring of this [legitimization] process [of the theological literary voice] showed itself in the colonies from the brutal suppression of indigenous languages all the way to the

[312] Shinar and Babel will be used interchangeably in this chapter. The intent in this section is not to reconstruct historical events but to imagine how the Tower of Babel is repeated in history.

vicious process of leaving a mother tongue in order to inhabit the civilized literary space of the colonial masters."[313] The narrator of Genesis does not detail how the new occupants and the indigenous dwellers of Shinar navigated their language differences. However, it appears as though the colonizers won out, at least for a time.

Centuries later, the temptation for uniformity of language and culture was and is still in play. In its beginnings, the Church of England sought to resist the Roman Catholic's hegemonic insistence on Latin for worship by setting forth the vernacular principle, "worship and faith expressions should honor and rise from the people's language and culture."[314] Ironically, The Episcopal Church in the U.S. has largely become what it originally resisted by predominantly celebrating one language and one white European expression of worship.[315] Though humanity has divided into myriad languages and nations, TEC and its majority white-European membership sends the message to the readers of TEC's contemporary story that we possess *the* way to speak. The other languages in and around the land are silenced by the one.

Making Space for Herself

The plains of Shinar might seem like a strange place to begin exploring the theological framework for TEC and racial justice, but David P. Leong demonstrates how God does not act apart from the spatial, material, and social dimensions of human life.[316] The land not only reveals

[313] Jennings, *Christian Imagination,* 231.

[314] Spellers, *Cracked Open,* 57.

[315] This is not to discredit the efforts of multicultural expression in TEC, such as the "Latino/Hispanic Ministries" arm of TEC. Spellers points out that the vernacular principle provides room for congregations to employ a variety of languages and cultural expressions in worship. The vernacular principle is an opportunity for Episcopal congregations to imagine new ways of gathering that are hospitable to a wider variety of people. Spellers, *Cracked Open*, 57.

[316] Leong, *Race and Place*, 30-31.

God's interaction with humanity, it also illuminates how humanity resists or joins the work of God, "When we examine our cities, we examine ourselves."[317] Jennings argues that Western Christian theology has been formed and continues to perpetuate a Christianity disconnected from geography and particular peoples, which undermines the transformational reality of the incarnate God living intimately among and joining all of humanity.[318] Jennings defines this theological disconnection from the land as *displacement*. He asserts that the European people's leaving of their own lands alongside their displacement of various groups of indigenous peoples is the groundwork for the creation of the racial imagination where all of humanity is placed on a scale of whiteness to blackness or the elect to bestial.[319] People become abstractions and are able to be racialized once they are separated from the land.[320]

Therefore, the land of Shinar and the people's relationship to it is as central to the narrative as the interaction between the people and God. The plains of Shinar reveal something about this "whole earth" of people. The human movement in the text is to centralize, dominate, and arrange distance between themselves and the former inhabitants of Shinar as well as those upon "the face of the (rest of) the whole earth."[321] Through their hegemonic distancing, the "whole earth" out there becomes akin to Jennings's racialized other. The movement of God in the text, however, is to come down to get a closer look (Genesis 11:5) and to disrupt the human-created distance by scattering and intermingling the Shinar occupants with the rest of the world.

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[317] Ibid., 27.

[318] Jennings, *Christian Imagination,* 7.

[319] Ibid., 36.

[320] Ibid., 40-41, 59. Jennings's argument is analogous to Tran's assertion that exploitation racializes.

[321] Thus, reinforcing the point that the people of the story see themselves as "the whole earth" (v. 1) yet there is still very much "the whole earth" (vv. 4, 8, 9) in existence around them.

Though scholars debate whether this monolithic group of people in Genesis is moving from the east or towards the east (Genesis 11:2), the movement and the emphasis on uniform language finds repetition in the German and British Anglo-Saxon "myth 'of a specific, gifted people—the Indo-Europeans—who spilled out from the mountains of central Asia to press westward following the sun,' carrying with them their language."[322] Since its beginnings, The Episcopal Church has been caught up in this westward movement making space for herself wherever it has gone. Though TEC, and Christianity in general in the U.S., is not as culturally centered as it once was, the predominantly white and affluent members continue to hold powerful spaces in society. Contemporary Episcopal parishes must additionally reckon with the fact that now they are often geographically located in economically depressed urban centers with affluent members who commute in each Sunday. Therefore, heeding Leong's previously mentioned invitation: to examine Jackson, Michigan is to examine ourselves. By inviting St. Paul's to listen to local Black leaders and discern what God might be calling us to do about racial justice in Jackson is to shorten the distance we have created and have found comfort. The act of listening is not merely to gain more information. Listening necessitates the sharing of space and serves to counteract TEC's historical participation in displacement.

To Be Like God

But this story is about more than a single language and a section of land. The people express the desire to "make a name for [them]selves; otherwise [they] will be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). Driven by the fears of powerlessness, insignificance, and intermingled life with "the other," they turn to the amassment of power and

[322] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015) 20 quoting Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 33.

self-aggrandizement. They desire to stand above all others. Likely written during the time of Babylonian exile and influenced by either Israel's own crumbled temple or Babylon's royal building programs, the narrator of Genesis 11 reports that the people desire to make the land so much their own, that they attempt to construct a city with a tower (or one might say, a cathedral) that reaches to the heavens (11:4).[323] Palestinian pastor and theologian, Mitri Raheb, concludes that the Tower of Babel is the "narrative of the empire," as he traces the numerous Babel-esque failed attempts in history of language and culture imposition.[324] Given the ambitions of the leaders of this enterprise on the plains of Shinar, it is likely that they depend heavily on the exploitation of others. Miroslav Volf describes how their attempt to build "a single 'place,' a single 'tongue,' and a single 'tower' will provide the pillars for a centralized political, economic, and religious system with universal pretensions. Humanity will be securely unified and manifestly great."[325] This making a nation "Great (Again)" has particular resonance in our post-2016 ears. Jennings's commentary on Ananias and Sapphira could also be said of Babel:

> Indeed from the first couple made one flesh by God, God has had to contend against its plans that would resist the divine will. Here is the energy that drives the most powerful forms of cultural, social, or economic boundaries. Here is the fortress that resists the new order most consistently. Here is where the worship of possessions and money come fully to life: in the two made one flesh. Together they imagine they can do anything. Together they believe in their sovereignty. After all, were they not made by God? … Yet God will now do what no one else can actually do: pull asunder, take apart, and break open.[326]

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[323] Terrence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. David L. Petersen (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:411; James McKeown, *Genesis*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary, eds. J. Gordon McConville and Craig Bartholomew (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 70-71.

[324] Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 111.

[325] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 226.

[326] Jennings, *Acts*, 54.

The sin in Babel, and then later in England and beyond, seems akin to Adam and Eve's sin of seeking to be like God, or, at least, their perception of God (Genesis 3:5, 22). J. Kameron Carter considers how the people of Babel display their understandings of God, creation, and humanity and what it means to be image bearers:

> The [Babel] story reflects an unredeemed way of imaging God's creation, and human being in particular, as both one and many, which is tied to the refusal to stand before and heed the word of the Holy. The result is the hardening of the divinely willed way in which creation is to be both one and many into a binary division of humanly willed homogeneity or diversity.[327]

Joel B. Green describes what occurs in the wake of eating fruit in order to see and to become like God (Genesis 3:22), "The ensuing narrative is overtaken with references in the first person—'I,' 'I,' 'I,'—documenting a tragic crescendo into self-aggrandizement, self-legislation, self-orientation, and self-dependence."[328]

In the narratival bookend to the primeval history in Genesis, it appears as though humanity has learned very little. Those who have overtaken the land of Shinar are animated by self-interest. In the estimation of the people of Babel, to be like God is to tower over all, to dominate and to use others and the land for their own gain. A problem, therefore, seems to reside in how the people conceive of God and imagine what it means to bear that image (Genesis 1:26). Cole Arthur Riley observes, "Perhaps the more superior we believe ourselves to be to creation, the less like God we become."[329] God's response to the people in Shinar is a repeat of Genesis 3. They are sent and scattered (Genesis 3:23-24, 11:8-9). And with that, the narrator rightly places

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[327] J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 365.

[328] Joel B. Green, *Why Salvation?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 17.

[329] Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories that Make Us* (New York: Convergent, 2022), 7. The context of this quote is Riley's discussion on humankind's mastery of the earth. Due to the focus of this paper, I suggest the phrase could read "to creation and others," as the same could be said of human beings' efforts of mastery over other humans.

the phrase "let us" back in the mouth of God, "Come, let us go down, and confuse their language" (Genesis 11:7).

The Beginnings of Reversal

There are two prevalent and problematic interpretations of the Babel narrative. Many proponents of segregation in U.S. history have used this text to claim God's will for segregation.[330] Humanity seeks unity and integration, and God desires separateness and distinction—and for it to remain that way. Therefore, the segregationists are doing the "true" work of God. Another common interpretation is that God's act of confusing the language and scattering the people is God's effort to assert domination over humanity—do not mess with God, or else.[331] The confusion and scattering is not what God desires, but the people need to be disempowered and put back in their place.

I suggest, however, that the flattening of the tower and scattering might signal a turning point or even the beginnings of God's Great Reversal of humanity, or God's rearranging of humanity into the *imago Dei*. Instead of this narrative serving to instill a fear of God, it is an invitation into community as God imagines. God will be the host, not Babel.

It seems significant that one of the most paradigmatic texts in the Old Testament, the calling of Abram and promise to bless all the families of the earth through him (Genesis 12:1-9), comes immediately following God's dispersion of humanity from Babel. Is it possible that God's response in Babel sets the stage for the greater blessing of God? The people must maintain particularity and be arranged anew to facilitate greater communion. Communion cannot occur in

[330] Miguel A. De La Torre, *Genesis*, Belief: A Theological Commentary of the Bible, eds. Amy Plantinga Pauw and William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 136.

[331] Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 37. See also McKeown, *Genesis*, 72.

the space of hegemony. We know from the later coming of both the Son and the Spirit that God does not tower over humanity. God resides in and among all while also remaining host of the table.

Genesis 1:26-27 reveals key theological and anthropological assertions that are helpful in exploring the scene in Babel: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.'" Presumably not being familiar with later understandings of the Son and the Spirit, the Jewish writer likely intends the "us" to be Yahweh and the divine council.[332] Therefore, at the least, this passage indicates that humankind is created by community and exists for community. The males and females who are created by God are different from one another yet find communion in their shared humanity within God's created world.

Though the literary context of the passage was not intended to be trinitarian, Christians throughout history have frequently read the Trinity back into Genesis 1. Various conceptions of the Trinity inform how one understands the *imago Dei*. For example, a hierarchical construction of the Trinity with the Father as the head informs a more patriarchal view of the *imago Dei* and affirms the arrangement of patriarchy in church and society.[333] Or, an overemphasis on the One God with a diminishment of the three Persons reinforces the prevalent view that the individual bears the *imago Dei*. Individual persons bearing the *imago Dei* is frequently asserted in antiracism discourses, as explored in Chapter Two's subsection, "The Individual as the Image of God?" People are often instructed to love others, because each person is created in the image of God. Although there are merits to this approach, I suspect it has limited Christians from investing themselves more fully. Simply put, more is at stake with a communal notion of the

[332] Fretheim, "Genesis," 345.

[333] Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 239-241.

imago Dei. If we lived with the recognition that our collective imaging of God depended on social and economic rearrangements, we might make greater efforts to participate in God's great reversal.

Jürgen Moltmann presents an alternative social trinitarian theology by asserting that the three Persons of the Trinity cannot be understood apart from their relationship to one another, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share a life of mutual indwelling and perfect love.[334] There is no hierarchy in the social Trinity, as "Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another."[335] Following Moltmann, Volf explores the term often used for the social Trinity, *perichoresis*. Volf defines *perichoresis* as "'making room,' not 'dancing round,'" and demonstrates how *perichoresis* depicts "the kind of unity in which plurality is preserved rather than erased."[336] As the three Persons of the Trinity are "*personally interior* to one another…they do not cease to be distinct."[337] When the Trinity is conceived of socially instead of hierarchically, humanity bearing the *imago Dei* communes amid and because of distinctions.[338] In light of Genesis 1:27, Moltmann writes, "From one another, with one another, and in one another human beings discover that mirror of the Godhead which is called *imago Dei*, and which is in actual truth *imago Trinitatis*."[339] Green posits:

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[334] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 171-178.

[335] Ibid., 176.

[336] Miroslav Volf, "'The Trinity is our Social Program': The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14.3 (1998): 409.

[337] Ibid., 409.

[338] Though I argue for the *perichoresis* of the Trinity giving shape to human relationships, I recognize that it is impossible for human beings to mutually indwell one another to the same extent as the Father, Son, and Spirit. I am seeking to make the distinction between hierarchical and social conceptions of the Trinity and positing that social trinitarianism has greater potential for rightly forming our notions of the *imago Dei*.

[339] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 221.

> The individual human person, by herself or himself, is not a reflection of the Godhead, as though the human person were complete in herself or himself.…In Christian terms, then, we reflect the community of the Triune God not so much as individuals but as the human community, whose life is differentiated from and yet bound up with nature, and whose common life springs from and finds its purpose (or *telos*) in God's embrace.[340]

Therefore, a tension present in Genesis 11 is humanity seeking monolithic uniformity and dominance in hopes of becoming more God-like, and God setting humanity on a path for eventually becoming more like God, or better embodying the *imago Dei*. The flattening of Babel and scattering is neither God's will of the segregationists nor God's fearful display of dominance over humanity. The ensuing biblical narratives will reveal God's new arrangement of humanity that bears witness to the triune life of God.

The Great Reversal of Luke-Acts

The Leveling of the Great Reversal

In the New Testament, it is apparent that the story of Babel is still in play. Humankind continues to be drawn towards self-aggrandizement, the amassment of wealth and power, and hegemony, and God continues to usher humanity into a new social, economic, and religious arrangement that bears greater similarity to the social trinitarian *imago Dei*. Though there are many narratives in scripture that bear witness to God's work of reversal, the narrative unit of Luke-Acts amplifies the great reversal of God's reign more than any other stretch of scripture. To be clear, neither Luke nor Acts contain the language of *imago Dei*, but the narratives extend the invitation to form human community that finds its resonance in the life of the trinitarian God.

Before looking closer at Luke-Acts, it seems necessary to clarify that the term, "reversal," should not be understood as the switching of places. In the reign of God, those who once were

[340] Joel B. Green, *Why Salvation?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 11.

oppressed and marginalized do not become the oppressors of those who were once powerful.[341] Reversal is not a type of retributive justice or revenge that brings the same suffering upon the oppressor's head that they have done to another. For those who find themselves on the top of the social order, however, reversal does involve relinquishment of power, the humbling of oneself, and the surrender to the wisdom and salvation of God's new ordering of things (Luke 14:11). Justo Gonzalez maintains that "justice requires a reversal of conditions for the excluded and the oppressed—and, if they insist on their privileges, also for the insiders and the oppressors."[342] In other words, reversal for the powerful might be quite painful depending on how tightly one clings to privilege and wealth.

Perhaps a better way of understanding God's work of reversal is that of leveling or a new arrangement around God's table where no person or group seeks superiority over or exploitation of another. Tran offers the contemporary example of leveling, "Dayspring refers to this as 'smoothing the way of the Lord'… Such smoothing occurs by smoothing the curve of inequality, the highest paid 'made low' and uneven ratios 'shall become level' so as to make inequality 'a plain' and 'every' employee 'shall be lifted up.'"[343] The purpose of God's reversal, as will become clear below, is ultimately for the sake of communion. Therefore, as the community of St. Paul's Episcopal Church discerns God's justice in light of the social reversals in Luke 14, I am not suggesting that the white, affluent members submit ourselves to exploitative structures of

[341] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 109-110.

[342] Justo L. González, *Luke*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible, eds. Amy Plantinga Pauw and William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 6.

[343] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 228.

racial capitalism. Instead, I invite us to imagine life with our neighbors arranged according to the abundant life of the trinitarian God.

Indiscriminate Generosity

From the beginning of the Luke-Acts narrative, God's very choosing of a poor and disempowered young woman to contain the life of God is the ultimate display of God's reversal. In case the reader misses what God is enacting, Luke makes God's reversal explicit with Mary's song, "[God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; [God] has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53).[344] The unexpected characters and marginal locations of just the first two chapters of Luke reveal that the reign and salvation of God does not occupy places of social power and is not merely spiritual or other-worldly. God becoming vulnerably enfleshed through Jesus brings a shocking new social and economic order into the world. John the Baptist also serves to remind readers that God's exilic-saving work of leveling formidable mountains and raising up the low places will be manifest in the life of Jesus (Luke 3:4-6).[345] When the crowds ask John the Baptist, "What should we do?" his response displays God's leveling work, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise," to tax collectors, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you," and to soldiers, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages" (Luke 3:10-14). In these examples, the rich and the poor do not switch places. Instead, John offers a glimpse of shared life and contentment within God's abundant economy.

[344] Mary's song echoes Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, which indicates that God's reversal began long before the New Testament.

[345] John the Baptist's proclamation echoes Isaiah 40:3-5.

In Jesus's inaugural sermon in Nazareth, he amplifies God's reversal by declaring that God's Spirit has anointed and sent him to "bring good news to the poor…proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:18-19). Leonard Allen observes, "The first four tasks all involve images of Israel's low and broken estate from Isaiah 40-55—they are poor, captive, blind, and oppressed. And all five tasks point to her impending release from this condition by the Spirit-anointed servant of the Lord and royal Son."[346] Luke 14 will list similar conditions, "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" twice in the narrative, which identifies the Pharisees with those who are marginalized (14:13, 21). Just as God has cared for Israel's low estate, God, and the people of God by extension, continue to care for the lowly.

Perhaps anticipating Jesus's Jewish audience's claim to the Lord's favor and the eventual contemporary temptation to spiritualize his ministry (such as giving sight to the spiritually blind or releasing people from captivity to sin[347]), Jesus asserts that he is of the same God who sent Elijah to provide food for the widow at Zarephath and chose to heal Naaman the Syrian of his leprosy (4:25-27). Jesus has come not merely as a promise of the future alleviation of suffering in the eschaton but to create better physical and social conditions for all of humanity now.[348] Jesus is speaking about literal healing and liberation, and it is often for those whom God's people

[346] Leonard Allen, *Poured Out: The Spirit of God Empowering the Mission of God* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018), 79.

[347] For example, see Beth Moore's popular Bible study series among Evangelicals: Beth Moore, *Breaking Free: The Journey, The Stories*, rev. ed. (Nashville, Lifeway Press, 2009).

[348] It is evident throughout Luke-Acts that the new arrangement Jesus brings is for *all* of humanity. Luke's genealogy roots Jesus in Adam (3:38) rather than stopping at Abraham. In the temple, Simeon declares of infant Jesus, "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (2:32) and John the Baptist anticipates that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (3:6). Luke is deliberate to narrate Jesus's life as one that constantly interacts with and takes into account the socially and religiously marginalized. Later in Acts, Jews and Gentiles join together at the table of God's salvation signaling that God's salvation truly is for all (Acts 10).

consider as undeserving.[349] Contemporary readers of Luke 4 typically do not notice that Jesus has omitted a line from the Isaiah passage, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and *the day of vengeance of our God*" (Isaiah 61:2, emphasis added). The reign of God inaugurated through Jesus does not bring expected vengeance upon the enemies of Israel. God indiscriminately cares for all, and the favored ones of his hometown are filled with rage. Those who tightly grasp power and privilege of various kinds perceive the sweeping generosity and reversal of God as a threat. The violent reaction and rejection in Nazareth foreshadows the political and religious power holders who join in putting Jesus to death.[350]

While no one reading Luke-Acts today would desire to place oneself in the narrative as attempting to throw Jesus off of a cliff, I wonder if the white fragility and the white rage prevalent in U.S. society is a contemporary example of the dynamic occurring between Jesus and his hometown.[351] Similar to the zero-sum thinking where one group must miss out if another group is advantaged,[352] the people of Nazareth expect God's favor to rest upon them and not on enemies like Naaman. In their minds, God cannot possibly care for all, and they expect for God to share their views. While the Jewish people of Nazareth are a marginal religious group and would not be considered socially and economically powerful, they have hopes that God will bring vengeance (not blessing!) upon their oppressors. In the U.S., white people find themselves

[349] Luke's version of the beatitudes offer tangible alleviation and blessing for those who suffer and woes for those who have an appetite for wealth, comfort, and honor (6:20-26).

[350] The primary dynamic Luke seeks to address in Luke-Acts is worldly power vs. the power of the Holy Spirit that is most visible in the cross and the lowly. Luke demonstrates that multiple forms of power (religious and political) align to put Jesus to death. Jesus frequently admonishes the Pharisees for the ways they organize their lives around cultural values of wealth, privilege, and power. They are acting like the nations to enhance their standing as a small, marginalized religious group.

[351] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*. Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

[352] McGhee, *The Sum of Us*, 255.

in a different social and economic standing from the Nazareans, yet the narrative of white supremacy claims divine favor and even hopes of divine retribution upon those considered undeserving.[353] White people seem to expect God to see Black people through our eyes and are disappointed and even angry when we discover that God does not share our views. For those who have benefitted from white privilege our entire lives and have believed, either consciously or subconsciously, that we are more deserving of material ease, societal advancement, and/or divine favor, we easily slip into a defensive or offensive posture at the suggestion that Jesus is concerned about the physical, social, and economic flourishing of the enemies we have created. This text, therefore, invites the white, affluent constituency of the Episcopal Church to resist caving to our own sense of threat and, instead, join Jesus's program of healing and liberating the disempowered.

If the people of Nazareth know their Hebrew scriptures, they recognize in Jesus's inaugural sermon that he is borrowing the words of the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 58:6, 61:1-2). They also might remember that their ancestors killed the prophets for their cries for justice, but in case they have forgotten, Jesus will remind the Pharisees in Luke 11:47-51. When Isaiah employs these words of justice in chapter 58, he makes an indictment of their oppressive religiosity. They have imported the exploitative ways of the nations into their religious practices. Instead of striving to know and worship God by serving their own interests, Isaiah asserts that they will experience healing and liberation as they participate in the work of justice (58:6-14). It seems as though the way to, "delight to know [God's] ways" does not involve the eating of fruit (Genesis 3:3-6), the building of a tower to the heavens (Genesis 11:4), or the hubris of fasting (Isaiah

[353] Common narratives about Black people are that they are lazy, welfare dependent, and "super predators," which bolsters the belief that the Black community deserves to suffer. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 75, 154.

58:3). Rather, in Isaiah, knowing God's ways, and, therefore, bearing the *imago Dei*, entails shunning exploitation (58:3-4, 13) and pursuing justice for the oppressed (58:6-7). All of Israel will flourish "like a watered garden" when the privileged look not after their own interests but the interests of the disempowered (58:11). In other words, communal life arranged around God's good gifts is one of abundance for all. In Nazareth, Jesus pulls forward this call from Isaiah and gives it priority in the reign of God. Jesus's life and ministry display the new arrangement of humanity where both the exalted and the lowly will walk on the same level garden of God.

It is possible that, being a church ordered by prayers, readings, and rituals, the predominantly white Episcopal Church has mirrored Israel, hoping that God would take notice of us. In praying weekly for God's justice, perhaps we have leaned too heavily on the belief that God would take care of the oppressed without us. Perhaps like Israel, we have felt angered by the suggestion that God would elevate those we have most sought to keep down. For those who have ears to hear, however, God invites the most socially, economically, and religiously elite of society to become part of a new social fabric that God weaves.

The Table of Belonging

Literary Context of Luke 14

The most frequent location of social reversal in Luke-Acts occurs at the table. In both Luke and Acts, there are a total of 15 table narratives with Luke 14 containing unique features that summon the reader to attend closely.[354] If one starts at the beginning of Luke and moves through the narrative, some of the key elements of Luke 14, such as the sabbath, the table, the Pharisees, and the marginalized, are all features that the reader has encountered before. Luke 14,

[354] Luke 5:27-35, 7:36-50, 9:10-17, 10:38-42, 11:37-54, 14:1-33, 15:1-32, 19:1-27, 22:14-20, 24:13-49, 24:36-49. Acts 2:41-47, 4:31-37, 6:1-15, 10:1-11:18.

however, is slightly different from previous Lukan scenes. Here, Luke brings together all these elements in a manner that has not occurred previously, which gives this passage particular narrative weight.[355]

In Luke, Jesus experiences conflict with the Pharisees on the sabbath three other times: Jesus's disciples pluck grain on the sabbath (6:1-5), Jesus heals the man with the withered hand (6:6-11), and Jesus heals the crippled woman (13:10-17; i.e., the synagogue leader), yet none of these occur in the home of a Pharisee or around a table. In two previous passages, Jesus experiences conflict at the table of the Pharisees: Jesus is anointed by the sinful woman while eating in the home of Simon (7:36-50) and Jesus denounces the Pharisees and lawyers (11:37-53), yet these narratives do not appear to occur on the sabbath or offer physical healing. Jesus also dines at the homes of others where the Pharisees can be found lurking around those tables: Jesus eats in the home of Levi, the tax collector (5:27-32), the tax collectors and sinners come near to listen and to dine with Jesus while the Pharisees and scribes grumble (15:1-2), and Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus into his home (19:1-10; Pharisees unmentioned). Space does not allow for the other occasions in Luke where Jesus breaks the sabbath, offers healing, denounces the Pharisees, and breaks bread with others.[356] Although approximately half of Luke 14 is material that is unique to the Gospel of Luke (14:1-14, 28-32), given the themes, it is seamlessly at home within the larger narrative.[357]

[355] Stuart Love, "The Man with Dropsy," *Leaven* 6.3 (1998): 136.

[356] A few notable table passages that serve as signs of God's new community that occur after Luke 14 are: Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-53), the new community of Christians (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37), Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48), Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:11-40).

[357] Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, ed. Ben Witherington III (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 387.

Healing of the Man with Dropsy (14:1-6)

While Jesus has just declared that he is not yet ready to enter Jerusalem (Luke 13:33), in Luke 14 he finds himself entering the home of a leader of the Pharisees on the sabbath, a location of Jerusalem-like power and authority (14:1). Based on previous encounters with the Pharisees, readers are unsurprised that "they were watching him closely" and are right to suspect that this is a hostile watching instead of watching of admiration.[358] Though the Pharisees seem to be watching with ill-intent, to invite someone to the table in the ancient world is a signal of honor, purity, intimacy, and kinship.[359] Considering Jesus's fellowship with impure "sinners" in Luke, it is somewhat unexpected that the Pharisees include a defiled Jesus at their table. Perhaps this reveals their desperation to trap him, or maybe the Pharisees are seeking to show Jesus the true Israel through their religiosity. If tables in the ancient world "reinscribe social roles and separate insiders from outsiders," the Pharisees might be seeking to show Jesus where he belongs at their table and under their religious authority.[360] Some scholars compare this meal scene to the ancient Greek practice of symposium, and Luke placing Jesus at this table bolsters the view of Jesus as an authoritative teacher or philosopher.[361] Joel B. Green wonders if this is not a proper symposium but Luke drawing upon a common Greco-Roman social custom in order to subvert it.[362]

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[358] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, vol. 3, Sacra Pagina Series, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 223.

[359] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 540; Joel B. Green, "Embodying the Gospel: Two Exemplary Practices," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 7.1 (2014): 18; Alan R. Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 9:284.

[360] Levine and Witherington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 387.

[361] Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 225; Levine and Witherington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 387.

[362] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 541; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, rev. ed. (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 170.

Paralleling the crippled woman who appears suddenly in the synagogue in 13:11, a man with dropsy—excessive water retention—also appears suddenly before Jesus in the home of the leader of the Pharisees (14:2).[363] While the text is not explicit, this man likely would have been considered unclean and was not an invited guest. Stuart Love indicates that a person was unclean when they either had "too much" or "too little" body matter, and a person with the excessive water retention of dropsy would certainly fit in the "too much" category.[364] Before Jesus offers explicit table instructions, Jesus is already impinging on the host by subversively hosting someone who would defile their table.[365]

It is noteworthy for the purposes of this project that this is the only mention of dropsy in the New Testament.[366] Scholars offer varying interpretations and significance for this, but Chad Hartstock insists that Luke employs dropsy as an accusation of the insatiable wealth and greed of the Pharisees.[367] There are several instances where Luke critiques the Pharisees regarding greed, most overtly in 16:14, "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him."[368] Hartstock details that dropsy is a condition where the body cannot properly process and excrete fluids, yet the sufferer continues to experience great thirst and drinks so much fluid that their organs burst.[369] He also demonstrates through primary sources that dropsy was a prevalent metaphor in the ancient Greco-Roman world for greed, such as Diogenes

[363] Culpepper, "Gospel of Luke," 284; Levine and Witherington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 387.

[364] Love, "Man with Dropsy," 138.

[365] Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* 546.

[366] Chad Hartstock, "The Healing of the Man with Dropsy (Luke 14:1-6) and the Lukan Landscape," *Biblical Interpretation* 21.3 (2013): 342.

[367] Ibid., 353.

[368] See also Luke 11:39; 12:15, 18, 45; 16:1-13, 19-31 and contrast with Zacchaeus's generosity in 19:1-10.

[369] Hartstock, "Man with Dropsy," 342.

referring to money-lovers as "dropsies."[370] Luke's readers would have readily made the connection. Those who are hungry for wealth and status seek to satisfy their never-ending desires are akin to those who suffer from dropsy and are in need of a miraculous healing they cannot generate themselves. Green concludes, "Just as in front of Jesus stood a man who had dropsy, so, around the table, sat persons whose disorder was no less self-detrimental."[371]

The Pharisees are to see their pursuit of wealth and religious superiority as it really is and feel a sting of conviction, while also seeing Jesus as the only answer to their plight. Jesus "metaphorically and ironically opens up the possibility for Pharisees to be healed of a hypocrisy manifest in ravenous greed."[372] The healing of the man with dropsy illuminates that Jesus can heal the Pharisees too, yet they continue in their unwillingness (13:34). They are so unwilling to receive Jesus as healer, that they silently indicate their disapproval of another being healed. Their adherence to sabbath law, and the elevation in status that adherence gives, blinds them to the need of the man with dropsy. Their unwillingness is amplified a few chapters later when Jesus tells the rich ruler that he must sell all that he owns and give the money to the poor (18:18-30). The ruler, however, "became sad; for he was very rich" (18:23). Jesus indicates the impossibility of simultaneously holding onto wealth and participating in the kingdom of God, yet he also extends the same healing he extends to the man with dropsy, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God" (18:27). The good news is that the power of God can break the power of greed. The kingdom of God is defined by mercy and healing for both the exalted and lowly.

[370] Ibid., 349. See also primary sources in Love, "Man with Dropsy," 139-140.

[371] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 547.

[372] Ibid., 541.

Not many people prefer to admit the presence of greed in their lives. Greed is reserved for the billionaires who leisure-travel to space.[373] It is not a word we feel comfortable using for devoted Christians who have benefited our whole lives from centuries of generational wealth produced at the expense of others.[374] But it might be a necessary word to face as we seek racial justice. While there is a difference between the billionaire space traveler and those who have inherited immense or relative financial ease, it seems fair to ask a group of predominantly white, affluent Christians in the U.S. to consider the role that wealth plays in the conversation about racial justice. Is it possible that we have been more seduced by the powers of wealth and greed than we would like to believe? The white community's fretting and anger at the mention of reparations and the creation of more equitable conditions for those "who haven't worked for it," reveals an attachment to wealth and societal power.[375]

We desire to distance ourselves from the Pharisees in this narrative. If we encountered a person who is in obvious distress, like the man with dropsy, it is difficult to imagine remaining cold and uncompassionate.[376] Yet, those suffering from the exploitations of racial capitalism frequently feel that the response from the white community is cold and uncompassionate. White Christians appear as though we are more interested in the Christian equivalent of "maintaining

[373] Jackie Wattles, "Which Billionaire is Winning the Space Race? It Depends," *CNN Business*, July 20, 2021, accessed December 21, 2022, https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/14/tech/jeff-bezos-richard-branson-elon-musk-space-race-scn/index.html.

[374] "In the long run, what one makes (income) matters far less than what one starts with (wealth). When it comes, then to those who directly or indirectly inherited second-slavery wealth (or, for that matter, those who inherit Delta Chinese wealth), they start with an insurmountable advantage over those descended from the slaves of the very same system. We are talking about racial capitalism's aftermarket writ large across time." See Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 225.

[375] As just one example of this sentiment, Ja'han Jones, "Republicans Cry 'Racism!' in Suit Over Biden's Student Loan Plan," *The ReidOut Blog*, MSNBC, October 5, 2022, accessed December 21, 2022, https://www.msnbc.com/the-reidout/reidout-blog/republicans-racism-lawsuit-biden-student-loan-plan-rcna50836.

[376] Ironically, the greedy are to be seen as in dire distress, yet the Pharisees and wealthy, white people cannot see how our own greed is ultimately killing us.

the sabbath." We often speak the words of compassion or pray for God's justice while not being quite troubled enough to enter the messiness required for the healing for all. But Jesus reveals that the way forward for the whole community necessitates that the wealthy and socially elite undergo a healing and transformation of our own. Jesus is hoping to perform a double-healing in this text and today. While Jesus elevates mercy, healing, and liberation for a person who has been marginalized, he also offers healing for those who have wrongly elevated themselves (or those who find themselves in an elevated place by virtue of the conditions in which they were born). The healing of the greedy Pharisees is bound up with the healing of the disenfranchised. In this simultaneous healing, Jesus offers a new vision of human flourishing for all. The solution to racism, therefore, is not the distanced writing of checks. Racial justice involves a willingness for the affluent and socially powerful to be transformed ourselves by forming a new relationship with wealth and status. The thesis of Heather McGhee's *The Sum of Us* is similar. We are all suffering under the greed of the zero-sum paradigm and will be able to thrive together if we seek the solidarity dividend instead.[377] The good news for those of us uncertain of how to climb down from the heights of wealth and white privilege is that the Spirit of Christ continues to offer a hand of healing. We do not have to break from the powers of wealth and greed on our own, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God" (Luke 18:30).

The Great Reversal of the Table (14:7-14)

Perhaps as a precursor to Jesus's literal turning over of the exploitative tables of the temple in Jerusalem (19:45-48), Jesus next turns the table of his fellow guests and host upside down. Before healing the man with dropsy, the Pharisees watch Jesus closely. It is now Jesus's

[377] McGhee, *The Sum of Us*, 271.

turn to watch closely. Luke opens this portion of the meal scene by describing Jesus as "[noticing] how the guests chose the places of honor" (14:7). Continuing his disruptive table manners, Jesus tells them a parable that is uniquely embedded and unfolds in the context of the table around which they sit (14:7). This is not a parable from which the Pharisees may conveniently remain aloof. They are active participants in the story.

Jesus proceeds to instruct his fellow guests to choose lower places at the table to create space for "more distinguished" guests who will have places of honor (14:8-11). Jesus's earlier, "Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues," might have been ringing in the Pharisees' ears (11:43).[378] Apparently, the Pharisees have a habit of organizing themselves according to the Greco-Roman social arrangement of patronage. Mark Love explains, "Patrons maintained social standing and economic well-being by securing clients through providing favors or gifts that in turn obligated recipients to reciprocal demonstrations of loyalty. Clients curried the favor and protection of patrons by offering gifts that appropriately marked the socially superior status of the patron."[379] Later when Jesus is eating his last meal with the apostles, he makes clear what he is after in Luke 14: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves" (22:25-26). Jesus presents a new kingdom with alternative human arrangements. In Luke 14, Jesus scolds the Pharisees for importing the economic social arrangements of the nations (the Gentiles) into religious life instead of entrusting themselves to the God who has cared for Israel all along.

[378] Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 224.

[379] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 107.

While the political economy of the U.S. appears to differ from the Greco-Roman system of patronage, the wealthiest continue to hold the places of social honor and power. And those people are most often white. Society is stratified in such a way that even wealthy people of color have difficulty achieving and holding social honor and power. This is problematic, of course, and it is particularly problematic that these arrangements, instead of the economy of God, have defined the church's relationship with the world. Like the Pharisees, the Episcopal Church and other white, affluent churches have imported this stratification into the church and have organized our lives around that which is most exalted in society. We have normalized society's systems of wealth and power in such a way that to imagine any other economic arrangement with our neighbors is denounced as socialist. The Christian ethic in the U.S. is informed more by "the nations" than the kingdom of God.

In a culture of patronage, honor, and shame, Jesus initially seems to be reinforcing well-known wisdom such as Proverbs 25:6-7, "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble."[380] Jesus is looking out for their interests and helping them not to bring embarrassment and shame upon themselves. Upon closer consideration, however, Jesus is leveraging a social convention in order to "subvert it with a more radical demand of the kingdom."[381] It is becoming clear that the "distinguished guests" Jesus has in mind are the marginalized and exploited (14:13, 21, 23). Jesus unravels Greco-Roman benefactor-client social arrangements and establishes "God [as] the Supreme Benefactor" who doles out the blessings to

[380] Culpepper, "Gospel of Luke," 286; Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 227.

[381] Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 227.

anyone who has need (14:14).[382] The Pharisees are not just to move down a couple of places; they are to move all the way to the lowest station trusting in God's table arrangements.[383] Significantly, these are not metaphorical or spiritual instructions. Jesus is speaking about real tables and real social practices to be embodied here and now, though it is also a vision of the reign of God that will one day be in full.[384] In the kingdom of God, God has created a new household or economy (*oikonomia*) that is arranged around God's indiscriminate generosity.

In Tran's discussion on the economy of God, he demonstrates God's abundant "gift-structure of creation," where God is the giver of all that is good.[385] Redeemer Community Church, Dayspring Partners, and Rise Prep live with their neighbors according to God's abundance. They view all that they have as gifts from God to be shared and stewarded with generosity. However, this is not the typical relationship that Christian communities in the U.S. have with their neighbors. Many white Christians have been deluded by cultural narratives of scarcity and greed, which continues to drive a wedge between affluent churches and nearby marginalized communities. Liberal white Christians affirm the premise of racial justice while holding tightly to all that we have "earned." We then wonder why racism is so challenging to dismantle. God invites us to organize our lives around God's generosity. We are called to entrust ourselves to God's household arrangement that does not make "sense," yet somehow contains more blessings than we can imagine. If the Pharisees allow their table practices to be reshaped by Jesus's vision of the kingdom, they will become "friends" of God (14:10) and will receive an

[382] Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 116.

[383] Culpepper, "Gospel of Luke," 287.

[384] Barbara K. Lundblad, "Expanding the Table: Food Justice in a Hungry World," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 64.4 (2013): 42.

[385] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 15.

exaltation that can only be bestowed by God (14:11).[386] Though this exaltation may only be experienced in the eschaton, Jesus implies that this arrangement of the table far supersedes any self-exaltation employed at the expense of others, "One standard offers the reward of social position, the other the reward of God's favor."[387]

After Jesus addresses his fellow guests, he turns to the host and offers the radical instruction to invite "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" to the banquet, because they cannot reciprocate like family members and wealthy friends (14:12-14). Greco-Roman culture utilized the convention of reciprocity because they viewed social belonging as a limited commodity.[388] Reciprocity was a tool of the socially powerful to keep the marginal populations marginal. Jesus exposes the self-seeking of the host and all others who participate in this social arrangement.[389]

Barbara Lundblad rightly quibbles a bit with a common interpretation of Jesus here. She challenges those who believe Jesus is portraying the marginalized as having nothing to offer in terms of repayment.[390] She notes the unique gifts and perspectives the poor, disabled, and marginalized bring to the table, which are ultimately far more valuable than money. This is a helpful critique, as it deconstructs the assumption that the privileged have all the goods to offer. The Episcopal Church and other white churches formed through colonialism have a history of imagining the church as superior to anyone who is not white and wealthy. In this regard, the relationship moves in one direction: from the church to the other. Marginalized neighbors,

[386] Culpepper, "Gospel of Luke," 287; Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 227.

[387] Culpepper, "Gospel of Luke," 288.

[388] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 132.

[389] Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 173.

[390] Lundblad, "Expanding," 42.

therefore, are not regarded as having anything to offer and are instead viewed as a "drain" on the church. However, Lundblad highlights the mutuality of the kingdom and life of the triune God, which is likely what Jesus has in mind when he promises that those who sit at this newly arranged table "will be blessed" (14:14). As presented in the Introduction chapter, the wisdom of the kingdom of God is gifted through the scandal of suffering and death (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

The Parable of the Great Dinner (14:15-24)

Like the guest in 14:15, we hear these instructions of Jesus and are quick to exclaim, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" It has been suggested that this exclamation approximates today's anxious and fragile assertion of, "All Lives Matter."[391] The great reversal of God's kingdom feels threatening to the privileged. Charles H. Talbert notes the hollowness of these words that indicate the outward piety of the Pharisees but lack the practice of inclusion.[392] As a way of reining in this guest's enthusiasm and illuminating more clearly the kingdom of God, Jesus tells the parable of the great dinner.

In this parable, Jesus echoes a vision of God's table that has been offered before in Isaiah 25:6-8, 55:1-2, and 65:13-14. The Pharisees would interpret these prophetic table images eschatologically and not expect for them to give shape to life now.[393] If the wealthy and powerful Pharisees are willing, however, they discover themselves in the excuse-making and invite-declining wealthy guests (14:18-20). Jesus intentionally depicts these excuses as absurd and outlandish (only the wealthiest would think they need 10 oxen!) in order to expose the Pharisees'

[391] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 132.

[392] Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 174.

[393] Levine and Witherington, *The Gospel of Luke*, 397.

true love of money and not God (cf. 16:13-14).[394] It is noteworthy that all three of the excuses pertain to that which would be considered possessions in the ancient world: land, oxen, and a wife. Green adds, "Within the Third Gospel, the chief competitor for this focus stems from Money—not so much money itself, but the rule of Money, manifest in the drive for social praise and, so, in forms of life designed to keep those with power and privilege segregated from those of low status, the least, the lost, and the left-out."[395] Jesus is exposing how the Pharisees' attachments to wealth and social power are stronger than their devotion to God. In effect, the Pharisees are the wealthy guests who do not believe the master's banquet has anything to offer and to benefit them. The Pharisees are snubbing God.

Some have interpreted the second and third waves of guests, "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind," as God's last choice. Our contemporary readings often miss the scandal of a master in a context of patronage inviting those who cannot reciprocate. The master is willing to bring social shame on himself as he welcomes and identifies as family with the marginalized guests.[396] The parable works to reveal the Pharisees' prioritization of possessions and rejection of God as well as God's economy that runs on indiscriminate generosity and not reciprocity. God's table is open to all, but not all desire to pull up a seat at a table outside of their control.

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[394] Lundblad, "Expanding," 42-43; Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 229; Culpepper, "Gospel of Luke," 289.

[395] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 24; Instead of money, Nikole Hannah-Jones prefers to use the term wealth, "Wealth, not income, is the means to security in America. Wealth—assets and investments minus debt—is what enables you to buy homes in safer neighborhoods with better amenities and better-funded schools. …Wealth is security and peace of mind. It's not incidental that wealthier people are healthier and live longer. Wealth is, as a recent Yale study states, 'the most consequential index of economic well-being' for most Americans. But wealth is not something people create solely by themselves; it is accumulated across generations." Nikole Hannah-Jones, "What is Owed," *New York Times Magazine*, June 30, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/24/magazine/reparations-slavery.html.

[396] Robert C. Tannehill, "Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14," *Biblica* 17.4 (1996): 566.

The rule and love of money continues to compete with the invitation to participate in the kingdom and table of God today. White Christians are often more preoccupied with acquiring, maintaining, and storing material wealth and comforts and are missing out on the party God is hosting. Tran's observation is worth repeating here, "Those Americans worried that justice will take away their advantages like nothing more than to talk about identity. They love diversity, inclusion, representation, multiculturalism, and the like because it leaves their stuff—what Jesus in Luke 12 called 'barns and bigger barns'—untouched."[397] Engagement in racial justice necessitates the willingness to share our lives with all and gather around God's table. May we confess with our lives that God's table is worth sacrificing our wealth, time, energy, and comfort if it means that more people are able to find their way to the table, "A church that discovers its life as it is drawn into the life of the Spirit will likely find itself eating at tables not of its own choosing."[398]

The Cost of Discipleship (14:25-35)

The last section of Luke 14 initially seems disconnected from the previous narratives, as Jesus is now traveling to Jerusalem with great crowds following him. Despite the change of scenery, the parable of the great dinner is still on Jesus's mind. Three times (14:26, 27, 33), Jesus emphasizes the relinquishment and suffering involved in discipleship. If anyone is considering following him, they cannot also be attached to family, a particular way of life, or possessions (14:18-20). These things are not inherently corrupt, and Jesus is not telling his potential disciples that they cannot love their families. The point is that if one identifies themselves in the first

[397] Tran, *Racial Capitalism*, 295.

[398] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 138.

guests of the parable of the great dinner, then they should refrain from signing on too early (14:15). This pericope of Luke 14 works to reinforce the rest of the passage. All other loves must be lesser loves in comparison to Jesus.[399] It seems no accident that Luke and Acts are addressed to the "lover(s) of God," Theophilus.[400]

Jesus's teaching on throwing out unsalty salt is a literary bookend to 13:28: "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out." It serves as a harsh critique of those who choose the way of self-interest, wealth, and exclusion of others. They become like bland salt that is so bad it cannot even benefit the manure pile (14:35). Yikes! Is it possible that churches who serve the interests of the privileged to the detriment of the marginalized are as useless in the kingdom of God as bland salt? The first two verses of Luke 15 indicate that the only ones who have ears to hear this message are not the Pharisees but the tax collectors and sinners (14:35). Does the church today have ears to hear?

Missional Pneumatology of Racial Justice

After a couple of post-resurrection table scenes, Jesus tells his disciples to remain in Jerusalem, "until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The narrative picks up in the book of Acts with the disciples prayerfully waiting on the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8, 14). Before Jesus ascends, they ask, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel" (1:6)? Though Jesus has given no indication that the kingdom of God is

[399] Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 175.

[400] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 44.

one that mimics the nations' conceptions of power and might, the disciples are holding out hope that this is Israel's moment to gain the upper hand.[401]

The text does not elaborate on exactly how the disciples envision the coming of the Spirit, but no one seems to anticipate what occurs next. In the rush of a violent wind, the Spirit is poured out upon every last one of those present and enables them to speak in the mother tongues of the Jews who have traveled from every nation (2:1-13). This should not be interpreted as a Pentecostal worship service of speaking in tongues. Jesus's followers are speaking clearly, intricately, and coherently in the languages of those who have shown up in Jerusalem for worship. Why this? Of all the ways the Spirit could have been poured out on humanity, why did God facilitate foreign language acquisition? Willie James Jennings posits that the miracle of Pentecost was one of intimate communion. He poignantly describes the often overlooked joining of the Spirit on Pentecost:

> This is God touching, taking hold of tongue and voice, mind, heart, and body. This is a joining, unprecedented, unanticipated, unwanted, yet complete joining. Those gathered in prayer asked for power. They may have asked for the Holy Spirit to come, but they did not ask for this. This is real grace, untamed grace. *It is the grace that replaces our fantasies of power over people with God's fantasy for desire for people*.[402]

Some interpret Pentecost as proof that God's good news can be translated into every language, but Jennings believes this interpretation misses the profound ways that knowing the language of another, "signifies a life lived in submersion and in submission to another's cultural realities."[403] Pentecost creates mutuality and communion similar to the perichoretic life of the Trinity. In

[401] Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 266.

[402] Jennings, *Acts*, 28, emphasis added.

[403] Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 266.

other words, the pouring out of the Spirit on all enables humanity's imaging of the triune God.[404] Grace Ji-Sun Kim beautifully describes how the life of the triune God gives shape to justice empowered by the Spirit:

> Our participation in the gracious unity of the Trinitarian God is what saves us. Mystically shaped by this triune communion of love, [Hyo-Dong] Lee notes, we are pushed toward a materialization of justice in the political sphere. Moments of materialization in the multitude's attempt to embody democracy offer traces of the Trinity. Spirit God provides the ontic link between the triune economy and the *oikonomia*. This *oikonomia*, or whole inhabited earth, is the place where God's Spirit dwells. As we receive the embrace of Spirit God, we are enabled to embrace the Other.[405]

It is often said that Pentecost is the reversal of Babel. God confuses the speech of the people of Babel and scatters them, and then God helps the scattered tribes understand one another at Pentecost (Genesis 11:7; Acts 2:4, 7-8). Pentecost does reverse Babel with regard to language. However, the narratives that follow Pentecost do not indicate God is concerned with amassing all the believers in one place or that God shares "human fantasies of power over people." This is not a reversal to the extent of building a hegemonic tower. In Jennings's words, "the Holy Spirit presents a profoundly *counterhegemonic* reality" and is more interested in God's desire of joining.[406]

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[404] In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul demonstrates the distance between the transformative work God has already brought into existence and the full glory of God, "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Just above this passage, Paul speaks of the ongoing and increasing nature of our imaging of God, "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore, in my assertions of the Spirit enabling "humanity's imaging of the triune God," I am not suggesting that humanity can somehow bear the image of God in God's fullness. While the Spirit brings about a progression and transformation, a distance remains between the *imago Dei* and God.

[405] Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 156.

[406] Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 266, emphasis added.

Pentecost signals that God's Spirit is not selective about where it lands. Peter proclaims that God's Spirit is poured out upon *all* flesh: men, women, young, old, slaves, and free (Acts 2:17-21). The Spirit is unmerited and a gift to all, including those to whom Peter has just told crucified Jesus (2:23, 36, 38). When Simon the magician desires to buy the power of the Spirit, Peter reprimands him for seeking to purchase a gift that is freely given (8:14-24). And as the book of Acts evolves, the Spirit is freely gifted to those who are regarded as profane, the Gentiles (10:14, 44-48). In other words, the Spirit continues to signal the abundant, generous, and indiscriminate economy of God, "removing it from the realm of transaction or favor currying. It is not a part of the economy of reciprocity."[407]

The Spirit in Acts picks up the Lukan theme of the great reversal by continuing the pursuit of God's social and economic arrangements. Jennings describes how the Spirit poured out on all flesh destroys the existing stratified social order and establishes a new order of the Spirit.[408] Certain narratives in Acts seem more dazzling than others, such as the miraculous healings of the apostles and jailbreaks of the Spirit (3:1-10, 9:32-43, 12:6-19, 16:16-40). Often overlooked are Luke's summary statements of the communities of new believers who sell all their possessions and care for one another to the extent that "There was not a needy person among them" (2:43-47, 4:32-37). Luke also disrupts the narrative to include descriptions of new Christians caring for vulnerable widows and the sufferers of famine (6:1-7, 11:27-30). These passages often occur in conjunction with contrasting characters who meet their demise in light of their orientation around possessions and wealth, namely Ananias and Sapphira and Herod (5:1-11, 12:20-25). Mark Love notes how Herod is "performing the role of the benefactor" by

[407] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 154.

[408] Jennings, *Acts*, 34-35.

currying the favor of the people when there is to be no currying of favor in the economy of God.[409] Similar to God's response to the self-aggrandizement of Babel, the powerful and wealthy in Acts are brought low. These descriptions of the communities of early believers seem unremarkable until one recalls the impossibility of giving up possessions (Luke 14:1-35, 18:18-30). What Jesus began with the stunning healing of the man with dropsy (i.e., greed), the Spirit continues. This is marvelous work! For contemporary white, affluent Christians this is good news. The Spirit makes possible what is impossible for humans to do on our own. For a church that has benefitted from systemic racism for generations, God's Spirit gives us immense hope that we can live with our neighbors according to the economy of God.

[409] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 114.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHOD

Project Timeframe

The research project was implemented over the course of seven weeks during the summer of 2022 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Jackson, MI. The project consisted of two communal practices: Dwelling in the Word on Luke 14:1-35 and Listening Opportunities with three Black leaders (Conversation Partners) from the community and three forms of data collection: surveys, focus group interviews, and researcher field notes. The Dwelling in the Word (Dwelling) practice took place each Sunday morning for seven weeks, and the Listening Opportunities occurred Sunday afternoons of weeks one, three, and five of the study (Appendix H for timeline of the project). Two focus group interviews took place the Monday and Thursday following the seventh Sunday.

Focus Group Interview Participants

Eight members of the congregation of various ages, four women and four men, were invited six weeks prior to the study to serve as focus group interview participants. Participants were selected on the basis of likelihood of participation. In reviewing a list of members of St. Paul's, I selected those who are mostly present on Sundays for both the Christian education hour and coffee hour, as those are the timeframes when the components of the project would occur. In an effort for a variety of perspectives and responses, I did not select both members of married couples to serve as participants. The focus group participants agreed to attend at least four of the seven Dwelling in the Word practices and two of the three Listening Opportunities (see Appendix B for the consent form). Two of the original participants withdrew mid-way through the study due to unforeseen circumstances that inhibited them from meeting the attendance

requirements. One person who had already been present at all of the meetings was asked during week five if they would be willing to participate in the focus group interviews at the end of the summer.[410] Therefore, the final number of focus group interview participants was seven and consisted of three women and four men.

Dwelling in the Word Practice

The Dwelling in the Word practice was open to anyone in the congregation during the education hour on Sunday mornings between the two worship services. The average weekly attendance for Dwelling in the Word was 15 adults. The focus group interview participants comprised approximately one third of the attendees each week, though neither the researcher nor the participants revealed the identities of the interview participants to the rest of the group.

On the first Sunday of the study, I disclosed the terms of the study and introduced the practice using the script found in Appendix D. For the remaining weeks of the study, I sought for Dwelling to feel more like a spiritual practice and less like a research project as often as possible. In summary, Dwelling in the Word followed the same steps each week: read the text and invite participants to notice the place that most caught their attention, practice a minute of silence, invite the group to "find a reasonably friendly looking stranger and listen them into free speech," listen attentively to what partner shares, gather in the large group and share what we heard our partner say, offer global observations of the week's themes, and conclude in gratitude for God's Word and the Spirit that continues to speak through both scripture and community with the call

[410] I consulted with my primary advisor and secondary reader regarding this decision. Because I had not yet gathered any data through interviews, and the individual had been present and engaged in the elements of the project as the original participants, we discerned that the benefit of adding the person's contributions was greater than the risks associated with joining the study part way through. The primary difference between the added participant and the original participants was not knowing they were a participant and, therefore, not being encouraged to keep notes from the beginning.

and response prayer (with the bolded text said by the whole group), "This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**." For the sake of consistency, I was the reader of the text each week. During weeks one through three and the final week, we dwelled in all of Luke 14:1-35 (NRSV; see Appendix E for a copy of the text). Once we had become familiar with the whole passage, we condensed our dwelling practice weeks four through six with Luke 14:1-14, 14:15-35, and 14:7-24, respectively. I also participated by pairing up with a new person each week and sharing with the larger group what I heard my partner share. I utilized a field journal to capture statements shared during the class and typed the statements each Sunday afternoon.

Reflections and Field Journal

I appreciate how Elizabeth Conde-Fraizer articulates the transformative power of the practice of reflection and why I incorporated the practice into my project:

> The two main elements of experiential learning are doing and reflecting on the action. Experience without reflection is a happening, and no learning can be reaped from it. One should begin with concrete experience followed by reflective observation. These observations are the building blocks for constructing new perceptions that reshape one's understanding of the world and how to be in the world.[411]

Before the study began, I encouraged participants to keep a journal each Sunday evening in order to deepen their reflections on the Dwelling in the Word and Listening Opportunities. I also reminded them to review their reflections before the interviews at the end of the project. The journals were not a requirement of participation, nor did I collect them as data. To help guide their reflections, I offered four sets of questions that we use with ministry students in the MREML at Rochester University. The questions were:

1. What happened? What did I notice?

[411] Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *Many Colored Kingdom*, 198.

2. What surprised me?
3. What did I learn?
4. What might God be calling St. Paul's to do or to be in relation to what I discovered today?

After typing out the comments from the dwelling practice each Sunday, I also utilized these four questions to record my experiences, observations, and reflections. I not only answered the questions from my perspective, but I sought to answer the questions based off of the comments I heard the group express that day. As an example, I recorded what surprised me as well as what appeared surprising to the group. On the Sundays when we had Listening Opportunities, I also ran through this set of questions in relation to what I experienced and observed.

Rationale for Dwelling in the Word

I could have designed a Bible study curriculum for my participants and taught a series of classes on the topic of justice and the Bible. However, I believe that imparting information has less impact on beliefs than the experiential learning that comes through repeated practices. In a teaching situation, "The learner can privately evaluate the information without it staking a claim on how one might imagine the world differently."[412] Therefore, I included the Dwelling in the Word practice in the project, because it has greater potential for shifting what participants believe about God and the world.

Through the practice, participants engage multiple levels of listening and gain practice for listening in other contexts. Dwelling invites participants to share what catches their attention in that particular reading of the text. Participants do not need to prepare anything beforehand or

[412] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 252-253.

have unique knowledge of the text in order to participate. As a researcher, I have the undergirding belief that God is present in the text and among the community of listeners. Therefore, what predominantly catches our attention in the text might be God's call to the community for deeper engagement and response. Additionally, by remaining in the same text for several consecutive weeks, participants can become more familiar with the passage and explore the layers of the text more deeply. Since Dwelling is an ongoing practice, the text is more likely to appear in the daily world and imagination of the participants. It is my hope that participants will be more inclined to carry the text with them and consider it in relation to the Listening Opportunities and other occasions during the week. Also, by remaining in the same text together, it also creates a shared imagination across the community.

The practice of Dwelling also stretches the community to listen attentively to one another in pairs and in the larger setting. Because participants share what they hear their partner say, they are more likely to listen well. Furthermore, when participants share in the larger group, the practice is to listen and receive what is shared rather than offering commentary in return. Participants' thoughts are less preoccupied with how they might respond or challenge the other, which frees their capacities for better listening. Without directives of a discussion question curriculum, participants also have more space to share.

Lastly, I believe that dwelling is one way that congregations may practice listening to others beyond the community of faith. I use the particular invitation, "find a reasonably friendly looking stranger and listen them into free speech," to heighten our awareness to receiving the other. As participants grow in comfort and ability in the practice of listening, they have greater aptitude for listening well to other strangers they encounter.

Coding Dwelling in the Word

Before the study, I imagined I would record a few noteworthy moments or statements from the dwelling practice in my field journal and offer some general observations and themes when writing up my results chapter. On the first Sunday of Dwelling, however, I recorded every statement or comment that was offered in the class. I typed out my handwritten field journal notes each Sunday afternoon in order to ensure the most accuracy as possible. I did not have an audio recording, so there is a larger margin of error with the Dwelling data collection compared to the surveys and recorded interviews.

Because of the patterns I was noticing, I realized that I could code the statements that were made during Dwelling and offer a rough quantitative analysis of our engagement of the text. I developed a spreadsheet and gave a tally mark each time that a comment fell into one of the four pericopes of Luke 14 (vv. 1-6; 7-14; 15-24; 25-35). I also had other columns and gave tally marks for certain recurring verses and themes, such as participants expressing frustration with the text or demonstrating conviction and response. At the end, I was able to see how often the group landed in certain areas of the text and avoided other areas for one reason or another.

Listening Opportunities

The Listening Opportunities with three local Black leaders, with whom our rector had standing relationships, were another key element of the project. I selected this component for the project, because I wanted the members of St. Paul's to have encounters rather than learning information through books and documentaries. Mark Love, director of the MREML, explains how new experiences or encounters contain the potential for transformation:

> New information is a weak catalyst for change because we tend to absorb new information into the account of reality we already possess. It usually takes a new experience, one that we can't account for within our typical frameworks of

> understanding, to startle us into a new perception of things. This new perception arises in tandem with our ability to construct a meaningful narrative around the new experience.[413]

I believed that the experiences of seeing and hearing from people who experience the ongoing harm of systemic racism would challenge our assumptions and beliefs. Though the surveys and interviews that followed the Listening Opportunities were not extensive moments for reflection, the questions prompted participants to begin the process of constructing new narratives.

The Listening Opportunities lasted approximately 60-90 minutes each and were held on weeks one, three, and five. These individuals are referred to as Conversation Partners (CP 1, CP 2, CP 3) in the study, and the consent forms outlining possible benefits and risks for the CPs may be found in Appendix C. All three CPs are professionally involved in the work of racial justice in Southeast Michigan. CP 1 consults with various groups seeking diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as advocates for racial justice in the education system. CP 2 was incarcerated in Michigan for several years and now works with a non-profit organization to create policy changes for more just conditions for returning citizens. CP 3 is ordained by The Episcopal Church and assists congregations in the work of racial healing in their local communities.

In addition to the information that I provided the CPs in the consent forms, about three weeks before the study, I sent the CPs a copy of the survey questions and the following guidance for their time with St. Paul's. I gave them the freedom to share however they were the most comfortable, whether it was through autobiographical sharing or from a more systemic standpoint. I also encouraged them to share specifically about their vocational work in the community. I noted the project's emphasis on the practice of listening and expressed that I wanted for St. Paul's to be hosted and led in learning, reflection, and conversation by them. I

[413] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 177.

explained our context in TEC as being one of the most historically powerful, prominent, and affluent churches in the U.S. and our need to grapple with the systemic and unjust realities of racism. I clarified that the focus of my project is on St. Paul's discerning how we may join in racial justice in our local community as opposed to the immediate goal of becoming an interracial congregation. I received prior consent from the CPs in order to make an audio recording of the Listening Opportunities for the sole purpose of accessing accurate statements when writing the results. The recordings were not made available to the congregation or the public. St. Paul's gave an honorarium check to each CP as a gesture of gratitude for their time and investment in our community.

The CPs were invited to worship with the congregation during the second service and join us for coffee hour before the Listening Opportunities began, though only CP 3 joined us for worship. The three Listening Opportunities were originally planned to take place in the fellowship hall, but unfortunately the acoustics proved challenging enough with CP 1 that the second two events were moved to the sanctuary.[414]

The rector of St. Paul's and I invited and encouraged all members of the congregation to attend the Listening Opportunities, though a number of members did not attend due to summer travel, various activities, illness, or lack of interest. After each of the three Listening Opportunities, attendees over the age of 18 were asked to complete an anonymous survey on paper or online with a Google Form link provided. Very few paper forms were utilized with the majority of the participants filling out the online survey. The Google Form surveys remained

[414] After the first Listening Opportunity in the fellowship hall, some members complained of being unable to hear the CP. A few elderly members left early citing difficulty hearing as the reason for leaving. In order to foster a better environment on the other two occasions, the rector and I discerned it would be best to move to the sanctuary. I explained the situation in advance to both of the remaining CPs and asked their permission to speak in the sanctuary instead of the fellowship hall. I believed it was important to seek permission and to prepare them for the transition from a less overtly Christian space to a space of worship.

open for 72 hours after each Listening Opportunity in order to attain the most immediate responses. The survey questions were the same after each event. There was no word limit on the Google Form for questions 4-10, though most participants kept responses to a few words or sentences. The survey questions were as follows:[415]

1. What is your age?

   ___18-34 ___35-49 ___50-64 ___65-79 ___80+

2. How important is it for St. Paul's to be discussing racial justice?

   ___ Not Important ___ Somewhat Important

   ___ Important ___ Extremely Important

3. What was your comfort level while listening to the presenter today?

   ___ Very Uncomfortable ___ Somewhat Uncomfortable

   ___ Somewhat Comfortable ___ Very Comfortable

4. As a way of describing your experience while listening, please share one to three words or brief phrases that express your most dominant feeling(s) or reaction(s).
5. What surprised you about the conversation today?
6. What is one new learning that you had today?
7. How would you define racial justice?
8. If you were aware of God's presence today, write 1-2 sentences to describe what you noticed.
9. What is one hope or dream that this conversation sparked in you when you consider the future of St. Paul's and racial justice in our community?

[415] See Appendix A for Survey Consent Form and Appendix F for Listening Opportunity Survey with its accompanying instructions.

10. What is one question that is still lingering for you? (This question may be directed towards the Conversation Partner, the St. Paul's community, the researcher, yourself, God, or any other audience as you see fit. Please indicate the addressee.)

Rationale of Listening Opportunity Survey Questions

Because St. Paul's is primarily an older congregation, I asked the age of the respondents to track if the survey data was reflective of the age trend of the congregation. I also wanted to have the opportunity to compare responses from older and younger participants in order to note any differences. Responses from younger participants could be helpful in imagining the longer-term future of the church.

I offered two Likert Scale questions that pertain to the level of importance regarding conversations about racial justice at St. Paul's as well as the comfort level during the Listening Opportunities. These questions primarily served as a temperature check of the participants. The lower the interest and comfort levels, the slower the leadership should navigate engagement in racial justice. I also sought to identify if there is a consensus among participants in terms of importance and comfort.

The remainder of the survey questions were inspired by a few different sources. For question four, I asked respondents to condense their feelings and reactions down to just a few words or a brief phrase. St. Ignatius encouraged practitioners of the prayer of the examen to attend to the emotions and feelings that occurred throughout the day.[416] He believed that the Holy Spirit uses emotions and feelings to signal for our attention and are critical for our ongoing discernment of God's calling. Regarding multicultural learning settings, Elizabeth Conde-Fraizer

[416] Mark E. Thibodeaux, *God's Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God's Will* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 9.

recommends, "[Participants] should also talk about the feelings they had along the way. Emotions are important in the process of learning, for they reveal the places of resistance and empowerment. Emotions need to be treated as an integrated part of the process rather than as a disturbance in the learning setting."[417] Therefore, question four was to help us unearth and name the emotions and feelings we had in response to the CPs, so that we could be better discerners of God's calling. Additionally, I asked for condensed responses for this question, because it invites participants to pause after listening to a large amount of content and bring into focus the most salient aspects of the experience.

Questions five, six, eight, and nine were largely shaped by the questions shared above that we utilize in the MREML. After students engage in any action or experience in their congregations, they reflect with their participants on the following questions: What happened and/or what did we notice? What surprised us? What did we learn? What might God be calling us to do or to be in relation to what we have discovered here? We believe that these questions help communities to discern what God might be up to among and around us and how we might join in that work.

For question five, I asked participants what surprised them about the Listening Opportunity that day. Mark Love discusses the importance of paying attention to the surprise, "The gospel…teaches us to attend to the surprise as the possible place where God is bringing the world we have imagined to an end for the sake of a world made possible by the Holy Spirit."[418] A surprise could signal the movement and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and it is important for missional communities to cultivate the habit of noticing and embracing surprises rather than

[417] Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, *Many Colored Kingdom*, 174.

[418] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 70.

viewing them as unwelcome disruptions. Because we often have preconceived assumptions about the presence and activity of God, asking about the surprise opens us to consider if God is inviting us into something new.[419] Love discusses the startling nature of the gospel, which often occurs when one is willing to begin seeing the world through the eyes of those who experience injustice.[420] Therefore, I asked about a surprise because I was curious if listening to the three Black leaders would startle the community into a new perspective of God's presence and work in the world.

Question six asked participants what they learned and complements the question about a surprise. Asking about learning is not simply about gaining new information. The intent is to detect if the community is taking observations and surprises and translating them into new understandings about the way the world works. This question invites participants to articulate how their beliefs and perceptions might be shifting in light of what they have experienced.

I asked questions eight (God's presence) and nine (hope or dream) to help us begin discerning how God might be calling the community to join God's work in the world in light of what we have experienced in the Listening Opportunities. Instead of asking straightforwardly about God's calling, I wondered if it might be easier for participants to answer the question in two parts. I was curious if they would detect God's presence in the Listening Opportunities and how they might articulate that presence. Because the church does not often use the language of "What might God be calling the church to do or to be?" I leaned on the wisdom of Appreciative Inquiry to ask about a hope or a dream in question nine.[421] Though several of the survey

[419] Ibid., 246.

[420] Ibid., 69.

[421] Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2004).

questions pertained to the moment of the experiences of the Listening Opportunities, I wanted to include at least one question that would call the attention of the community towards the future.

I asked participants how they would define racial justice in question seven to gain a sense of how their definitions of racial justice were being shaped by the Conversation Partners. As explored in the subsection above, "Undefinable Justice," there is not one definition of racial justice. Though we will never arrive at a solid definition, I anticipated that listening to those who have experienced racial harm would help us to have more nuanced understandings and more appropriate responses in our local community.

Lastly, I asked if participants had any lingering questions to identify the areas related to racial justice that we need to pursue further. This question additionally draws our attention towards the future as it suggests that the conversation will continue. As the researcher, I understand that I have blind spots. I am unaware of what the community still needs and do not want to make uninformed assumptions as we move forward. By leaving the addressee of the question fairly open-ended, I hoped that this would be an area on the survey to catch some points of concern I have overlooked.

Coding of Listening Opportunity Survey

While I glanced at some survey responses as they were submitted, I did not thoroughly read through every response until after the completion of the entire study. The surveys were automatically populated into spreadsheets by Google Forms with one column per question. After all three surveys were complete, I brought all of the data together onto one sheet ascending in the order of the Listening Opportunities with a total of 44 rows of survey responses. I color coded each of the three Listening Opportunities in order to track how the responses corresponded with the different experiences. I assigned numbers to each code as I identified themes.

On a second spreadsheet, I arranged all of the questions in columns again, except that I used three color-coded columns for each of the short answer questions. Down the left side of the spreadsheet, I assigned each row a code. I reread through the data from the first spreadsheet and pulled over words and phrases into their corresponding boxes. At the end I tallied how often codes were assigned and was able to see the most prominent themes. Because I arranged the data from all three Listening Opportunities side by side per question, I was able to see how themes differed depending on who the respondents had just heard.

On a third spreadsheet, I copied and pasted the columns from the second spreadsheet and grouped them by Listening Opportunity. Through this, I was able to see what themes were prominent in each of the separate events.

Focus Group Interviews

The final phase of the research project consisted of two focus group interviews. They were held the Monday and Thursday after the seventh Sunday of the study and lasted 73 and 96 minutes, respectively. Group One was composed of 2 women and 2 men and Group Two was composed of 1 woman and 2 men. With advance permission, I made an audio recording of each interview and made transcriptions. I asked the following questions to both groups (see Appendix G):

In light of your experiences with the listening opportunities and dwelling practices:

1. Please share three words or brief phrases that express your most dominant feelings and reactions this summer.
2. What moment this summer was the most surprising to you and why?
3. Tell of a moment when you experienced discomfort or grief.
4. Tell of a moment when you were aware of God's presence.

5. What keeps returning to you from Luke 14 and what might it mean for St. Paul's?
6. Briefly name one theme that was recurring or seemed significant for the group during the dwelling practices.
7. How have the practices of listening to the text, to our conversation partners, and to one another informed or shaped your understanding of racial justice?
8. What might God be calling the community of St. Paul's to do or to be over the next year? What is one possible next step?
9. What question is still lingering for you? (We will not attempt to answer this question right now. We are just offering questions for more exploration.)

Rationale for Focus Group Interview Questions

Many of the interview questions were identical or similar to the survey questions for the sake of consistency between the two forms of data collection and to make it easier to identify themes. Asking two entirely different sets of questions would have yielded too many outcomes and made it even more difficult for St. Paul's to discern and respond.

The rationale shared above for the survey questions was the same for the interview questions with a few additional considerations. I changed the question about comfort from a Likert scale to an invitation to share in narrative form, "Tell of a moment when you experienced discomfort or grief." By adding the word grief to the question about comfort level, I opened up the possibility for participants to share on a more difficult and intimate level. I believed that the dialogical format of the focus groups would encourage deeper responses beyond the survey. I was interested in how the additional time to reflect on the Listening Opportunities and the space for dialogue would differ from the anonymous surveys taken independently and fairly immediately.

Because the surveys pertained only to the Listening Opportunities, I asked a few interview questions about Dwelling in the Word and how Luke 14 might be brought into conversation with the Listening Opportunities. Instead of asking interviewees to supply a definition of racial justice, I modified question seven to ask, "How have the practices of listening to the text, to our conversation partners, and to one another informed or shaped your understanding of racial justice?" When I originally wrote the question, my intention was to learn how participants would define racial justice after experiencing all the components of the project. While that remained an interest of mine, I realized in the moment of asking the question in the first interview that the question actually invited participants to reflect on various practices of listening. Overall, my rationale for both the survey and interview questions was to invite participants to reflect on our experiences and articulate new changes in perception and potential leading from God in the work of racial justice.

Coding of Focus Group Interviews

My process for coding the interviews was similar to coding the surveys. After each interview, I listened to the audio and cleaned up the automatic transcription generated during the recording. I placed a question in each column and assigned each interviewee a row. As I read through the transcriptions, I placed participant responses in the box that corresponded with the appropriate question. I read through all the data and assigned them the same number codes from the surveys along with some new codes that did not appear in the surveys.

Similar to the survey spreadsheets, I created a second sheet with a question per column and a code per row for the first interview responses. I created a third spreadsheet identical to the second but containing responses from the second interview. Finally, I created a fourth spreadsheet by arranging the columns from the previous two spreadsheets alongside one another

to compare interview responses per question. Through this process, I was able to see trends per interview as well as per question. Because there were only seven interview participants, I did not end up quantifying the codes for the interviews as I did in the surveys. However, I was still able to see where the bulk of the dialogue occurred for each interview and each question.

After I coded all three data points, the Dwelling field notes, surveys, and interviews, I reviewed them and took notes on the most prevalent themes that were surfacing in all three. I made observations of commonalities and differences between the data sets and identified a few things that seemed missing from the data. I explore the eight most significant themes in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

In large part, the combination of Dwelling in the Word in Luke 14 and the three Listening Opportunities "stirred the pot" at St. Paul's by generating continued learning, discussions, and interest in the topic of racial justice. As anticipated in Chapter One, simply asking questions and having conversations shifted the congregational system in profound ways that continue to be seen and felt months after the project.

I will briefly review the results from the age range and Likert scale questions before moving on to the short answer survey questions, interviews, and statements shared during Dwelling. I identified eight recurring themes from the data. Themes will not be presented from the most prominent or significant to the least, or vice versa. Instead, I have arranged them to demonstrate how the project and experiences evolved over the seven weeks. Because of this configuration, some of the more challenging themes will appear before the more hopeful themes.

Listening Opportunity Age Range and Likert Scale Results

The three Listening Opportunities had an approximate average attendance of 28 with attendees completing 16, 13, and 15 surveys, respectively, for a total of 44 surveys. While all members of St. Paul's were invited and encouraged to attend the Listening Opportunities, some members did not participate for a variety of reasons. Presumably, these included summer travel, illness, and lack of interest. Though the challenges with sound were addressed and communicated to the congregation after the first Listening Opportunity, some might not have returned due to frustrations from the first week. Therefore, the survey participants were self-selecting and not reflective of the entire congregation.

Appendix I offers detailed pie charts and tables that depict the results from the first three questions of the survey that inquired about age, the importance of discussing racial justice at St. Paul's, and the comfort level of the participants during the Listening Opportunities. On average, half of the participants were between the ages of 65-79 with 20 percent being younger than age 50. The majority of participants being older than 50 is reflective of the generational demographic at St. Paul's.

More than four-fifths, 84 percent, of the surveys indicated that it is "extremely important" for St. Paul's to be discussing racial justice and just over nine percent selected "important." No respondents said it is "not important." Therefore, a reasonably high agreement exists that racial justice should be a topic of concern at St. Paul's among those who participated in the study.

When asked about their comfort level while listening to CPs, 84 percent of the time respondents selected "very comfortable" along with 12 percent describing the experience as "somewhat comfortable."[422] Notably, those who selected "very comfortable" rose from 75 percent with CP1 to 85 percent with CP 2 and to 93 percent with CP 3.

There are numerous possibilities for the increase. Each of the three CPs differed in presentation style and content. As will be discussed more below, CP 1 expressed to the group that they tend to speak quickly when they are nervous.[423] In some of the responses, participants indicated that CP 1's display of discomfort heightened their own discomfort. Additionally, participants felt that CP 1 spoke more confrontationally, "[CP 1] was speaking at me, while [CP 2] was speaking to me," while concerning CP 3, they were "very low key and conversational." As an ordained priest, CP 3 framed the work of racial justice as spiritual formation, which

[422] Percentages have been rounded here. See Appendix I for more precise figures.

[423] Third person plural pronouns will be used for all project participants.

resulted in a more familiar and comfortable environment for the participants. It is also important to take into account that there were some attendees who heard CP 1 who were not present for the other two Listening Opportunities. It is possible they experienced discomfort and did not return, which might explain the increase in comfort for the other two Listening Opportunities. The second two also took place in the sanctuary, which could have also contributed to greater comfort for the group. Aside from the differences between the Conversation Partners, attendees, and space, the increased comfort level could also be an indication that participants grew in comfort the more they practiced listening to Black leaders, the text, and one another throughout the project.

Broad Range of Responses and Understandings

Although the Likert scale questions indicated participant consensus regarding levels of importance and comfort, the short answer questions gave a more detailed and scattered picture. When I began coding the data, I felt overwhelmed by the broad range of feelings, reactions, understandings, and suggested responses to racial justice that participants offered. Comments shared in all areas of the project revealed that people felt angry, frustrated, sad, hopeless, disgusted, convicted, surprised, awakened, mildly annoyed, disappointed, inspired, confused, guilty, guilted, overwhelmed, enlightened, energized, appreciative, hopeful, empathetic, uncertain, encouraged, curious, and challenged. Some of these feelings surfaced multiple times, but not one emotion captures the entire project experience. Also, respondents occasionally held together contradicting emotions when asked to share three words or a brief phrase that express their dominant feelings and reactions, such as, “Frustration, sadness, hopeful” or “Inspired and frustrated,” demonstrating how the various listening practices ushered participants into the complex reality of racism. Pulling the community into the tension of emotions has the potential

to create paralysis or synergy for a response. As will be explored more below, it appears to have produced synergy.

In addition to a broad range of feelings, the data reveals that the people of St. Paul's have a number of understandings of racial justice and how to respond to it. When asked to define racial justice, respondents articulated it as inclusion, diversity, breaking down barriers, color does not matter (color blindness), appreciating other cultures, avoiding prejudice, having relationships with all others, fairness, equality, loving one's neighbors, providing opportunities, equity, dismantling racist systems, reparations, and working towards a world where all may thrive. In the surveys, the most frequently offered understanding of racial justice was equality, which was mentioned 22 times. Equity and reparations were mentioned 14 times, thriving and wholeness 11 times, and loving neighbors 10 times. Unsurprisingly, conceptions of racial justice shifted depending on the nature of the presentation made by the CP. Racial justice definitions were more geared towards dismantling racial injustice in the criminal justice system after listening to CP 2 but expressed the desire to love our neighbors after CP 3 presented the work of racial justice as spiritual formation. The hopes, dreams, and next steps ranged from wanting to do more reading and listening, to getting to know our neighbors better, to meeting with legislators, to one survey respondent expressing passionately, in all caps, "THAT WE WILL EMBRACE THIS WORK AND NOT JUST TALK ABOUT IT."[424]

Given the broad range in the larger U.S. culture on the topic of racism, I should not have been surprised by the variety of understandings of and hopes for racial justice at St. Paul's, but I was. Many of the participants in Dwelling and the Listening Opportunities have read and watched documentaries on racism over the past few years. Racial justice is frequently mentioned

[424] The "Looking Ahead" section near the end of this chapter will explore this topic more.

in sermons and finds its way into Bible study and Koinonia (small group) conversations. Many of St. Paul's members vote in support of legislation in hopes of increasing justice for marginalized groups. While there is general consensus that racism exists and St. Paul's needs to take part in addressing it, various understandings of racial justice and its solutions abound. Inclusion, equality, equity, and loving one's neighbors are not synonymous and have different outcomes for people of color. This study indicates that St. Paul's needs to take a more critical look at systemic racism and the possibilities for response. Also, this discovery invites the community to be mindful of the wide array that exists in a space that would seem to offer more agreement on the topic. Members cannot make assumptions regarding one another's stance on racial justice. Rather than seeing the variations as a threat, they provide the opportunity for deeper discernment and more nuanced conversations and actions.

Additionally, whether it was on the surveys or during the interviews, it was not uncommon for participants to stray from the question and use the platform to share whatever they felt needed to be shared. This contributed to the data feeling a bit wide-ranging and unwieldy at times. Perhaps different questions could have kept participants more focused. It occurs to me, however, that the hard realities of systemic racism are so often kept in a pressure can, that the smallest opening yields a large and jumbled release of pressure. U.S. political and societal tensions are currently at such intensity that there are few safe spaces to express oneself honestly without inciting a firestorm. While the project was focused on listening to the text, listening to one another in light of the text, and listening to three Black leaders, it seems as though participants felt the need to be heard as well.

After the first Listening Opportunity, I immediately realized that I had overlooked this need in my research design. I did not account for the need to debrief together what we were

hearing and experiencing. I sensed participants were frustrated, and a glance at the surveys confirmed that suspicion. However, there were no moments built into the project for communally exploring what we had just heard. I could not add an element to the project, so we had to wait seven weeks to reflect together. It is possible that the minimal outlet for expression in the surveys and two interviews during the project contributed to the responses reflecting what the participants wanted to express rather than corresponding to the question. While it appeared aggravating to participants to wait, ultimately it seems beneficial that a privileged white group had to practice extended listening before having the opportunity to speak.

If the stated purpose of this project is, "to invite the members of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church to discern how God might be calling the congregation to understand and participate in racial justice in light of the social reversals found in Luke 14 and the practice of listening to three Black leaders from the community," then one could say this project fell short given the broad range of responses. We have gained little consensus and are further from discerning God's calling than before the project began. I suggest, however, that the diversity of responses helps the congregation to avoid blind spots and gives us the opportunity to be better discerners. The responses reveal important groundwork that needs to occur. As we experience the value of being in community with others who have varying perspectives, we are also better formed for the work of racial justice beyond our walls, as we will inevitably continue encountering differing views. Lastly, the broad range of responses indicate that the congregation is beginning to see that racism is not as simple as loving our neighbors. Racial justice entails a complex economic response that has endless possibilities.

Confusion, Frustration, and Deflection

Confused by Luke 14

For much of Dwelling in Luke 14, participants expressed quite a bit of confusion and frustration along with some deflection. On the surface, narratives about table arrangements and banquets appeared to have nothing to do with racial justice. After seven weeks of Dwelling, a participant came into the interview expressing residual confusion when asked to give three words to describe dominant feelings and reactions, "I want to start with 'confused.'" The first day of Dwelling, people offered sentiments such as, "Jesus is creating problems!" and "Overall this text is very disturbing. It is a lose-lose!" Some questioned Jesus's instructions for taking the lowest seat so that the host may invite people higher, as Jesus did not seem to demonstrate "a pure motive" for humility. Demonstrating our cultural distance from the text, participants did not understand why anyone would even desire the highest seat. The group often gravitated towards the master of the great banquet trying to figure out why he invited the wealthy first and the poor only when he was "desperate for guests."[425] Instead of seeming absurd, the excuses of the wealthy seemed reasonable to some, and the master asking the slave to "compel people to come in," appeared awfully forceful to others.[426] Participants during the first couple of weeks were especially caught and confused by Jesus calling his disciples to "*hate* father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself" (14:26, emphasis added). And the two brief verses about salt at the end received a disproportionate amount of attention and quandary.

[425] Of the four pericopes of Luke 14, 32 percent of the comments were on the parable of the great banquet (vv. 15-24). The next most frequently cited pericope, 26 percent of comments, was Jesus teaching about dinner guests and seating arrangements (vv. 7-14).

[426] A challenge to using parables for Dwelling in the Word and the practice of discernment is that participants are tempted to read them allegorically or metaphorically. Parables reveal a new way of seeing the world that is often unsettling, as the hearers realize that they are the punchline of the parable.

Even at the end of the study, participants felt no closer to understanding the salt than when we began, "We need some theologians to tell us what the hell salt means!"

Frustrations with Dwelling and the Researcher

In addition to confusion over Luke 14, the Dwelling practice itself was unfamiliar to the group, as the members of St. Paul's had not done the Dwelling in the Word practice prior to the project. For a group of people accustomed to reading lectionary texts once every three years, Dwelling was a stretch. Reading the same text over and over again became such a humorously frustrating experience that someone suggested we make "I survived Luke 14" t-shirts! One participant jokingly described the experience as being "bludgeoned with this text," though they did go on to note how the text was beginning to feel more cohesive (week 5). Participants indicated that they desired to have new insights each week and were dissatisfied that the text was not sparking anything new. About midway through the project, participants said things such as, "I just feel like I've gotten to the point where there's nothing else to say" and "We feel like we're just repeating ourselves. Is that ok?" Though I reminded the group that the purpose of Dwelling is to share with one another what captured our attention that day and not to look for novelty in the text, a degree of dissatisfaction with the practice persisted. In light of this experience, I wondered if the group feels more comfortable holding new insights briefly rather than letting repeated wisdom penetrate our hearts.

Likely due to the great confusion and frustration over Luke 14, from beginning to end participants inquired of my intent choosing the text, "Why did you pick this passage?!" On week two, I wrote in my field journal, "Participants seem to be feeling some frustration and agitation about why I would select this text. Some seem a bit bothered or maybe even preoccupied with solving the puzzle of my intent as a researcher." Some participants hinted that they wondered if I

was intentionally causing distress as a way of studying their behaviors. I assured them that this was not a psychological study. I felt concerned that the effort to figure me out or appease me as a researcher was a distraction from listening to and receiving the text. On multiple occasions, I attempted to remind the group that all we were doing was noticing what stood out to us that day. New insights were not necessary. Though I had reasons for selecting the text, I also did not come into the experience with fixed interpretations in my mind, as I believe that all texts have numerous interpretations informed by context. I hoped to hear interpretations that I had never considered before, which I did. Most of the time, I sought to refrain from rescuing the group and clearing up confusions, because Dwelling in the Word is designed for communal wisdom and not the wisdom of an "expert." However, the unfamiliarity of a communal-led practice instead of expert-led might have created even more anxiety. I often wondered how our listening to the text would have differed had it not been for a research project. Having primarily practiced Dwelling with our MREML students, I underestimated the learning curve of a group from a mainline tradition. In hindsight, perhaps it would have been better to prepare potential participants in the months leading up to the project by Dwelling in a less challenging text. More familiarity with the practice itself would have been one less thing for participants to resist, which could have sparked more serious engagement with the text. That said, frustrations with Dwelling sure did add some spice to the project!

Deflection and Luke 14

During the focus group interviews, some participants had a conversation about something I had been thinking but did not want to suggest. One participant was talking about Jesus's instructions to hate our families and to give up all possessions in order to be his disciples. Another participant chimed in and said, "And then he's talking about salt." The first participant

responded and said, “And we jump on that, because it’s easier to talk about that than about hating our family.” Though it was easy to criticize Jesus for using the word, “hate,” it seemed even easier for the group to be curious and light-hearted about the perplexing salt verses at the end. I was curious if participants knew that Jesus was indicting the Pharisees, and us by extension, for their attachments to possessions and status, and participants did not want to see themselves in the mirror of the Pharisees. Criticizing Jesus or the text or fixating on the strange things like salt might have functioned as a deflection tactic.

I have a similar observation about the healing of the man with dropsy. Because participants had no idea that the word dropsy was a metaphor for greed in the ancient world, I went ahead and answered the group’s questions about the ailment early in the study. I hoped that knowing more about dropsy would open up the text in significant ways. However, only 11 percent of the time did participants make comments on that pericope (vv. 1-6), and most of the time the comments from that section pertained to Jesus healing on the sabbath. The group seemed to avoid making the connections between the healing of the man with dropsy and Jesus’s ability to heal the Pharisees’ greed of socio-religious status and possessions.

Deflection and the Listening Opportunities

Similar deflection tactics occurred during the Listening Opportunities, especially the first week. CP 1 shared how they have explored various reasons why systemic racism still exists and have finally come to the conclusion that, “If we get down to the real root of it, in my opinion, fear and greed are the real issue.” The CP stood before a predominantly white and affluent crowd and courageously and unapologetically spoke the words “fear and greed.” As soon as I heard the phrase, I anticipated comments and pushback in the surveys. I was surprised, however, that out

of 16 surveys for CP 1, only three comments mentioned the words fear and greed. Only one of seven interviewees briefly mentioned fear and greed.

Instead, there was a higher prevalence of two things. Survey and interview participants freely offered opinions on the demeanor and effectiveness of the CPs. I found it noteworthy that some of these comments were shared in response to the invitation for personal reflection, "As a way of describing your experience while listening, please share one to three words or brief phrases that express *your* most dominant feeling(s) or reaction(s)" (emphasis not on survey). Instead of participants sharing about themselves, they turned the attention of the question and critiqued the presenters. Some said CP 1 was "confrontational," "extreme," and "antagonistic." Others viewed CP 1 more favorably by expressing they were "helpful," "engaging," "inspiring," and "courageous." Comments about CP 2 were less polarized and assessed the presenter as "effective," "persuasive," and "mesmerizing," and "had us eating out of the palm of [their] hand." Participants described CP 3 "uplifting and encouraging" and as "having very deep roots in God's presence, like an ancient tree." For all three Conversation Partners, some attendees expressed that they were disappointed that there were not more specific suggestions for action offered indicating they did not feel the CPs were as effective as anticipated. While it could be argued that these words and phrases reflect dominant personal reactions, it is interesting how often responses are an assessment of the CP more than a reflection of the participant.

Second, rather than focusing on the meat of the presentation of the CPs, there was a higher prevalence of comments about minor things than I anticipated. When asked about a surprise during the Listening Opportunities, some noted they were surprised by specific details of the personal lives of the CPs, such as their hobbies or the number of children they have. While the personal anecdotes given by the CPs gave the audience a fuller and more autobiographical

picture, I wondered why those were noteworthy moments of surprise for participants. It is possible that those kinds of comments were a form of deflection. I wondered if participants found more comfort in latching onto minor points and assessing the presentation styles of the CPs than participants desired to grapple how things like fear and greed may be identified in their own lives.

It is also helpful to consider that the kinds of questions asked on the surveys and interviews are not often explored at St. Paul's. When asked about a surprise, participants seemed to interpret that to mean surprising information rather than a surprise related to the experience or the encounter. This will be explored more below in the "Theological and Missional Imagination" section.

Perhaps one could say that the questions on a survey immediately following a speaker invite evaluative responses. In our society, people are frequently asked to rate their customer service representative or answer presidential approval polls. In light of this kind of cultural conditioning, participants possibly made the assumption that the survey questions were of that nature. I wonder, however, if the trend of a white, upper-class group immediately evaluating the demeanor and effectiveness of the Black presenters is more than customer service and more than a deflection tactic. This phenomenon might signal what Willie James Jennings calls "the performance of the self-sufficient white man"[427] or Miranda Fricker's testimonial injustice.[428]

Jennings describes how the colonial legacy of Western education has distorted our imaginations in such a way that we are enthralled by the performance of possession, control, and

[427] Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*, Theological Education Between the Times, ed. Ted A. Smith (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020).

[428] Miranda Fricker, excerpt from *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance*, eds. Rik Peels and Martijn Blaauw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1-24, https://www.mirandafricker.com/uploads/1/3/6/2/136236203/epistemic_injustice_and_the_preservation.pdf.

mastery.[429] In other words, we have learned to love a specific kind of intellectual form of whiteness and measure all performances in relation to it.[430] A highly educated group that has been historically shaped by the performance of white, European male priests freely evaluates others by these standards and has the privilege of expressing it.

Fricker uses different terms to explore the listening dynamics between two groups of people. She describes how speakers of color experience *testimonial injustice* because white hearers' hearing is shaped by implicit biases and skepticism of non-white cognition.[431] The hearers' ingrained habit of *judgment of credibility* supersedes the testimony of the speaker and blocks the flow of new learning.[432] This dynamic increases what she calls *hermeneutical marginalisation*, where some social groups are unable to contribute to the pool of shared social meanings.[433] While it is impossible to know the extent that the project participants' judgment of credibility was at work, it is enough to consider these possible explanations for the evaluation of the CPs.

White Privilege, White Fragility, and White Saviorism

White Privilege and Listening

This brings me to one of the more uncomfortable themes to discuss. When CP 1 declared that "fear and greed" are the root issue of racism, they did not linger in that moment or unpack how they understood those words. It felt like they placed a bomb on the table before the audience

[429] Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 6-7.

[430] Ibid., 29.

[431] Fricker, *Epistemic Conditions*, 2-3, 5-6.

[432] Ibid., 3.

[433] Ibid., 4.

and walked away. This could have been a rhetorical strategy, some understandable nerves that overcame them, or something my limited perspective cannot imagine. Whatever the CP's rationale, I felt uneasy. I did not feel discomfort, however, because I disagreed with them. I selected Luke 14 because it challenges all of us who find ourselves in places of privilege to face our own greed and relationship with possessions and status. I designed the project with the undergirding belief that greed has something to do with racism. Therefore, I affirmed CP 1's conclusions. My challenge was CP 1's method of delivery. An interview participant shared my reaction, "It wasn't that you didn't agree with what CP 1 was saying. It was the way [they] said it. It was a matter of delivery. [They were] adversarial."

For days, I found myself going back and forth between two thoughts. In the practice of teaching and preaching, I have learned to invite others to walk alongside me to grapple with a difficult reality. I want to avoid provoking hearers from shutting down too early and wondered if the CP spoke too confrontationally. I sincerely wanted CP 1's words to be heard and was concerned that attendees would not have ears to hear because of the delivery. However, as I mentally gave CP 1 well-intended suggestions, I began to realize how white privilege and fragility were shaping my assessment and notions of effective rhetorical strategies. A person of privilege has the time to slowly and gently invite listeners alongside them. A person who experiences ongoing oppression needs immediate justice and should not be expected to remain quiet or peaceable. Further, I was allowing the predominantly white audience to determine the "wisest" course for racial dialogue. In a sense, I was mentally "tone policing" CP 1 and hoping for them to conform their delivery in such a way that us white people could hear it. I had performance standards shaped by white privilege and fragility and was jarred and disappointed when CP 1 did not fit that mold. Given the numerous comments about the demeanor and

effectiveness of the CPs shared above in "Deflection and the Listening Opportunities," it seems as if many members of St. Paul's easily slip into the mode of assessing others more than we assess ourselves. White supremacy's way of rhetorical mastery might have formed our habits and encounters more than we realize. While there is wisdom in knowing one's audience and speaking in a way that can be heard, this experience reveals that a predominantly white audience, which includes myself, needs to take greater ownership of our part of the tension. Rather than policing the tone or method of the other, this project invites white listeners to explore first why another's message is difficult for us to hear and to recognize our own sense of privilege in our reaction.

St. Paul's as the Host

In light of both Luke 14 and the Listening Opportunities, some participants made suggestions that arranged individuals and/or St. Paul's as the hosts and saviors. Many of the Dwelling comments imagined St. Paul's as the host of the table in the text. Understandably, the group often heard Jesus's instructions to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind," along with the parable of the Great Banquet, as instructions for how churches are supposed to invite others into worship, "So, who are [we] called to invite to our banquet?" asked an interviewee.[434] Conversations often went down the path of asking how St. Paul's can become more inviting to our Black neighbors and diverse, "How might we change up the way we do things?" and "I would like people of other races to feel they would be welcome to attend St. Paul's, and that they would be truly welcomed." These sentiments led to immediate concerns and palpable anxiety about how St. Paul's could get Black people to attend and remain ("how do you

[434] The title of this paper, "Table of Belonging: Exploring Social Reversal at St. Paul's Episcopal Church," which was chosen at the beginning of the study and shared with participants, might have also contributed to interpreting Luke 14 as our church being a place of belonging.

get people to come back three to four times?"), whites and Blacks not being able to relate with one another (asked in Dwelling, "If you only invite [the marginalized] and don't get to invite your family and friends, how do you relate to these people?"), and changing worship styles. These uncertainties continued to surface in survey responses to the CPs, "Can Episcopalians still revere/imbed English culture while appreciating / celebrating / welcoming other cultures? Must we CHANGE to do this?" (emphasis original). While the desire to worship with all people is the eschatological hope, togetherness in worship as the immediate goal is rife with challenges (see "Racial Reconciliation as Togetherness?"). I believe this project exposes the need to orient ourselves around God as the host in our community at large (see "Imaging God at the Table").

When I asked the focus group participants, "What might God be calling the community to be or to do over the next year? What is one possible next step?," the responses were less directly connected to the question and varied considerably. A theme from both of them, however, was the desire to continue learning through books, documentaries, and listening to various speakers from the community. Some participants suggested that St. Paul's could begin hosting regular listening opportunities for the wider Jackson community to broaden awareness of systemic racism and possible solutions. Continuing the Listening Opportunities was additionally suggested a few times in the surveys. Given the design of this research project, listening and learning from others has tremendous value. The community of St. Paul's has demonstrated that we are all over the map when it comes to our understandings of systemic racism and racial justice. Additional learning will help us to have more nuanced understandings and appropriate responses. However, we must also recognize that more reading and listening will not necessarily create racial justice in Jackson, MI. I believe it demonstrates a degree of privilege and comfort to continue reading and listening rather than moving into action. A survey participant commented

along these lines, “When operating from a white supremacist ideology, [I learned] that fear and greed become two of the biggest barriers to true transformation from white churches and communities who would prefer to keep their involvement at the reading, listening, and sparingly donating level.”

Exploring God as Host

To represent the comments fully, I must note that some participants did move outside of the paradigm that imagines St. Paul’s as the host. One person shared how the invitation in Luke 14 does not necessarily mean inviting marginalized people to church, “Jesus was challenging in the parable to have wide open hearts and to fill his house. I didn’t read that as this house but to fill his house. So, fill our lives with people we wouldn’t maybe normally otherwise.” Also, in responses to the CPs, some participants demonstrated the recognition that racial justice entails more than inviting Black people into St. Paul’s and must go beyond the walls of the building:

> I hope that St. Paul's will strive to be more deeply connected to the lives of those who live in our immediate community, our church neighbors, and that we will still deepen the ways we are already trying to be in and serve our community by cultivating those relationships and partnerships more (after CP 1).
>
> Seeing the importance of divesting to reinvest in communities of color that have been systematically driven to poverty (broadly imagined as the lack of relationships and resources to flourish), I hope we can find ways to connect with our neighbors and invest relationally and in other ways to move toward wholeness (after CP 2).
>
> Beyond contacting our local representatives regarding upcoming proposed legislation, what are ways that we can directly engage with our neighbors, especially those currently incarcerated and their relational networks (after CP 2)?
>
> Dear God, what part of this large, complex injustice, can our small church address and make a noticeable, positive change in the Jackson community and beyond (after CP 3)?

These comments reflect the desire to help create greater flourishing for our Black neighbors within the context of meaningful relationships. As St. Paul’s shifts out of the role of host and spends more time listening in the community, we will open up space for God to host us in new

ways of life together. New possibilities can emerge when we go beyond our church walls and learn to be hosted by God through our neighbors.

White Saviorism vs. Solidarity

In addition to viewing St. Paul's as the host, a participant demonstrated white saviorism by approaching one of the CPs and offering to speak to other groups alongside them, because "it might be nice to have a white [person] by your side" and "I'd like to be your [person]." This participant expressed that they felt compelled by the presentation and fueled to make some sort of response. They shared how they see the pervasiveness and power of systemic racism and thought their presence as a white person might help the CP to be more convincing when standing before other white audiences. I believe the participant said this to the CP out of love and as a demonstration of support and solidarity. However, they did not seem to recognize that their offer could send the message that the Black leader was insufficient and needed the strength of the white person. In this, the participant overlooked how compelling the CP was on their own during the Listening Opportunity before a predominantly white group. The assertion of "I'd like to be your [person]" could be interpreted as the desire to remain as close to the center as possible.

This project has opened up the complicated relationship of solidarity and white saviorism. In the work of racial justice, it is important for whites to communicate a willingness to stand and suffer with people of color. The Civil Rights Movement demonstrated the power of whites and Blacks working together to create more just conditions. White allies are critical when it comes to racial justice. At the same time, the well-meaning intentions of white people can quickly become another form of white supremacy, mastery, and white-centrism. Filled with passion for racial justice, white people can begin to write the script and maintain spaces in the

dialogue that ultimately works to undermine the experiences and perspectives of the Black community.

Grief Resistance

Lastly, I thought it was striking that many of the interviewees preferred to use the word discomfort or uncomfortable over the word grief when asked, "Tell of a moment when you experienced discomfort or grief." Some of the responses that reveal this occurrence were:[435]

> You know, *I felt uncomfortable, that's the better word*, when [the CP] was talking about how the way to overcome it is just to go to Black businesses. … Well, what if they're not really good at what they do? … I just felt really *uncomfortable*. That [their] message was that we can fix things by just going to their businesses.
>
> I'll spin off that and you're right. *Grief would be way too strong* of a word…
>
> [I felt] *discomfort* from all 3 speakers in recognizing what the Black community has to deal with. The *discomfort* of what we have created, unintentional in some respects, but we certainly have created a world where it is hard for them to succeed. … *Uncomfortable* with where we are as a community and as a people, and I don't do a whole lot about it. I talk about it, think about it, but I don't do anything.
>
> *I don't know if it was grief or discomfort*, but it grabbed me.

I appreciate the honesty of all of the responses. It takes courage for anyone to share specific places of discomfort in conversations centered on racism. In addressing the possibilities for why interviewees avoided using the word grief in their responses, I do not want to diminish their valuable contributions. Perhaps grief simply did not match the particular comments shared. Participants might have felt grief related to something else from the project, but the word discomfort better described the specific comments they were sharing in the interview. Additionally, participants might have preferred to reserve the word grief for the loss of a loved one and did not feel it was not fitting in this case. Another possibility is that participants did not

[435] I added emphasis to each of the following quotes to highlight the frequency of the words discomfort and uncomfortable over the word grief.

feel comfortable in that setting expressing their grief. A research setting with a collection of a few other church members might not be the place where participants desire to open themselves up to the point of expressing grief. It is also possible that so much distance remains between Black experiences and white experiences in the U.S. that the white listeners did not actually *feel* grief in relation to what they heard during the project. White privilege has insulated whites to the point where we have difficulty accessing the immense suffering the Black community endures, so the word grief did not appropriately describe what white participants had felt. Or perhaps to admit grief is to admit complicity in inflicting the death of families and the death of dreams, and that was too difficult of a place for us to go.

Embracing Grief

It is important to share that one interviewee did overtly express grief, which sparked some shared empathy in the focus group. They said:

> I felt an intense amount of grief in hearing CP 2 talk about how long [they've] been inside. … Just the amount of time that is lost, where you're just sitting around in a cage. … But you know, 20, 25, 30 years is just such a long time. … I don't know anyone who has had that experience. Trying to imagine the total weight of all this time that's just being thrown away. … People having their lives crawl out of them, and then, they come back. And it didn't really sink in before [they were] talking about that. I honestly missed the rest of the talk.

CP 2 shared a number of compelling statistics related to the criminal justice system, but it was the biographical narrative that captured the attention and heart of this participant and others. The person standing before the group did not match the typical portrayal of Black incarcerated persons in the news and by political leaders. Through this experience, hearers were forced to discern between two opposing narratives, and it was difficult to spend time with CP 2 and not be challenged to reconsider previous perceptions and beliefs. This reveals the transformative power

of the encounter. In the sharing of their story, CP 2 opened up space for hearers to imagine themselves in the narrative and begin to shift out of the space of white privilege.

Theological and Missional Imagination

Hermeneutical Differences

In the above section, I highlighted how often the group read Luke 14 and imagined St. Paul's as the host. Participants frequently went from Luke 14 to wondering how we can invite our Black neighbors to church. Because my imagination has been shaped by missional theology's emphasis on God's activity in the world and efforts to decenter the church from the position of host, I did not come into the project interpreting Luke 14 as Jesus instructing churches to be the benefactors of and host the socially marginalized. I read Luke 14 and see God as the host who invites all to the table. Further, I understand that God's table is found in all sorts of places in our world beyond the walls of the church. Particularly in the parable of the Great Banquet, I see the startling news that those of us who assume religious, social, and economic places of privilege might not end up at the banquet due to our own preoccupations and greed, and those assumed by society to have nothing to offer will dine in the places we thought were ours. I assumed or hoped that some participants would see things similarly. After reading Luke 14 with a group of lay members whose imaginations have not often been informed by missional theology, however, I now see how strongly that both Christendom and white supremacy, both of whom assume the role of the host, have informed our readings of the text. Because we have read through these lenses for so long, we easily slip into host mode when interpreting scripture and God's call to us. The project reveals that St. Paul's could benefit from the cultivation of a missional imagination as we interact with both the text and our neighbors.

Is God in This?

For many years, St. Paul's has utilized the phrase, "Celebrating Christ's Presence in a Changing World" on the church's logo, on a banner in front of the building, and at the top of the website as a way of communicating what St. Paul's believes about Christ, the church, and the world and the church's relationship with both Christ and the world. I did not attend the church when this statement was chosen, but I suspect that a major impetus for it was the centrality of the Eucharist in worship. Though the phrase is ubiquitous around St. Paul's, we do not typically discuss how we conceive of Christ's presence, other than the Eucharistic liturgy, and how we discern Christ's presence in our lives together and beyond.

As I was processing the surveys, I discovered that the question that was most frequently left blank (or said "nope" or "nothing") was the question that asked, "If you were aware of God's presence today, write 1-2 sentences to describe what you noticed." Out of 44 responses, this question was left unanswered 16 times. Possibly due to the overwhelming nature of racial injustice, one response said, "If anything, it feels like He's decidedly absent." The next most unanswered question, 13 times, was the last one on the survey, "What is one question lingering for you?"[436] Of the other five short answer questions, each of them had four blanks or less total, meaning that the questions about God's presence and if respondents had a remaining question were left unanswered much more frequently.

When survey respondents answered the question about God's presence, they detected God most often in the courage of the speakers, CP 3's call to love our neighbors, the engaged and active listening of the St. Paul's community, and the belief that God is calling the church to

[436] It is possible that some people might have seen the final question as more optional than the others. Perhaps respondents saw it as an open offer for people to provide any last comments or questions that did not fit in the previous survey questions. At the end of the survey, it would be easy to leave a question like this blank.

action. Participants made somewhat of a distinction between how they felt God's presence between CP 2 and CP 3. As CP 2 shared their story of incarceration, surveys described how they felt "mesmerized" and "captivated" and detected God's presence in the speaker's "forgiveness" and "grace and understanding while describing the infuriating, entrenched forces" of the criminal justice system. The way that respondents felt God through CP 3 was in their demeanor of peace, openness, forgiveness, and love of God and neighbor. In other words, God's presence was energizing with CP 2 and more subtle and conversational with the other.

In the focus group interviews, all participants answered the question about God's presence, though the nature of the responses were quite varied. Some responses did not name God or Christ and instead discussed the discomfort of CP 1's display of discomfort or how St. Paul's needs to be doing more in the community. One participant said the "one tie I had with God's presence" was when they connected CP 2's presentation on incarceration with Jesus's call to take care of prisoners, which indicates God's presence occurs when the person can directly link scripture with a contemporary situation. Unsurprisingly, many of the responses pertained to CP 3 and their spiritual formation-oriented presentation. Participants felt that CP 3 "radiated love and compassion…and Christ's presence" and that racial justice being connected to loving our neighbors was significant. One participant indicated that it "hit home" when CP 3 said "the closest thing to Eucharist is my neighbor." Another person shared how they initially thought CP 3 was giving an evangelical call to convert people and were relieved when CP 3 emphasized showing people God's love through our actions. In fact, that person indicated it was an "aha moment" that Christians could be involved in racial justice without the strings of evangelism

attached to it. Multiple participants shared how CP 3's suggestion of four questions "got right to the heart" of this work.[437]

It seems noteworthy that the presence of God was experienced through an Episcopal priest and with explicit mention of the Eucharist. Given the role of clergy and the Eucharist in Episcopal churches, this is to be expected. I affirm that CP 3 embodied the presence and love of God. At the same time, I wonder about our imagination for the presence of God in people and places that are not explicitly identified as Christian. While many interviewees felt compelled by various statements and experiences during the first two Listening Opportunities, because God was not explicitly named in those, they seemed less apt to articulate God's presence.

A couple of months after the end of the study, I was participating in an adult Sunday morning class and noticed how the group shied away from mentioning God. The group, many of whom attended the Listening Opportunities, was discussing racial justice, and there was a sentiment of defeatism floating around the room, "I've been around for decades, and racism is no different now than it was when I was born" and "It doesn't matter what we do. Things will never get better." While it is important to have a healthy sense of realism about the depths of systemic racism, I observed that no one was calling our attention to the living God's presence with us in the work of racial justice. I did not hear remarks or celebration of God's involvement in the healing and progress that has occurred, nor hope that God is currently interested in liberating people of color. I wondered if there was some functional deism at work. Had I not noticed this in the data, I might have missed how little the presence and activity of God is discussed at St. Paul's outside of worship.

[437] CP 3 shared four questions when they are getting to know someone new in the work of racial justice and reconciliation: "Tell me who you are. What gives you joy? Where does it hurt? What can we do together?"

There are several reasons why participants were less likely to name the presence of God in these instances. One is that Christianity in the West has largely been kept God out of civic matters. Because of this, it might not even occur to people that God is present in conversations about racism. God is experienced in the worship setting, and possibly during private devotions, but not often in other arenas of our lives. This has largely been shaped by the theological and ecclesial Western imagination that locates God in the church and is positioned over and against the world. When Christianity has been brought into civic matters, it has often been for the sake of further subjugation of already marginalized groups, such as efforts of conservative Christians to limit the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. This kind of civic engagement has not fostered a sense of God's presence and has typically done the opposite. One interviewee named the troublesome history of Christians using the Bible to condone slavery, which causes this participant to feel some hesitancy around involving the Bible in discussions around racial justice. It seems less complicated to avoid God in the discussion and advocate for racial justice on humanitarian terms. As the participant cited in the section above expressed that they want to avoid evangelicalism, I suspect that their avoidance is shared among much of the congregation. Episcopalians often try to distinguish themselves from evangelicals. In the effort to keep from overemphasizing and possibly trivializing Jesus's presence, I wonder if it feels more desirable for us to avoid "Jesus talk" altogether.

Additionally, Charles Taylor has identified that we find ourselves in an age of disenchantment and secularism.[438] In an age of enlightenment and modernity (and now post-modernity), the assumption and belief that God is present and acting in miraculous ways has

[438] James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2014.

faded.[439] This posture has become so prevalent, that people rarely attribute anything to the presence and activity of God. If something miraculous occurs, it is often deemed as a coincidence or fluke rather than the work of God. In Dwelling, for example, the comments largely exhibited an intellectual criticism and curiosity about Luke 14 and less often considered how God's Spirit is guiding us into embodiment of the text today.

In my time at St. Paul's, I have observed that the community perpetuates the lack of felt presence of God, because we rarely stop to reflect together and articulate how God might be present, active, and calling us as a community. Mark Love discusses the theological significance of cultivating meaningful reflection in the life of the congregation: "We seldom draw people into meaningful reflection on their experiences. Because we don't think of experience as a source for theology, we don't ask our members to consider how their experiences are related to what God is doing in the world."[440] I have heard people timidly and cautiously share personal accounts of God's stunning work in their lives while being quick to say things like, "Now, some of you might not believe this, but …" If St. Paul's desires to participate in the work of racial justice, it is necessary to nurture a greater sense of God's presence and activity. I suspect the congregation will be quickly discouraged if we pursue racial justice without a collective conviction that God is with us.

[439] Though there are also some Christians, particularly conservative evangelicals, who attribute everything to God's miraculous work to the degree that it is hard to distinguish between the ordinary and the work of God anymore. The end result is still a theological vacuum.

[440] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 179.

God Might Be Here After All

Though there seems to be some uncertainty, unfamiliarity, or even disbelief related to God's presence while navigating racial justice at St. Paul's, a few participants were able to identify God. One person felt God's presence during the Dwelling practices:

> I felt God's presence every time we had to share what our partner talked about. Because I don't think there was anyone who was fully satisfied with how well they were listening to someone else. And I don't think there was anyone who wasn't totally gracious, 'No, it's, fine. Don't beat yourself up because you don't remember everything that I said.' I really thought that there was a lot of graciousness and just enjoying each other's presence.

Though the Dwelling practice was new and challenging on many levels for the group, this participant highlights how the community values graciousness with one another over accuracy. Dwelling participants did not chime in to correct how they had been represented, and the group exhibited a level of trust that whatever was shared was of value for the whole group. Participants practiced humility, which is an important posture, especially in conversations pertaining to racial justice. In my time at St. Paul's, I have observed and participated in a community of graciousness. Embedded in the grace that we share with one another is the underlying belief that God is gracious with us.

When I asked survey participants when they felt surprised, none of the responses pertained explicitly to the activity of God. Most of the responses reflected eye-opening awareness regarding systemic racism, surprise at the openness of both the speakers and listeners, and disappointment that the CPs did not offer as many suggestions for action. As mentioned in the "Confusion, Frustration, and Deflection" section, some also shared that they were surprised about details about the lives of the CPs that seemed insignificant. I asked about surprises hoping that some comments would be occasions for discerning the activity of God's Spirit.

Initially, it seemed as though we, including myself, had little awareness that the Spirit was showing up in unexpected ways. A few months after the study, however, one person in the

church wondered out loud if the Spirit's work at St. Paul's is our growing awareness and attentiveness to systemic racism. They noted how these conversations and interest in the topic would have never occurred ten years ago and beyond. It reminded me of something Willie James Jennings says in reference to the new Christians in Antioch who responded to the needs of others during the famine (Acts 11:27-30): "The Spirit always brings to the church specific knowledge of the world and the specific sites of divine concern. A church that knows not the particular needs of its time and place is a church that has not heard the Spirit speaking."[441] In light of the openness and awareness at St. Paul's regarding racial justice, I wonder if the church is attending more to the Spirit than we might realize.

Realizations and Connections

Conversation Partners and New Perspectives

Participants offered many comments, including 17 from the surveys, that revealed how they gained important new insights as they listened to the perspectives of the Conversation Partners. Some expressed that they did not realize that racism is so prevalent today, even in our local community. One person was surprised that people today would still call a Black person the "N word," even a child. Listeners became more aware of the stark differences between the daily experiences of Black and white people. One person was struck by how careful the CPs had to be and then reflected on their own life, "I've never had to be that intentional about my life." Additionally, a survey respondent learned, "How difficult it must be to live your life 'with intention' of not upsetting 'white' expectations." One person had the eye-opening realization that Black people "have to consciously remember and teach their children that they must walk

[441] Jennings, *Acts*, 125.

differently in a white world." One expressed the recognition, "[The CPs] have to deal with things that we don't have to deal with." Hearing the CPs' stories "put true life to the issues we're facing in our society still today."

After CP 3, a number of participants commented on the value of connecting racial justice with spiritual formation. The remarks indicated that the spiritual component had been missing from the conversations on racial justice to that point. The reminder or realization that racial justice is spiritual work seemed to be centering for participants. As shared in the above section, an interviewee discussed how important it was for them to be reminded that racial justice is ultimately about "showing people love" rather than evangelizing people.

These were not simply new learnings. Many participants also expressed a level of shock about what they heard during the Listening Opportunities, especially the information shared about the criminal justice system. In response to CP 2, respondents said they were surprised by "the level of barriers to incarcerated people when released" and that they are "Beginning to see a longstanding, deliberate disruption of Black families." Another respondent said, "Just how bad [the criminal system] is was surprising, above and beyond what I had thought. The number of ways a conviction follows you forever, truth in sentencing, and the history immediately after slavery were particularly surprising." After the first Listening Opportunity, one interviewee said that it, "Really opened my eyes to a whole process of things. [CP 1] used the concept that we got here because of fear and greed. Wow, that really explains a lot. It was surprising because I had never thought of that before." An interviewee summed up the value of the Listening Opportunities by saying, "there is no question that the speakers had a greater impact on the topic than when we are all talking to one another from not horribly dissimilar places." Though many at St. Paul's have read books on the topic of racism, the project reveals how much more learning

and transformation occurs through an embodied encounter and the practice of listening to others share their experiences.

Evolving Understandings of Luke 14

As previously mentioned, the Dwelling participants were not shy in expressing great confusion and exasperation with Luke 14, especially the first few weeks of the study. A participant said to me about halfway through the study, "I just don't see what Luke 14 has to do with racism." After seven weeks of Dwelling, one of the participants came into the focus group interview expressing lingering confusion, "I didn't see a lot of correlation between Luke and the people that came and spoke." Participants also did not often bring insights from the Listening Opportunities into the Dwelling practice as I anticipated. On week four, I tried explicitly to frame the Luke 14 text with a reflection question to help build the connections between the text and racial justice.[442] However, the group indicated that the question made things even more challenging, so I decided to let things emerge on their own for the remaining weeks. Despite some initial resistance and even uncertainties near the end, participants increased in discoveries and connections throughout the study.

When reading through the Dwelling comments from start to finish, it is apparent that the participants had clearer understandings of the text and made more contemporary connections as the project moved forward. On week five, one person said, "When we first started, we were all over the place, and it was frustrating. The more we have been bludgeoned with this text, I mean, the more we have dwelled in this, the more cohesive it feels!" Another person reflected at that

[442] Before reading Luke 14:1-14, I asked, "As you listen, consider how this passage might pertain to a church who has historically been embedded in wealth and elitism (consider the Church of England as our roots) as well as finds ourselves in a city with a massive wealth gap and racial divisions. How do these considerations affect your hearing of the text?"

point, “I have a new curiosity for this text that I didn’t have at the beginning.” In the first four weeks of the study, only six comments were made during the Dwelling that I tagged as, “Noticing themes in the text; Making connections; Gaining clarity/understanding.” There were 17 comments of that nature in the final three weeks of Dwelling.

Almost all of the comments offered in the first half of the study that indicated connections or understanding, were internal to the text itself and made little to no connection to our contemporary setting. As example, one person noticed that the master of the parable first invites all the people that Jesus has just instructed the Pharisees not to invite, “do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors, in case they invite you in return, and you would be repaid” (14:12, 17-20). If the master represents God, they wondered why God would invite the very people Jesus just said not to invite. Another participant sought to make a connection between those who make excuses for not coming to the banquet to salt losing its saltiness (14:18-20, 34-35). One person observed how Jesus speaking of the “resurrection of the righteous” as true righteousness in verse 14 stands in sharp contrast to the Pharisees’ perceived righteousness.

As comments of connection and clarity increased the final three weeks of Dwelling, participants brought the text into more conversation with our contemporary world. Remarks typically pertained to three areas: possessions, humility, and the meaning of “blessed.” When reading the last two pericopes during week five, a few participants offered the helpful distinction between possessing and stewarding, “There’s a difference between owning possessions and being a steward of them. Stewarding is taking care of the gifts of God. You don’t have anything of your own.” Someone else pointed out, “You don’t want too much if you’re a steward. It becomes too complicated. You have to build more storage barns.” Another person discussed how

possessions control the person, much like dropsy had become all-consuming of the man at the beginning of Luke 14. They suggested that sharing possessions could bring us into greater community with one another and help us to move away from American individualism. Possessions continued to surface during weeks six and seven with comments that all observed how people have a choice related to their possessions, and it is easier to choose Jesus's feast if we have fewer possessions. A participant found an echo of this narrative in the rich ruler who goes away sad after Jesus tells him to "sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor" (18:22).

In my notes at the end of the project, I noted the things that people did not say. I discovered that no one made a literal interpretation of, "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (14:33). As the project moved along, the group discerned that something about possessions was critical for interpreting the passage. They just did not believe the wisdom of the text needed to be embodied literally for it to be of value. The group named how possessions interfere with our relationships with God and others. They could see how those without possessions are freer and more available to say yes to God's invitation, and in this sense, there might be something we could learn from our surrounding community. Instead of having a radical response of voluntary poverty, participants seemed to find greater consolation in the assertion that all that we have comes from God and can be shared and stewarded. Because of God's abundance, one participant articulated, "There is still room. There is more room than we think at the table."

The two themes of humility and being blessed near the end of Dwelling also surfaced repeatedly, and participants saw how one's relationship with possessions is connected with both of these. One participant said that "[Jesus] is presenting humility as the way," and coined the

term “humblizing” as their summary of Luke 14. Jesus is looking for those who are not so absorbed with themselves and their possessions that they have no regard for “the misfits.” Another person noticed a slight variation in the wording of verse eleven, “For *all* who exalt themselves will be humbled, and *those* who humble themselves will be exalted” (emphasis added). They said, “It gives the impression that pride and self-centeredness always come before a fall, but those who humble themselves will not necessarily be exalted. Therefore, humility is not a path that guarantees exaltation, because that’s not the goal anyways. The only thing we are called to focus on is humbling ourselves.” One person wondered if the slave, being in a lower social position than the master, identifies with the poor, crippled, blind, and lame and is one step ahead of the master in inviting them. The slave knows life “from below,” so his empathy moves him to invite those who are often left out.

Lastly, a couple of comments were made about the notion of being blessed in the passage. One observation stands out, “So, when Jesus says ‘and you will be blessed,’ he means, you will be blessed by no longer participating in this broken cultural system” (14:14). Though many of the comments of connection and understanding continued to focus on the text for the duration of the study, participants increased in making contemporary connections. Furthermore, the group moved from their initial agitation and outright rejection of Jesus’s call to give up all possessions and began to consider what God’s call to us might be related to possessions.

Participants also increased in making summative comments during the last few sessions of Dwelling. Some people expressed that it was helpful when others in the group sought to tie the text together for everyone else. An interviewee said they felt God’s presence in that regard, “I would go back to the last session that we had regrouped and when [a participant] tried to summarize what the whole thing meant in terms of everything leading to the inequality in the

existent society. Everything sort of relates to that. I thought that was very insightful, and I was inspired."

Deeper Insights through Focus Group Interviews

During one of the focus group interviews, three participants had a conversation and made an important connection between one of the Listening Opportunities and Luke 14.[443] Participant 1 was discussing how, "[Jesus] is very forthright about telling [the Pharisees] that they've got to begin to imagine a different way of operating in a way that's more just, in a way that's more open and inviting." Participant 2 chimed in and said, "I don't know if it came from the text as much as it came from [participant 1], but what you said about Jesus and how he behaved and acted with his hosts, his fellow diners. Maybe [CP 1] wasn't that wrong in [their] approach, because [they] certainly [were] fairly strident," referring to CP 1's comments about fear and greed. Participant 3 jumps in to say, "Well, we were the Pharisees and [CP 1] was letting us know it!" Participant 2 concluded, "Yeah, basically. So that was just something that just came to me in the last two minutes." This exchange demonstrates the value of focus group interviews. In individual interviews, participants might not have made that key connection between the text and one of the Listening Opportunities. The synergy of the conversation opened up space for participants to bravely name something in the context of community that could easily be dismissed if it had remained the thought of an individual.

Another person made some connections between the text and the Listening Opportunities through the focus group interview. As mentioned previously, a participant came into the interview expressing confusion between the two components of the project. When I asked

[443] I will name them as participant 1, 2, and 3 here for the sake of clarity.

participants if they had any lingering questions at the end of the interview, they said, "My question I think, still, and it might be a little closer now, since we've talked tonight. But still, I didn't see a lot of correlation between Luke and the people that came and spoke. I thought it was two different things altogether. However, after listening to everybody talking here tonight, I can see that it's a little tighter than it was. It still seems to me it's a tentative touch." Though this participant did not experience dramatic clarity, their comments suggest that the focus group interview formed some connections for them.

Lastly, I noticed how storytelling was a marked difference between the surveys and interviews. Interviewees utilized the space and attentive listeners to share more at length about their experiences during the project. The storytelling appeared to bring more value to the project than if the experiences had remained on their own. As one story was shared, participants felt the freedom to share additional stories along those lines and consider new possibilities in light of the collective storytelling. Mark Love notes the importance of storytelling as a communal practice:

> The lack of storytelling in most congregations leads us to wonder whether we are missing out on the full meaning of the experiences of God we have. Even those that are more spectacular or out of the ordinary may indicate to us that God is moving, but our failure to pay attention to the details around those events leaves us with less to say and less to believe.[444]

Storytelling is not a regular practice at St. Paul's, and the project highlights how storytelling could be one possible avenue for deepening our communal sense of God's presence in our experiences.

[444] Love, *It Seemed Good*, 175.

Dwelling: The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Since Dwelling was new to most participants, many were caught off guard by the new insights that emerged each week and the way that Luke 14 continued to have a life of its own beyond the Sunday morning moment. During the final week of Dwelling, participants offered reflections such as, "I noticed how many parts of this passage came up unbidden during the week. The world of the text keeps emerging in this world," and "I also noticed things from the text popping into my head throughout the week whenever I would least expect it. It made me think about things more instead of just passing them on by. The practice really grew on me." During the interviews, one person said:

> [I was] surprised in Dwelling that I could find something new and different every week. And talking with a different person every week, sometimes then something else would come out. Or maybe it would cause me to think about something during the week. But then when I came back the next week, I saw it differently. Because we sat quietly thinking on our own and then [we had] that discussion. I was really surprised. I didn't think I would find something different each time, and I did.

Another interviewee reflected on their experience with Dwelling throughout the project:

> I was always confused about that Bible chapter that we were reading in Luke. And as confused as I was, I had moments I would be thinking about it. Not while we were here, but I went back and read it myself and several times over the course of the summer, and I think maybe that was God speaking to me in some way. And he still hasn't given me a whole lot of answers, but for some reason, I keep looking at it.

Since the end of the project, several of the participants have continued engaging the topic of racial justice together, specifically through discussing the book *The Sum of Us* by Heather McGhee. People seem surprised (with bit of eye-roll!) at how often Luke 14 makes its way into our conversations. It seems like the group cannot get far into discussions on the economy and racism without Luke 14 pushing its way into the conversation again. One person told me that Luke 14 now has a significant place in their thoughts and imagination on a regular basis. They navigate the world through the lens of Luke 14 and are noticing things they had not previously

seen. Additionally, unbeknownst to me when I arranged my project, all of the lectionary texts for the Sundays from mid-June through the end of Ordinary Time were from the Gospel of Luke. Just three weeks after the end of the project, the lectionary had our community back in Luke 14, which sent out a wave of chuckles across the sanctuary. The congregation is beginning to believe we will never be able to get away from Luke 14!

Engagement, Hospitality, and Energy

The Gift of Engaged Listening

It was immediately apparent in the Listening Opportunities and Dwelling, and later confirmed in the surveys and interviews, that the community of St. Paul's listens well to one another and to others. Each of the CPs shared uncomfortable stories and information, and participants could have become defensive or walked out. While participants disclosed through surveys and interviews that they sometimes felt uncomfortable, and even some disagreement with what they were hearing, participants gave a full hearing to the CPs. When asked about surprises and a sense of God's presence, the community's posture of engaged listening was at the top of the list. Survey responses offered the following reflections:

> [I was surprised by] the active listening and compassion for [CP 1] by our members.
>
> After the technical difficulties last session, I wondered if people would sort of check out, but people seemed engaged, challenged, willing to wrestle, and ready to listen and ask uncomfortable questions.
>
> Today I noticed God's presence in the conviction of people, both their attentiveness and wrestling with what [CP 2] was sharing.
>
> I thought all were very engaged with what [CP 3] was saying.
>
> I felt God was there with us and was encouraging us all to listen [to CP 3] and help break down the barriers.

One person expressed personally, "Prayers to open my heart were heard." Additionally, survey respondents were mutually gifted by the openness and uncensored dialogue with the three CPs.

Clearly, creating space and listening to the other is one way that this community believes God is among us.

One interviewee said they felt surprised at how the community persevered in the labor of listening to the text and the CPs:

> I was most surprised to see all of the faces from the first week still there on the last week. We didn't really have anyone stop coming. I was surprised by the openness, because we were trying to do the same thing over and over. And it's frustrating and it's difficult. … Like it's just always, 'this is what it is.' It's hard. It's going to take an hour out of your life, and it's going to be emotionally taxing. You've got to try to make sense out of it and it feels bad. And it sort of felt like both Luke 14 and the three speakers were saying, 'Really, this is not a good situation. We're not going to candy coat it for you.' And that didn't chase anyone away. There were some weeks where I was like, 'Can I just skip this?'… You know, a lot of people went above and beyond. Some people weren't obligated at all, and they came to everything. I was not expecting it and was pleasantly surprised.

This person speaks candidly about the painful nature of the work of the project while affirming that the community of St. Paul's is here for it. Despite the degree of white privilege that is inevitable in a predominantly white, affluent group, the impulse was to remain present. Along these lines, an interviewee spoke of the challenge of listening to the other and celebrated how participants became better at it the more we practiced it:

> What I would take away from the practice of listening to each other talk about the Scripture is that for a while you have to take all of these thoughts that you've built up about how smart you are, about how you ask good questions of the Bible, about how you're good at figuring things out. … You've got to control all those thoughts raging in the back of your head and just turn it off, so that you can fill it with what the other person is saying. That takes practice. I myself am not very good at it. And I think that we all showed ourselves that with practice we can get better at it. And in combining that with speakers, we have to be open to their point of view and to turn our own point of view off for a little bit long enough for their presence and their experience and their observations to sort of seep into us. We have to give it space. And again, it takes practice. It's not an easy thing to do. It doesn't always feel good to take a back seat in your own brain. But I think that the practice was good for us. I think it demonstrated that we're open to getting better and more aware about it.

Through the practices of listening to the text, one another, and to the CPs, the community of St. Paul's has discovered the value of opening ourselves up to the other. On our own, none of us

contains the knowledge and wisdom necessary for social healing. Additionally, we learned the value of repeated practice and the gifts that come through the hard work. What might seem awkward, unpleasant, or challenging initially does eventually become easier and fruitful the more we practice. The final Sunday of Dwelling, one person spoke to the tension between discomfort and the value of the practice and indicated their willingness to endure, "I would definitely do this practice again. At first, I was very uncomfortable talking with new people each week. I'm still a bit uncomfortable, but even so, I would still do it again."

As discussed in the previous theme, the more participants dwelled in Luke 14, the more realizations and connections they made regarding the text. The group also offered some growing self-reflections that grew out of the practice, "I've noticed that I'm a terrible listener. It's hard to listen and process so quickly. I'm realizing that I'm too busy and move too fast," followed by another person's, "I agree!" And on the final Sunday, "I learned that I don't listen very well."

Though participants were critical of themselves as listeners, others were quite gracious and affirming of how well the group listened to one another. As shared above when discussing the presence of God, one participant was moved by the atmosphere of gracious listening during Dwelling:

> I felt God's presence every time we had to share what our partner talked about. Because I don't think there was anyone who was fully satisfied with how well they were listening to someone else. And I don't think there was anyone who wasn't totally gracious, 'No, it's, fine. Don't beat yourself up because you don't remember everything that I said.' I really thought that there was a lot of graciousness and just enjoying each other's presence.

Additionally, an interviewee affirmed the intentionality of listening for the project:

> I like that you call these things Listening Opportunities. And that's actually something I struggled with in even saying yes, because I thought, 'Well, I'm going to want to ask the question for clarification, but am I just to listen?' And I really enjoyed that statement [of listening]. That's what it was. And that might help if we were to invite people to say a 'listening opportunity' and not a debate forum.

Energy for Action

Not only did the community of St. Paul's exhibit engagement in listening, but some were immediately compelled to take action. One person, in particular, decided to connect with some Black business owners of Jackson, which has led to surprising outcomes. Coming away from all the practices of listening, their posture has become, "More engagement, more engagement is, at least for me, is the key. And since it doesn't happen naturally, organically, it has to be real intentional." They shared about a Black business owner who knocked on their door with their business card and information asking if they would consider using their business for their home. The person indicated that they have been happy with their previous long-term business relationship and were not looking to switch. However, the project had disrupted them enough to give the Black business owner an opportunity. After exploring more with the business owner about the pricing and services he could provide, they reported that they have now switched their business over to the Black business owner and are positioned to be in an ongoing relationship with someone from the community they might not have encountered otherwise.

That person shared a second story that was quite compelling. After the first Listening Opportunity, they realized that there are many occasions in their life where they could choose a Black-owned business instead of a white-owned business. CP 1 made a number of suggestions for the kinds of businesses that white people could utilize, and one of them was Black-owned hair salons. The CP pointed out that most cosmetology schools are white-owned, so Black hair-stylists learn in that context how to cut and treat the hair of white people. Instead of the opportunity coming to them, like in the previous story, this person took the initiative of asking a friend for a recommendation of a Black-owned salon in the area.

The person described feeling a mixture of courage and anxiety as they arranged their appointment and walked into a setting as the only white person. As they were getting their hair done, the stylist ended up sharing that the recent past has been traumatic for her with the sudden death of an immediate family member. Though the situation is still under investigation, it is possible that the cause of death was racially motivated. She is in a situation she did not anticipate and is having difficulty grieving and adjusting to her new reality. The stylist now bears the responsibilities of caring for the family members of the deceased. The person from St. Paul's could see the ripple effects in the Black community of racially motivated crimes. They were able to listen compassionately and become acutely aware of the unrelenting fear and pain Black people endure as a result of ongoing racism. Because the nature of getting a haircut lends itself to slowing down, being present, making conversation, and regular interactions, this one bold choice has opened up space for a relationship that would not have occurred had the person maintained the status quo.

In addition to these stories, some members from St. Paul's attended some of the Southside Summer Festival events that are hosted by the Black community in Jackson. These events created opportunities to meet Black-business vendors and artists as well as spend time in an environment where white people are in the minority. Some lay leaders in the church have also started seeking out new partnerships with our Black neighbors in Jackson and are listening to how St. Paul's might be able to help us be "more intentional about being part of the community that our church lives in," as one interviewee said it. Though this is not necessarily an action, several St. Paul's members during and since the study have talked about various documentaries and films they have been watching at home that pertain to the topic of racism. When so many series and movies are available to watch, it is noteworthy that the community is maintaining

interest in this issue. As participants become aware of the pervasiveness of systemic racism, they seem to be realizing how much more they need to learn. Although there is considerable racial justice work that remains, the community of St. Paul's demonstrates a promising level of engagement.

Recognition and Celebration

From time to time, participants offered a hopeful and positive balance to the challenging territory we navigated during the project. It was valuable for people to pause and reflect on the ways that St. Paul's has already transformed regarding social issues throughout the years. In Dwelling, one long-time member described how St. Paul's used to be a "society church" when they first started attending, but that is not as much the case anymore. Another person observed how our parish engages in challenging dialogues and is better connected with the surrounding community more than ten to twenty years ago. This person laments that we have lost some members due to these changes, but also celebrates the other ways we have grown and the hopeful path ahead of us. To participants, the church feels stronger and more vibrant for our willingness to push outside of our comfort zones.

It was important for participants to name specific actions St. Paul's has taken in recent years to support our surrounding neighbors. Jackson County has used our building for the past 10 years for a day camp for at-risk youth called the Get REAL Summer Program. The members of St. Paul's have fairly minimal interactions with the campers and staff, however, members celebrate the step that the church has taken to open our doors and share our space. While it might be time for St. Paul's to listen to the Get REAL leaders of other appropriate ways we could interact with the campers and their families, this experience demonstrates that St. Paul's has the

capacity for partnership and the humility to avoid the position of the host.[445] Over the years, mutual trust has been built, and it is a partnership with untapped potential.

Members also noted the many years of cooking meals for the clients of the Interfaith Shelter in Jackson, though the pandemic has disrupted our previous engagement there. During the winter months of 2021-22, St. Paul's fellowship hall was turned into an overnight warming center in partnership with the Interfaith Shelter and other volunteers. Participants discussed how some members felt some initial anxiety regarding the warming center, while also affirming that it was the right thing for St. Paul's to do given how few options the homeless population had at the time. The group indicated surprise that many in the parish were open to the warming center and that the effort went relatively smoothly.

Lastly, a few participants articulated that they felt some irritation at a CP's suggestion of patronizing Black businesses when St. Paul's has already formed partnerships with multiple Black business-owners in recent years. In one of these relationships, St. Paul's has given a microloan and the usage of our facilities to a person seeking to grow their business, and it has appeared to be helpful to the business owner. While there is always room for growth, the congregation was right to notice and celebrate that we have taken steps over the years. In the wisdom of the method of Appreciative Inquiry, as the group identifies positive engagement and God's work in the past, there is greater trust for taking risks moving forward.

[445] In this context, I understand the host position to be the leaders of the camp. St. Paul's has historically had little involvement by simply offering facilities.

Looking Ahead

Desire with a Dash of Doubt

Frequently, participants indicated that they feel called to take action while also expressing doubt. Sometimes the uncertainty reflected the realization of the complexity and magnitude of systemic racism paired with the question, "Where do we begin?" Participants said they were hoping the CPs would offer more tangible next steps for our congregation and came away still feeling a bit lost. There was a humble recognition that St. Paul's cannot solve racism and that any participation in the work is "going to take a lot of prayer." Despite these important cautions, participants also realized that the overwhelming nature of systemic racism can no longer be an excuse for inaction. As shared above, some survey respondents felt so passionately about acting that they wrote in all caps to ensure their words were not overlooked, "THAT WE WILL EMBRACE THIS WORK AND NOT JUST TALK ABOUT IT" and "That we can do more than CARE DEEPLY about racial justice. We can seek out specific opportunities to stretch ourselves and grow as anti-racists—both as individuals and as a congregation." In a variety of ways, participants communicated their desires for action that will go beyond previous engagement:

> We need to live what we believe.
>
> I hope that our congregation finds ways to involve ourselves in this struggle in ways that are not just spending money.
>
> I hope that St. Paul's parishioners will stand in support of fairness and equity for all starting at the grass-roots level.
>
> I hope that we can make a difference over the next year in working with people in our own neighborhood, so that next year there might be even a small change in this kind of discussion.
>
> I hope that our community makes ourselves known in the community through our actions.
>
> Are we as a congregation willing to step up our involvement?

> Dear God, what part of this large, complex injustice, can our small church address and make a noticeable, positive change in the Jackson community and beyond?
>
> We are in a community which actually has a lot of contact with, not necessarily prisoners, but certainly with families of prisoners. And from that standpoint, we should be heavily doing a lot more and still could do a lot more.

As shared above in the "Exploring God as Host" subsection, several participants view these actions as becoming better connected with the Black community in Jackson. Many participants recognize the importance of forming relationships in order to best know what actions to take. Some desire to do this through supporting Black-owned businesses and others mentioned forming partnerships with racial justice groups in the community. Particularly after CP 2, several participants realized how the presence of the prison in Jackson affords opportunities to address racial injustice in the criminal justice system, "[I hope] that we would be more involved in being vocal with those in authority and our lawmakers in making laws more equitable." The desire for action is clearly present, and participants have identified a variety of actions we could take.

Interviewees also named the tension between action and uncertainty. A couple of comments reflect cynicism related to genuine change. They do not exhibit confidence that the members of St. Paul's will take this work seriously.

> When we have conversations like this, especially in the past with our church, specifically, and even generally in the Episcopal Church, it sort of feels like we open up the closet and say 'Wow, those skeletons are terrible.' We push it all back in and lock the door. We don't seem to have hit this critical mass where we're actually working to redeem or really repent of our responsibility for how bad it is outside the master's walls.
>
> My question that I have, and it's not going to be answered for a while. Next year in August, will anything be different? I mean, I've already made this comment that we don't seem to change much. Even when we talk about it. I want to hope that it is going to be different, and maybe it's different now than it used to be, and I just didn't notice. I want to know if we're going to keep going in this direction. … We didn't give up this summer. Like I already said, we just kept coming. Even though it hurts. Even though it's not easy, and I want to think that after a year, we still haven't given up. That's what I hope, but that is the question that remains for me.

Members appear torn between strong convictions that the congregation can and should be doing more to create conditions of flourishing for our Black neighbors and the lack of belief or trust that St. Paul's will rise to the challenge. There seem to be two typical responses to this tension: more listening and learning and over-reliance on leadership.

More Listening, More Learning

As mentioned in the "St. Paul's as the Host" subsection, participants frequently expressed that they do not know where to begin and would like to continue learning and listening. Because the research project featured listening to Black leaders, I have wondered if the project design ultimately limited the imagination of participants to more listening. Listening is more than what we have previously been doing but not too uncomfortable to engage.

Learning is a critical component of the work of racial justice, as much harm has been done by white people making misinformed assumptions. I have some concern, however, that more listening and learning is the primary way the church responds to the tension between action for desire and doubt. When the work could impact our financial well-being, the easier route is to learn more. We have run up against the limits of our economic imaginations. I have not yet discovered the tipping point that will move the church from learning and listening to action.

Leader Reliance

As one participant noted, it appears as though there is not enough "critical mass" who will take action. Instead, the data indicates that St. Paul's relies on the leadership to help the church know what steps to take, or even to take the steps on behalf of the community. Participants mentioned fourteen times in the surveys and interviews the value of having a rector who has already led St. Paul's towards racial justice. People remarked about the many

connections our rector has made around Jackson, “everybody in the community knows her,” and how important those partnerships have been in guiding our church. In describing our rector, “That type of leader can make a big difference. … And she always comes in with a plan. She doesn’t just say ‘We’re going to do this.’ She’s got the details worked out,” and another interviewee followed, “She has community connections too, and that makes a difference when you don’t say, ‘Hey, let’s do this,’ but we don’t know anybody else who’s going to join us. Making those connections has made a difference.” These participants value a leader who gives specific steps informed by their own connections with the community, rather than simply making generic calls to do justice.

About two weeks into the study, our beloved rector of five years announced she had received a call to serve a different Episcopal community. No one at St. Paul’s, including myself, knew this news until it was announced publicly, and I wondered how it would impact the rest of the project. Thankfully, the members remained engaged in the study and did not appear distracted with the news. While the members supported and blessed the rector’s transition, the community has also lamented the loss of an excellent leader. Many of the participants indicated how grateful they were for her leadership, particularly in the area of racial justice, and their desire to find a rector who will continue the work that she started, “One of the key things in determining our direction going forward is having a leader who can help us” and “Do we give our, yet to be determined, search committee the message that we want to have a leader who will be taking us in similar directions and what she has been doing? A lot of leadership would be very comfortable sitting back there in the little ivory tower and not get involved in all the messy stuff that’s out there in the community.”

Clearly, it is important to St. Paul's to have a well-connected rector who is unafraid to participate in racial justice in the community. Given the history of clergy persons in TEC who have actively condoned and benefitted from systemic racism, this is a remarkable and welcome change. However, a potential downside to having such a strong leader for racial justice is that the community can more easily rely on the rector to do the work. It is possible that St. Paul's holds the operating narrative of being a community who participates in racial justice, even when the rector is the one making the most contact with the community. We name and celebrate our parish as being champions of racial justice while being less honest with ourselves about the lack of steps taken by many members on any given week. During this time of transition, I believe St. Paul's has the opportunity to step into the void the rector has left and participate in God's work of justice on our own.

Conclusion

The members of St. Paul's indicate that it is right and desirable for us to take some sort of action. We can no longer learn about the harm of systemic racism and remain passive. Simultaneously, we are overwhelmed by the complexity of the problem and haunted by our complicit past. Some respond to this point of tension by making initial relationships in the community. Some want to keep learning, either as a genuine desire to know more or because that is the easiest and least disruptive action to take. And some are waiting for a leader who will chart a course for the community. There is not one easily definable path for the church, and I suspect it will take a combination of all options to keep the community moving forward.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY AND CONCLUSION

Restatement of Project Purpose

This project has pursued the following research question: How might a congregation of the most historically powerful, prominent, and affluent church in the U.S. imagine its life in the Jackson, MI community in light of Luke 14 and encounters with people who experience racial injustice? I was motivated by the disconnect between our congregational statements supporting racial justice and our lack of practice of racial justice. The largely impoverished Black community of Jackson, Michigan is not experiencing improved conditions as the result of our named support of racial justice. Jemar Tisby describes that in which I have participated and observed at St. Paul's, "[Y]ou cannot read your way, listen your way, or watch your way into skillful advocacy. At some point you must act."[446] I suspected that a contributing factor to our paralysis is that we conceive of racism primarily in terms of racial identity and overlook or are unwilling to engage the exploitative realities of racial capitalism. Perhaps our cultural structures of racial capitalism have shaped our imaginations so powerfully that we cannot imagine anything different. Additionally, as an affluent congregation, we appear to have more comfort taking the "love our neighbors" or "welcome everyone" approach of antiracism than we are willing to name our complicity in and benefit from systemic racism. I wondered if our attachments to our material comforts is an untapped area of the conversation and desired to press us into confrontation of our greed, myself included. As a way of stimulating these discoveries and discussions, I invited the congregation to dwell in Luke 14 for seven weeks and listen to three Black leaders from the community.

[446] Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 214.

Project Summary, Reflections, and Implications

Before exploring the results of the project, I want to name the surprise of discovering the prevalence of an individualistic conception of the *imago Dei* in the antiracism literature. Though I have read a number of books related to racism, I had never noticed how often white Christians are encouraged to treat each person as an image bearer. It was in the process of reading beloved community literature where I began to notice this trend. One of the CPs even took this approach. As stated above, I do not want to be mistaken for disparaging a theological approach to racism that has created good. Combatting racism is too challenging for antiracists to begin turning on one another. My intent in discussing the individual versus communal conception of the *imago Dei* is to explore additional theological possibilities. When we begin to realize that we are all participants in a collective human imaging of God, it has the potential to change our behaviors more than seeing one person at a time as an image bearer. Cole Arthur Riley, the one antiracism writer I have found on this topic, shares my curiosity,

> Some theologies say it is not an individual but a collective people who bear the image of God. I quite like this, because it means we need a diversity of people to reflect God more fully. Anything less and the image becomes pixelated and grainy, still beautiful but lacking clarity. If God really is three parts in one like they say, it means that God's wholeness is in a multitude.[447]

Though my work in the project was fairly minimal in scope, this is a potential contribution to theological discourses on antiracism.

Turning to the project, it is important to reiterate that the participants were self-selecting and do not represent all of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Therefore, this project cannot be used to make sweeping conclusions and decisions regarding a response to racial justice in our community. While those who participated indicated strong support and comfort for

[447] Riley, *This Here Flesh*, 7.

congregational conversations regarding racial justice, it is necessary to move forward with awareness that the whole community has not been involved in the process to this point. Perhaps the leadership could create additional opportunities for those who did not attend the Listening Opportunities or Dwelling in the Word to express their understandings of racial justice. The intent would not be to achieve uniformity of beliefs, for that would be impossible, but to continue providing opportunities for all members to participate.

For those who attended Dwelling and/or the Listening Opportunities, it is hopeful that participants' comfort levels increased as the project progressed. Through this, we learned the value of repeated practices done in community. A practice that is initially uncomfortable does not necessarily remain that way if we continue to avail ourselves to the practice. Listening to the text, one another, and to strangers becomes easier and fruitful the more we engage. Though the Dwelling group was uninhibited in sharing their frustrations with both the text and the practice, people were able to see its value by the end. Participants gained greater awareness about themselves as listeners and received the gift of being graciously listened to by others. Some named how God felt present helping us both to share and receive, which is a treasure in a community that struggles to articulate the presence of God (more below). Those who spent time in Luke 14 now have the gift of a shared imagination that lives far beyond lectionary readings that occur once every three years.

Some participants might groan at this suggestion, but I believe the congregation could benefit from Dwelling in the Word becoming a regular practice. There is great potential if Dwelling could become part of the life of the congregation and not simply for a research project. Dwelling in the Word is more than a Bible study. It is ultimately a practice of collectively setting down roots in a shared narrative and listening to one another. It is one way for a community to

begin sharing life. The project also revealed the value of listening to others, and participants indicated a high desire to keep listening. While listening potentially creates one more opportunity for the congregation to stall taking action, I do believe that listening to people of other perspectives also needs to be a continued practice at St. Paul's.

Furthermore, the project shows how communal practices and reflections on those practices bring greater insights than individual explorations of the text and the topic of racial justice. Through both the conversations in Dwelling and the focus group interviews, I could track the chains of insights. One person's comment gave way to another and so on. Additionally, participants found great value in hearing the perspectives of the three Black Conversation Partners. A predominantly affluent, white group is beginning to realize how much we do not know. We need others to deepen our understandings.

Unlike some Christian communities that appear allergic to the word racism, the members of St. Paul's came into the project with a respectable awareness of systemic racism. Convincing the church that racism exists was, thankfully, not the hurdle of this project. However, the variety of responses and definitions of racial justice reveals how much more we need to learn. We are discovering that racial justice entails a complex economic response, and we have some uncertainty about our abilities and willingness to become engaged in the work.

At the outset of the project, I named how our lack of practices indicate that we have more of a "love our neighbors" or "welcome everyone" conception of racial justice. For a wealthy congregation, that approach appears easier than addressing the economic realities of racism. Interestingly, when asked to define racial justice in the surveys, participants more often articulated it as equality, equity, reparations, and thriving and wholeness than loving our neighbors. This could indicate a few things. One is that the phrase "racial justice" forces us into

something more systemic than loving others. Respondents knew that their responses needed to pertain to economics, even if it made them uncomfortable. Another possibility is that the Conversation Partners opened our eyes so much that we realized that we must go beyond simply loving others. Their testimonies and examples provoked us to imagine more active responses, and in this regard, the project achieved its intent. Or, perhaps these responses do not indicate new learning. Members have known for quite some time that racial justice entails an economic response. We have just been unwilling to take our actions that far.

St. Paul's appears to be stuck at the crossroads of conviction for action and skepticism that we will act upon our beliefs. These doubts are shaped by the overwhelming scope of racial justice and our self-awareness of how much this work truly demands of us. We do not appear to be ready to give that much of ourselves, so we keep slipping back into our default mode of learning and listening. I want to reiterate that learning and listening are good practices for a white community. They just cannot be the only response.

As we continue to pursue the work of racial justice, this project has highlighted the need for greater awareness of our white privilege, fragility, and saviorism. Our responses reveal our social standing and power as a wealthy, white community. The Dwelling practice demonstrated how the colonial enterprise has shaped our self-imagination as the host. It is noteworthy that our central practice of the Eucharist does not more significantly inform our theological and missional imaginations. The pinnacle of the Episcopal worship service is the Eucharist where the church reenacts the table of the Lord. It is unmistakable in the liturgy of this sacrament that Christ is the Host, not us. While this is a central practice at St. Paul's, it does not appear to inform how we imagine our lives with our neighbors. Therefore, we had a difficult time imagining that Luke 14 means anything other than inviting our marginalized neighbors to church. White privilege also

showed up in our freedom to evaluate others while also distracting ourselves with details from both the text and others' testimonies that did not need our attention. This indicates a call to deepen our empathetic listening and imagine ourselves experiencing what others experience. This entails greater awareness of and willingness to step outside of our white frame of reference.

On the one hand, our unbridled engagement with the text is a gift. As soon as I arrived at St. Paul's, I was struck by the questions and comments that would never be spoken in a conservative Christian setting. On the other hand, our intellectual inquiries and bold critiques of the text (even of Jesus!) appear to hinder us from hearing the Spirit's calling through the text. In an effort to separate ourselves from that which might be considered "undiscerning Jesus-talk" of conservative evangelicals, we have swung in the opposite direction of struggling to identify the presence and activity of God. In short, it is not cool to talk about God showing up in our lives. Therefore, St. Paul's needs to grow in our belief in the living God and risk articulating what God appears to be up to in our community. We need to make it a regular habit to share how we sense and believe God is present in both the text and our ongoing experiences, so that we may begin to realize that we are not alone in this work.

Near the end of one of the interviews, a participant said, "I think we are in a different place than we were when we started. Doesn't it feel like that to you too?" It occurred to me how little and how much had happened within a span of seven weeks. Considering the scope of systemic racism, it is fairly unremarkable to read Luke 14 seven times and to listen to three Black leaders from the community. It does not appear that we have "done" anything at all. However, I find much hope that a little bit of communal experimentation led some participants to begin changing their economic practices and creating new relationships in the community. Some are not waiting for the church to have a plan before taking action, and that is greatly

encouraging. This is important learning for congregational leaders who feel overwhelmed with the pressure to have an extensive plan before implementation. This project reveals that it does not take much to shift a congregation to respond, and the responses will often be better than what the leader is able to imagine.

While St. Paul's has plenty of racial justice work ahead of us, it is important to recognize and celebrate the steps that we have taken. As participants noted, the church does not shy away from painful conversations and is already making efforts in the community. It is hopeful that St. Paul's is a place that talks openly about racism, as not all churches are willing to engage the topic. Also, we have well-established relationships, such as the Get REAL Summer Program and the Interfaith Shelter, as well as new relationships from the project that we can build upon. When the work feels daunting, we have community partners who can and should show us the way. This project has given me hope that St. Paul's has great potential for being a leader for racial justice in Jackson. Although there is much good news to celebrate at St. Paul's, it is also important to name honestly that we have the operating narrative of being a racial justice congregation when we have historically relied on our rector and a few others to do the bulk of the work. This realization provides us with the humility that we have not arrived at racial justice, though we also celebrate our participation in it. Going forward, this project demands the attention, time, energy, creative solutions, and generosity of all of us.

I want to end by revisiting the end of my theological chapter. Christ's Spirit makes possible what seems impossible. The best news of Luke 14 is often overlooked. Jesus heals the man with dropsy, the man who represents our attachments to wealth and privilege to their greatest extent. Going forward, it is my hope that a church who struggles to name the presence

and activity of God will become caught up in the Spirit's wild winds of justice, for "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God" (Luke 18:30).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Consent Form

TABLE OF BELONGING: EXPLORING SOCIAL REVERSAL AT ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SURVEY INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the discernment of social reversal and racial justice at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Jackson, MI. This study is being conducted by Natalie E. Magnusson, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry program at Lipscomb University under the supervision of Dr. Scott Hagley, associate professor of missiology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. You have the opportunity to participate in this study because you are an adult member or regular attender of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and you have attended one of the three listening opportunities during June and July 2022. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to complete and submit your survey.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research project is to invite the members of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church to discern how God might be calling the congregation to understand and participate in racial justice in light of the social reversals found in Luke 14 and the practice of listening to three Black leaders from the community. Racial justice takes a variety of definitions in our society, and part of this project is to discern together what racial justice means for St. Paul's and the Jackson community. The listening opportunities (offered 3 Sunday afternoons in June/July) and the Dwelling in the Word (offered during the education hour during June/July) practices will be open to all members of St. Paul's. After each of the listening opportunities, all attendees over the age of 18 will be invited to complete a brief and anonymous survey. Additionally, 10 members will be asked to attend one of the focus group interviews near the end of the research phase. There will be two focus group interviews comprised of 5 members each. The same questions will be asked to each group.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate in the study, you will complete an anonymous survey following each of the three listening opportunities with Black leaders between June and July 2022. The listening opportunities will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Attendees will be invited to complete a new survey each time, and the questions will remain the same for all three surveys. The researcher will be the only one with access to the responses of the surveys.

Risks and Benefits:

The study includes some risk. The primary and possible risk of participation involves emotional or spiritual distress related to the topics of racism and elitism encountered in both the listening

opportunities and survey questions. A secondary risk involves the responses of surveys being connected to participants, though the researcher will take great care to respect the privacy of participants, to handle the data with confidentiality, and to report all data in a manner that minimizes risk of exposure.

Participants will benefit by pausing and offering reflections after listening to people of a different racial background share their stories and opportunities of racial justice in Jackson, MI and/or our diocese. Participants will get to contribute to St. Paul's communal discernment by sharing what they imagine God might be calling the church into as it seeks racial justice and the flourishing of the Jackson community.

Confidentiality:

In any written reports or publications made in the researcher's thesis or to the St. Paul's Episcopal Church, participants will not be identified or identifiable, and only group data will be presented. The researcher will keep the survey results confidential in a password protected and encrypted computer file and will only have access to the records for the duration of the project. The researcher plans to defend her thesis during spring 2023 and will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that could be linked back to participants.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Paul's Episcopal Church or Lipscomb University in any way.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Natalie E. Magnusson (nemagnusson@mail.lipscomb.edu) at any point during the study. You may also contact the researcher's primary advisor, Dr. Scott Hagley (shagley@pts.edu). If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher and advisor, you may also contact Dr. Justin Briggs, Chair of the Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board (justin.briggs@lipscomb.edu). You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study by completing an anonymous survey.

Signature of Participant	Date
Signature of Witness	Date
Signature of Researcher	Date

Appendix B: Focus Group Participant Consent Form

TABLE OF BELONGING: EXPLORING SOCIAL REVERSAL AT ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the discernment of social reversal and racial justice at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Jackson, MI. This study is being conducted by Natalie E. Magnusson, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry program at Lipscomb University under the supervision of Dr. Scott Hagley, associate professor of missiology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research project is to invite the members of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church to discern how God might be calling the congregation to understand and participate in racial justice in light of the social reversals found in Luke 14 and the practice of listening to three Black leaders from the community. Racial justice takes a variety of definitions in our society, and part of this project is to discern together what racial justice means for St. Paul's and the Jackson community. The listening opportunities and the Dwelling in the Word practices will be open to all members of St. Paul's. After each of the listening opportunities, all attendees over the age of 18 will be invited to complete a brief and anonymous survey. 8 members will be asked to attend one of the focus group interviews near the end of the research phase. There will be two focus group interviews comprised of 5 members each. The same questions will be asked to each group.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate as one of the 8 participants, you will be asked to attend at least two of the three listening opportunities with leaders of color between June and July 2022 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Each listening opportunity will last approximately 60-90 minutes. You will also be asked to attend at least four of the six Dwelling in the Word practices on Sunday mornings between 9:15-10:15 AM. After the three listening opportunities and six weeks of dwelling practices are complete, you will be asked to participate in one 75-90 minute focus group interview along with four other research participants. These group interviews will occur at the end of July or first week of August. An audio recording will be made of the focus group interviews, and the researcher will be the only one with access to the recordings and transcriptions.

Risks and Benefits:

The study includes some risk. The primary and possible risk of participation involves emotional or spiritual distress related to the topics of racism and elitism. A secondary risk involves

identities and responses of participants being known, though the researcher will take great care to respect the privacy of participants, to handle the data with confidentiality, and to ask all participants to keep others' identities and responses confidential. Steps will be taken to de-identify and code the data before writing and publishing the results.

The benefits to participation are hearing people of a different racial background share their stories and experiences, hearing about opportunities of racial justice in Jackson, MI and/or our diocese, listening to scripture and one another in the St. Paul's community, and being invited to imagine what God might be calling the church into as it seeks racial justice and the flourishing of the Jackson community.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission. Your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications made in the researcher's thesis or to the St. Paul's Episcopal Church, no one will be identified or identifiable, and only group data will be presented.

The audio recordings of the interviews will be for the sole purpose of the researcher transcribing and coding the data. The researcher will keep the audio recordings, transcriptions, and research results in a password protected and encrypted computer file and will only have access to the records for the duration of the project. The researcher will defend her thesis during spring 2023 and will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that could be linked back to you.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Paul's Episcopal Church or Lipscomb University in any way.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Natalie E. Magnusson (nemagnusson@mail.lipscomb.edu) at any point during the study. You may also contact the researcher's primary advisor, Dr. Scott Hagley (shagley@pts.edu). If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher and advisor, you may also contact Dr. Justin Briggs, Chair of the Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board (justin.briggs@lipscomb.edu). You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study and agree to be audio recorded.

Signature of Participant	Date
Signature of Witness	Date
Signature of Researcher	Date

Appendix C: Conversation Partner Consent Form

TABLE OF BELONGING: EXPLORING SOCIAL REVERSAL AT ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

CONVERSATION PARTNER INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited as a Conversation Partner in the research study investigating the discernment of social reversal and racial justice at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Jackson, MI. This study is being conducted by Natalie E. Magnusson, a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry program at Lipscomb University under the supervision of Dr. Scott Hagley, associate professor of missiology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. You were selected as one of three Conversation Partners who will share with the St. Paul's community during June and July 2022. Please read this form and indicate your agreement of participation.

Background Information:

The purpose of this research project is to invite the members of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church to discern how God might be calling the congregation to understand and participate in racial justice in light of the social reversals found in Luke 14 and the practice of listening to three Black leaders from the community. Racial justice takes a variety of definitions in our society, and part of this project is to discern together what racial justice means for St. Paul's and the Jackson community. The listening opportunities and the Dwelling in the Word practices will be open to all members of St. Paul's. After each of the listening opportunities, all attendees over the age of 18 will be invited to complete a brief and anonymous survey. In addition, 10 members will be asked to attend one of the focus group interviews near the end of the research phase. There will be two focus group interviews comprised of 5 members each. The same questions will be asked to each group.

Procedures:

The Conversation Partners will spend time with the members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church between June and July 2022. Each listening opportunity and conversation will last approximately 60-90 minutes. The researcher will work with you to arrange a time that fits your schedule. An audio recording will be made of your presentation and conversation with us, and the researcher will be the only one with access to the recording and transcriptions.

Risks and Benefits:

The researcher acknowledges that participation as a Conversation Partner includes some risk. The primary risk involves the emotional and/or physical distress of sharing and leading conversations on racial justice as a person of color in a predominantly white space. Another risk is that the conversations will expose greater resistance to racial justice than anticipated at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and the resistance could be distressing.

The researcher hopes that the benefit of participation will be forming greater partnerships with St. Paul's in the work of racial justice and the flourishing of all people in the Jackson, MI community and/or the Diocese of Michigan.

Consent for Recording and Identification:

As a Conversation Partner for the project, the researcher will make an audio recording of your time with the members of St. Paul's. The recording is for educational purposes only and will not be posted or distributed. Only the researcher will have access to the recording and transcription.

When the researcher writes the results of the project, she will include your name and a brief description of your role/title in the Jackson, MI community or Diocese of Michigan. In order to explain the data and/or responses of research participants, some quotes from your presentation and conversation at St. Paul's might be included in the thesis.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this research project is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Paul's Episcopal Church or Lipscomb University in any way.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Natalie E. Magnusson (nemagnusson@mail.lipscomb.edu) at any point during the study. You may also contact the researcher's primary advisor, Dr. Scott Hagley (shagley@pts.edu). If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher and advisor, you may also contact Dr. Justin Briggs, Chair of the Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board (justin.briggs@lipscomb.edu). You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the project at any time.

I consent to participate in the research project as a Conversation Partner. I agree that the audio will be recorded and my name, role/title information, and possible quotes will be included in the thesis.

Signature of Participant	Date
Signature of Witness	Date
Signature of Researcher	Date

Appendix D: Dwelling in the Word

The following is a script that I used to introduce and explain the Dwelling in the Word practice:

Welcome! I'm thankful for each person here and the opportunity that we have to listen to God through scripture and to one another this morning.

As was announced, this class is part of my research project for my doctoral work. The purpose of my project is to offer opportunities that help us to discern how God might be calling St. Paul's to partner in the work of racial justice here in Jackson, MI. The title of my project is, "Table of Belonging: Exploring Social Reversal at St. Paul's Church." I believe interaction with scripture is an important part of the communal shaping and discernment process, and I have chosen for us to spend time in one of the many texts that might have to do with what we are addressing.

Anyone who participates in this space will not be named or identifiable in my project thesis. Nothing is being recorded. I will only take notes of the themes and statements that stand out during our time together. If you experience some sort of theological or emotional distress in relation to this practice, Pastor Sarah is available to discuss it further with you and she has the names of professional therapists in the area should you desire more support. In addition, I have invited eight people from the congregation to attend as many of these Dwelling practices as possible. At the end of the summer, I will ask the eight participants to offer their discoveries and reflections from our time together on Sunday mornings.

So, I'm going to introduce you to one of the standard spiritual practices that we use in my work in the graduate program at Rochester University. It is called Dwelling in the Word and has a few simple steps that we will do each week.

First, I will read all or a portion of Luke 14. Just to warn you that when I read all of it, it will take about 6 minutes. Then we will spend about a minute in silence. I will be reading from the NRSV, and I will have the words available in print each week. When I read, pay attention to what catches your attention. What word or phrase stands out to you? What question is lingering with you? Allow yourself to ponder that word or phrase.

Second, we will find a "reasonably friendly looking stranger and listen them into free speech." I encourage you to pair up with a person with whom you do not ordinarily spend a lot of time. If you are able, feel free to move around the room. I've placed some chairs in pairs, so that people do not have to drag their chairs with them. We will spend about five minutes sharing with our partner what captured our attention in the reading and what seems significant about it today. Listen well to your partner, because when we gather back together as a whole group, each person will share what they heard their partner say. It is just fine if you would like to take notes on what your partner says to help you remember better. I have paper and pens available.

Third, we will gather back in the large group and share what we heard one another say. In some settings like this, people will be tempted to make comments or more deeply discuss what someone has just shared, but in this moment of the practice, we will simply be sharing what we heard. We will share in "popcorn" style, meaning that we will not go in a circle, and you do not

necessarily have to share right after your partner. While I would love to hear from everyone, you do not have to share if you feel uncomfortable sharing in the larger group.

Then, I will ask the group to identify any recurring themes or surprising discoveries from today. After we make some observations together, we will end in gratitude for the Word of God that is spoken to us through scripture and in community. I will say, "This is the Word of the Lord," and I invite you to conclude with saying, "**Thanks be to God.**"

I know I just gave a lot of information. To recap, we will listen attentively and curiously to the scripture, pause for a minute of silence, find a reasonably friendly looking stranger and listen to them share what they noticed, come back to the larger group and share what we heard our partner say, identify themes or surprising discoveries as a large group, end in gratitude.

Appendix E: Luke 14:1-35 (NRSV)

[1]On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. [2]Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. [3]And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, 'Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?' [4]But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. [5]Then he said to them, 'If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?' [6]And they could not reply to this.

[7]When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. [8]'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; [9]and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. [10]But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. [11]For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

[12]He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. [13]But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. [14]And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

[15]One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' [16]Then Jesus said to him, 'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. [17]At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now." [18]But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies." [19]Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies." [20]Another said, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come." [21]So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." [22]And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room." [23]Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. [24]For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner."'

[25] Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, [26]'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. [27]Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. [28]For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? [29]Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, [30]saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." [31]Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? [32]If he cannot, then, while the other is still

far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. [33]So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

34 ‘Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? [35]It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’

Appendix F: Listening Opportunity Survey

Survey Purpose and Instructions:

This survey is for the purpose of collecting data for Natalie E. Magnusson's doctoral research project entitled, "Table of Belonging: Exploring Social Reversal at St. Paul's Episcopal Church." She is a doctoral candidate at Lipscomb University in Nashville, TN. The purpose of her project is to invite the members of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church into the practice of listening to three Black leaders in the community and to begin discerning, in light of scripture, what God might be calling the congregation to do or to be regarding racial justice in Jackson, MI.

The survey is anonymous and will likely take 10-15 minutes to complete. Participants may opt out of any question, though responses to all are appreciated. Please submit only one survey per person.

Survey participants must be 18 years of age or older, a member or regular attendee of St. Paul's, and have participated in a listening opportunity at St. Paul's in the past 72 hours.

1. What is your age?

   ___18-34 ___35-49 ___50-64 ___65-79 ___80+

2. How important is it for St. Paul's to be discussing racial justice?

   ___ Not Important ___ Somewhat Important

   ___ Important ___ Extremely Important

3. What was your comfort level while listening to the presenter today?

   ___ Very Uncomfortable ___ Somewhat Uncomfortable

   ___ Somewhat Comfortable ___ Very Comfortable

4. As a way of describing your experience while listening, please share one to three words or brief phrases that express your most dominant feeling(s) or reaction(s).

5. What surprised you about the conversation today?

6. What is one new learning that you had today?

7. How would you define racial justice?

8. If you were aware of God's presence today, write 1-2 sentences to describe what you noticed.

9. What is one hope or dream that this conversation sparked in you when you consider the future of St. Paul's and racial justice in our community?

10. What is one question that is still lingering for you? (This question may be directed towards the Conversation Partner, the St. Paul's community, the researcher, yourself, God, or any other audience as you see fit. Please indicate the addressee.)

Appendix G: Focus Group Interview Questions

I would like to cultivate an atmosphere of freedom and trust during today's group interview by asking for the identities of other participants as well as anything shared by participants not to be shared with anyone outside of this group. Please respect one another's privacy by maintaining confidentiality.

In light of your experiences with the listening opportunities and dwelling practices:

1. Please share three words or brief phrases that express your most dominant feelings and reactions this summer.

2. What moment this summer was the most surprising to you and why?

3. Tell of a moment when you experienced discomfort or grief.

4. Tell of a moment when you were aware of God's presence.

5. What keeps returning to you from Luke 14 and what might it mean for St. Paul's?

6. Briefly name one theme that was recurring or seemed significant for the group during the dwelling practices.

7. How have the practices of listening to the text, to our conversation partners, and to one another informed or shaped your understanding of racial justice?

8. What might God be calling the community of St. Paul's to do or to be over the next year? What is one possible next step?

9. What question is still lingering for you? (We will not attempt to answer this question right now. We are just offering questions for more exploration.)

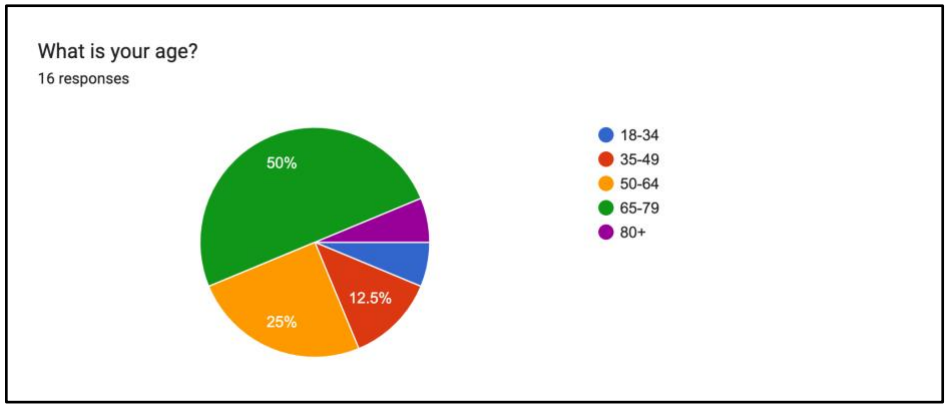
Appendix H: Project Timeline

	Week 1 Sun	Week 2 Sun	Week 3 Sun	Week 4 Sun	Week 5 Sun	Week 6 Sun	Week 7 Sun	Week 7 Mon	Week 7 Thur
Morning	Dwell: Lk 14:1-35	Lk 14:1-35	Lk 14:1-35	Lk 14:1-14	Lk 14:15-35	Lk 14:7-24	Lk 14:1-35		
After-noon	Listen. Opp. 1		Listen. Opp. 2		Listen. Opp. 3				
Evening								Focus Group Inv. 1	Focus Group Inv. 2

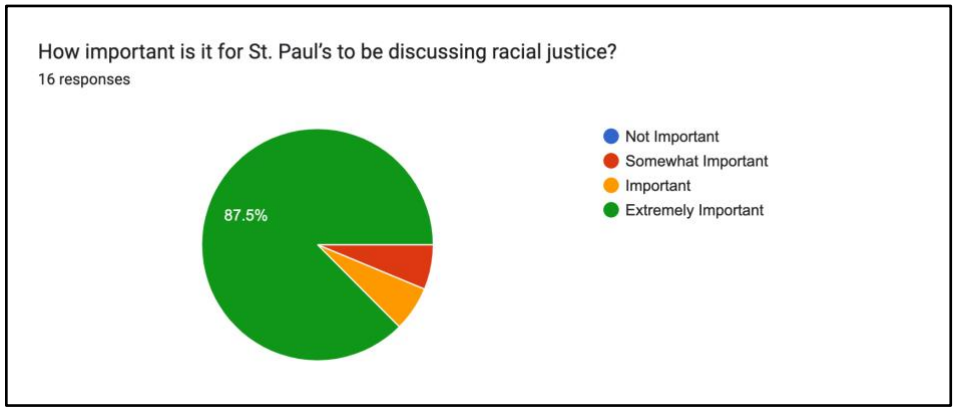
Appendix I: Listening Opportunity Likert Scale Results[448]

Listening Opportunity 1

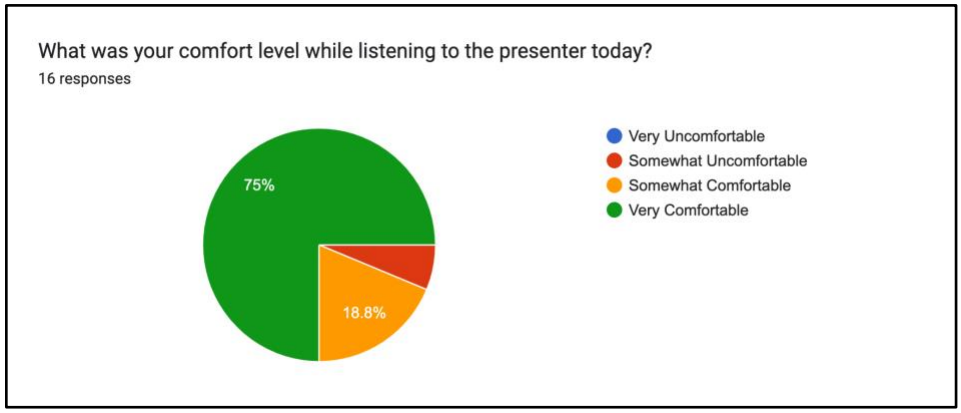
Question 1:



Question 2:



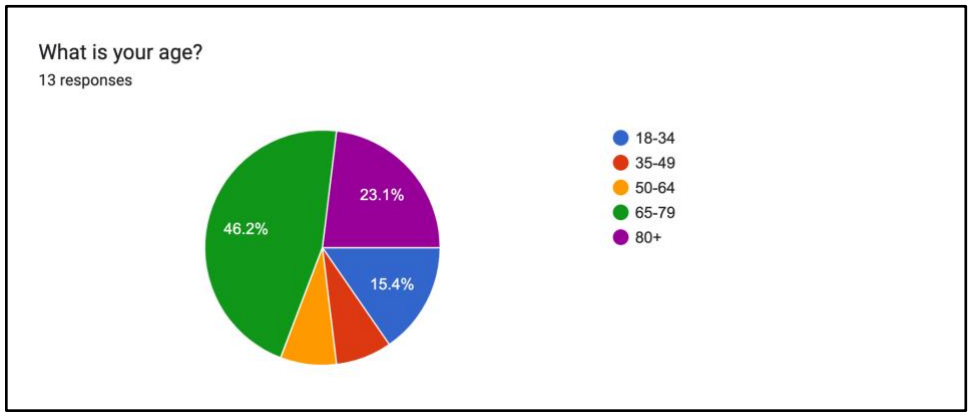
Question 3:



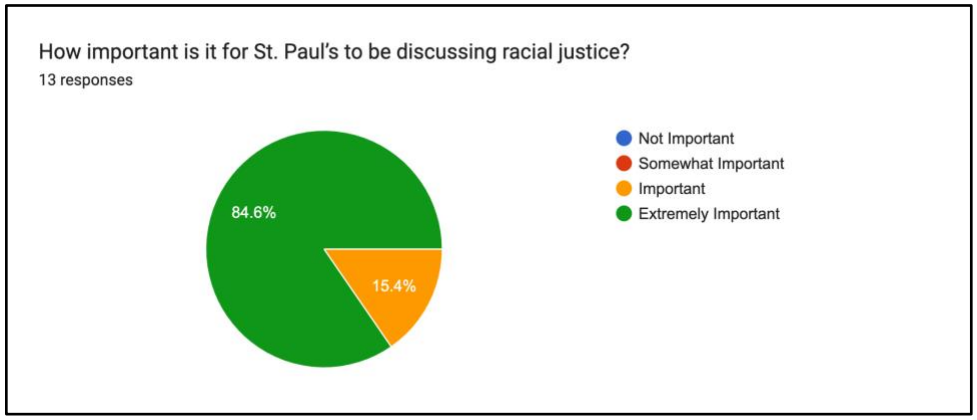
[448] Paper surveys were imported into Google Forms, so that pie charts are reflective of all surveys. See fourth page of appendix for survey values and averages.

Listening Opportunity 2

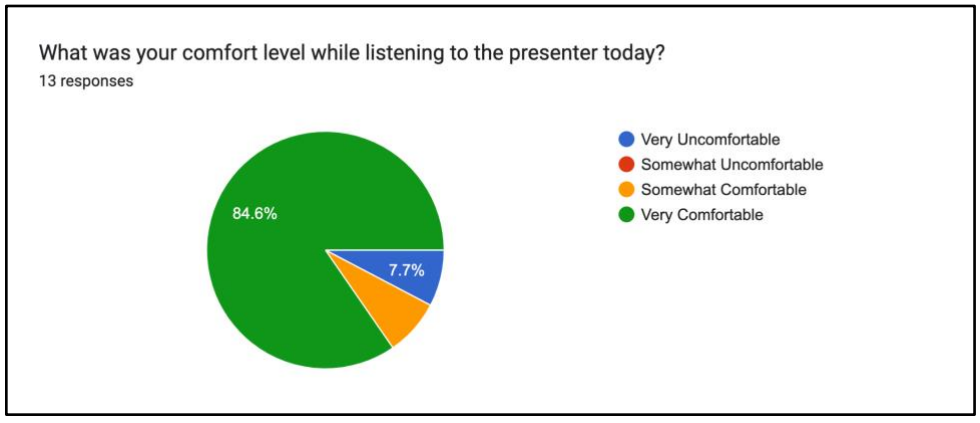
Question 1:



Question 2:

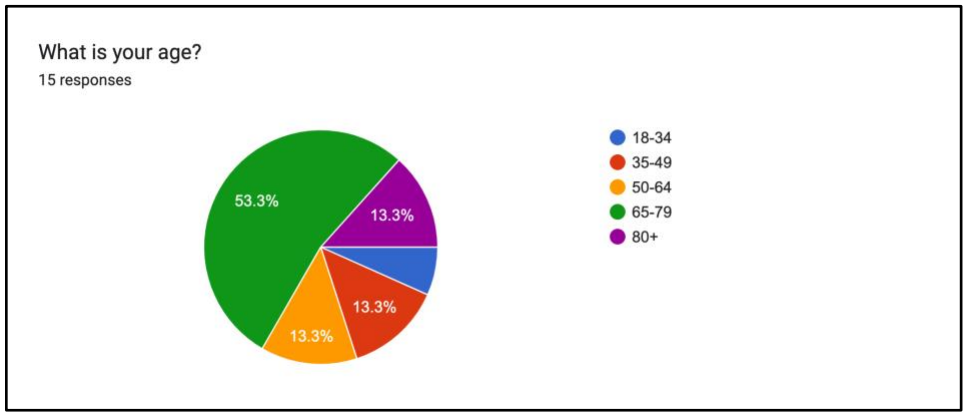


Question 3:

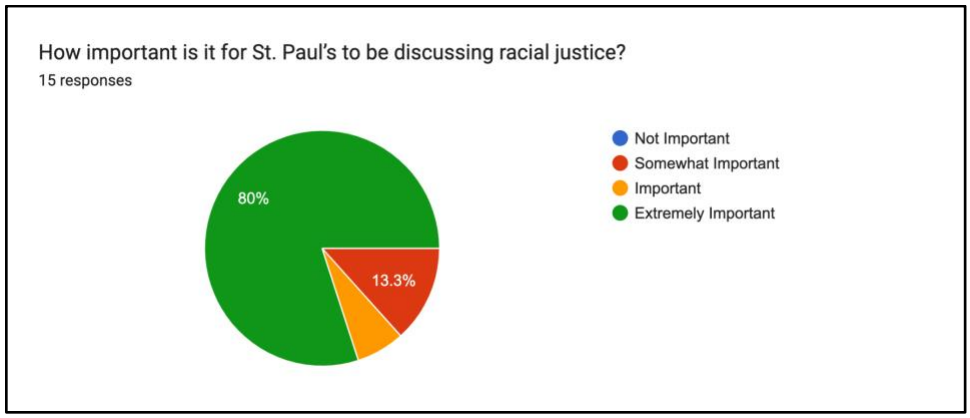


Listening Opportunity 3

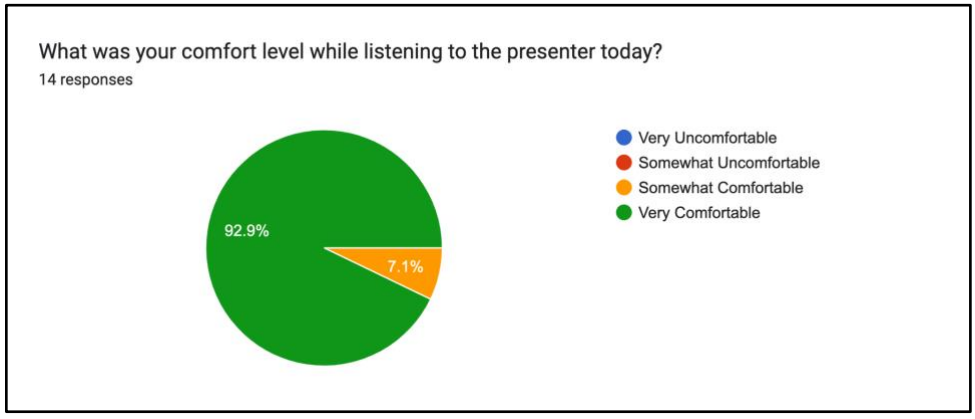
Question 1:



Question 2:



Question 3:



Question 1: What is your age?

	Listening Opp. 1		Listening Opp. 2		Listening Opp. 3		Average	
Age Range	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
18-34	1 of 16	6.3%	2 of 13	15.4%	1 of 15	6.7%	4 of 44	9.1%
35-49	2	12.5%	1	7.7%	2	13.3%	5	11.4%
50-64	4	25%	1	7.7%	2	13.3%	7	15.9%
65-79	8	50%	6	46.2%	8	53.3%	22	50%
80+	1	6.3%	3	23.1%	2	13.3%	6	13.6%

Question 2: How important is it for St. Paul's to be discussing racial justice?

	Listening Opp. 1		Listening Opp. 2		Listening Opp. 3		Average	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Not Important	0 of 16	0%	0 of 13	0%	0 of 15	0%	0 of 44	0%
Somewhat Important	1	6.3%	0	0%	2	13.3%	3	6.8%
Important	1	6.3%	2	15.4%	1	6.7%	4	9.1%
Extremely Important	14	87.5%	11	84.6%	12	80%	37	84.1%

Question 3: What was your comfort level while listening to the presenter today?

	Listening Opp. 1		Listening Opp. 2		Listening Opp. 3		Average	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Very Uncomfortable	0 of 16	0%	1 of 13	7.7%	0 of 14	0%	1 of 43	2.3%
Somewhat Uncomfortable	1	6.25%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.3%
Somewhat Comfortable	3	18.75%	1	7.7%	1	7.1%	5	11.6%
Very Comfortable	12	75%	11	84.6%	13	92.9%	36	83.7%