

Sacred Ground Session 2: The Roots of Whiteness, and Deeper Roots (Oct. 5, 2021)

This is a third 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.

We opened the second session with a reflection on Romans 8:24-27, which to me expresses hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about changes in hearts and lives. Connecting this to Sacred Ground, we can hope that racism in society will diminish as knowledge of and trust in God's redeeming love increases.

Diving right into the deep end, we next looked at the reality that "race" is a human construction. We learned it has no basis in biology – there is not a gene for one's race. We saw an eye-opening 3-minute video, *The Myth of Race Debunked* <https://youtu.be/VnfKgffCZ7U>, that summarizes the history of how the concept of the White race and the harmful notion of hierarchy of races were constructed. We learned that, in defining the "other" as inferior to oneself, race has often been used to justify various exploitative behaviors, such as conquering, taking lands and resources, killing, enslaving and other forms of economic exploitation.

Armed with this knowledge, we reflected on our own family histories, thinking about what our ancestors lost and gained when they came to America. A short article by Colin Woodward "A Geography Lesson for the Tea Party" and another short video *Decoded: Are Cracker, White Trash & Redneck Racist?* <https://youtu.be/wII-tgTHWOY> helped us understand how class, cultural and religious differences and conflicts in Europe were imported into colonial North America. In reading an essay by David Dean, "Roots Deeper than Whiteness," we discovered how White identity was used as a tool to create solidarity in colonial America along the lines of race and reduce solidarity along the lines of class. Dean's argument is that by reconnecting to our roots that are deeper than whiteness we will realize that our ability to survive in the current world depends on our ability to ally ourselves with people of other races.

We next came back, considering all of the readings and videos, and looked at the question of how class, culture and religious conflicts interact with racial constructs. Key to this discussion for me was the idea that notions of race combine with these other categories (class, culture, religion) to reinforce "us" versus "them" dynamics and heighten the negative effects of racism. In this context, I was struck by the truth in the quote by Simone Weil, "He who is uprooted uproots others." Another way of saying this might be "Hurt people hurt people."

We closed the session using Prayer #39 from the Book of Common Prayer, *For Those Who Influence Public Opinion*.

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.