

## Sacred Ground Session 5: Whose Land? Exploring Latino History (Nov. 16, 2021)

*This is the sixth article in a series to provide an insight into what the participants in the first St. Luke's Sacred Ground Circle learned over the past year of work. We will be providing one article a week through the summer to try to broadly capture the material that was presented. This will be supplemented by the personal statements of Circle participants describing what the experience meant to them and how they believe the Holy Spirit is calling them to respond.*

The Scripture we chose to open this session was Galatians 3:28 – *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* This is a central message for Sacred Ground: Christ's death and resurrection opened the door for us all to draw near to God; all distinctions that humans choose to draw to divide themselves are meaningless in Christ's eyes, we are all beloved children of God.

We then said together a prayer adapted from the Jesuit Resources webpage for Hispanic Heritage Month: *O God, you have made of one blood all the people of the earth, but you have also richly blessed us with a world of many languages, cultures and traditions. I thank you today for the many contributions which Hispanic Americans have made – and continue to make – to our great country. Enable us always to learn from and appreciate each other. Make us even stronger as one nation because of our diverse gifts and experiences. Enrich our minds, bodies and spirits, we pray, as we learn together on this beautiful day which you have made. Amen.*

We spent the first part of our meeting reflecting on the experience of Latinos “living in an in-between space”. Hispanics are characterized in our Census statistics as an ethnicity, people of who identify themselves as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. One of our readings pointed out that Latinos do not call themselves Hispanics, as to them that phrase refers to the Iberian peninsula. Going beyond a focus solely on recent immigrants, we looked at the special challenges Latinos in the United States have faced as descendants of the Spanish & Portuguese, of the many diverse Indigenous peoples in what we now call South & Central America and the Spanish Caribbean, and of Africans who were enslaved in these regions in even greater numbers than in North America.

Many of us were surprised to learn from a PBS video *Latino Americans: Foreigners in their Own Land* how Anglo Whites arriving in the Southwest disrupted a thriving Latino culture, using violence to appropriate land, wealth and local government to establish Anglo Whites at the top of the “racial” hierarchy. This was driven home in an Op-Ed by Roberto Lovato “Moving Beyond the Black-White Binary.” He argued that the erasure of Latino history enables gentrification & national amnesia, even in part of the United States that was once Mexico. We were appalled to learn of the myth of racially neutral frontier justice and the history of lynchings of hundreds of Latinos from the Gold Rush to the 1930s. A particularly horrifying episode was the Matanza (massacre) and Hora de Sangre (Hour of Blood), a decade of racial tension in Texas between 1910-20 when vigilantes and the law enforcement such as the Texas Rangers killed hundreds if not thousands of Mexicans. Some participants reflected on the fact that Latinos in America often must live two lives, fitting in with the dominant Anglo White culture to function in the economy and society while preserving their language, customs and culture among themselves.

In a selection from a book by Juan Oliver, *Ripe Fields: The Promise and Challenge of Latino Ministry*, we reflected on the ministry of Jesus Christ among the poor and the outcast of society of His time and the parallels to the Latino experience of poverty and privation, which are rightly a place of revelation where God

is present. This immigrants' place of revelation, however, can be a dangerous place to the extent it is seen in the eyes of the dominant in society as "other" and therefore undermining the stability of their world. The takeaway from this reading was that unity of different peoples in the Church cannot be bought by sacrificing diversity; rather, unity will be realized only when we recognize & welcome our differences as reflections of the life of our Creator, who is one, while consisting of three distinct persons. And there we are, back to Galatians 3:28!

During the Breakout Session, we reflected on the roots of global inequality, why Europeans have been so dominant over the past 500 years. A fascinating short video presented Jared Diamond's thesis in his book *Guns, Germs and Steel* (a St. Luke's book group read this together 25 years ago) that geography and luck were key factors establishing White European dominance in the world (<https://youtu.be/hYSz010CVss>). We were also challenged by a theological essay by the Rev. Stephen H. Phelps in which he asked why it was that "... when it comes time to translate the apostle's [Paul's] words to the present – 'neither black nor white nor brown, neither documented or undocumented' many churches cannot find their tongue?" And again, back to Galatians 3:28.

Our reading from Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* called to our minds the striking similarity of the social position of Jesus in Palestine and that of most of the American Blacks in the 1930s, "a similarity of a social climate at the point of denial of full citizenship which creates the problem for creative survival." So, Thurman argued, Jesus projected a vision to give the people of Israel needed security: the kingdom of God is within. Abandon your fear of each other & fear only God. Hatred is destructive to the hated and hater alike. Love your enemy, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.

From Debby Irving's book *Waking Up White* we were challenged to see ourselves as benefiting from White privilege. She referenced an extremely telling PrimeTime Live Report with Diane Sawyer "True Colors" that drove home this notion of White privilege in stark terms ([https://youtu.be/oi\\_DF9Iu2xA](https://youtu.be/oi_DF9Iu2xA)). Irving concludes her chapter with the thought "White people must see themselves on the up-side of the see-saw to understand that discrimination results from privilege."

We closed the session with a modified version of the Prayer of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

*As a reminder, Sacred Ground, a film-based dialogue series on race and faith, is one tool that supports the Episcopal Church's long-term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation and justice under the banner of Becoming Beloved Community. The race dialogue series is an attempt to be responsive to the profound challenges that currently exist in our society, focusing on the challenges that swirl around the issues of race and racism, as well as the difficult but respectful and transformative conversation about race. It invites participants to walk back through history to peel away the layers that brought us to today, and to do that in a personal way, reflecting on family histories and stories, as well as important narratives that shape the collective American story. It holds the vision of beloved community as a guiding star – where all people are honored and protected and nurtured and beloved children of God, where we weep at one another's pain and seek one another's flourishing.*