ADVENT 2013

THE PEACEABLE "KIN"DOM



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PREPARED BY

PRO-RECONCILIATION/ ANTI-RACISM TEAM

OF

CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN ILLINOIS AND WISCONSIN

Isaiah 11

1 A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse;
a branch will sprout from his roots.
2 The Lord's spirit will rest upon him,
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of planning and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.
3 He will delight in fearing the Lord.
He won't judge by appearances,
nor decide by hearsay.
4 He will judge the needy with righteousness,
and decide with equity for those who suffer in the land.
He will strike the violent with the rod of his mouth;
by the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked.
5 Righteousness will be the belt around his hips,
and faithfulness the belt around his waist.
6 The wolf will live with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
the calf and the young lion will feed together,
and a little child will lead them.
7 The cow and the bear will graze.
Their young will lie down together,
and a lion will eat straw like an ox.
8 A nursing child will play over the snake's hole;
toddlers will reach right over the serpent's den.
9 They won't harm or destroy anywhere on my holy
mountain.
The earth will surely be filled with the knowledge of
the Lord,
just as the water covers the sea.

10 On that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a signal to the peoples. The nations will seek him out, and his dwelling will be glorious.

11 On that day, the Lord will extend his hand a second time to
reclaim the survivors of God's people who are left from Assyria
and from Egypt, from Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and
from the coastlands of the sea.

12 God will raise a signal for the nations and gather the
outcast men of Israel.
God will collect the dispersed women of Judah from
the four corners of the earth.
13 Ephraim's jealousy will cease,
and Judah's harassment will be eliminated.
Ephraim won't be jealous of Judah,
and Judah won't harass Ephraim.
14 But they will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to
the west;
together they will plunder the people to the east.
Edom and Moab will be under their power,
and the Ammonites will be their subjects.

Background

The prophet Isaiah lived in a time of socio-political upheaval. The eighth century BCE was a time of tremendous political power and economic growth unlike any previous time. It was a time of unprecedented urban expansion. The beneficiaries of this economic growth were the ruling elite who in turn made up the state bureaucracy. The economic surplus that existed was used to support leisured and luxurious living of the elite and to maintain political power and control. The impact of this was a growing poverty and deterioration of conditions for the peasantry. Peasants bore the brunt of taxation. Creditors and moneylenders, who were often the landed elite, contributed to the impoverishment of the peasantry. Further the judiciary, the traditional place to seek arbitration and/ or to address these abuses, was also under the control of the elite. These social conditions were the moral failures that the eighth century Hebrew prophets speak against.

Today, many of the conditions that existed in the 8th century BCE that benefited the power elite are similar to the conditions and factors that benefit the power elite today. Today, we can add the factor of race to these conditions. Racism in the United States continues to contribute to economic disparity between persons of color and white persons. Lending practices historically have tended to favor white persons. Racism in the United States continues to contribute to judicial practices that lead to disproportionate numbers of African Americans being imprisoned. A black man born in 1991 has a 29 % chance of spending time in prison at some point in his life. Nearly one in three African American males aged 20 – 29 are under some form of criminal justice supervision whether imprisoned, jailed, on parole or probation. Currently, the government is building prisons based on predictions derived from third grade reading test scores on who will go to prison at some point in life. In part, the ability to use this as a basis of prediction is further indication of the damage and destruction that results from racism. Inequity and discrimination within the education system which leads to poorer education for persons of color seems to be the norm.

During the Advent season, we are called to look with longing and expectation toward the future when the promises of the coming of Emmanuel will be fulfilled. Advent focuses our attention on the day when Christ will put an end to all evil – including the evil of racism – and reaffirms our understanding that human history by the grace of God is headed in a direction where God's purposes and plans will be fulfilled. According to O. Wesley Allen, professor at Lexington Theological Seminary, Advent begins by focusing us on the second coming of Jesus and the implications of his coming. It is not a season for mere sentimentality but a time of deep yearning for righteousness and longing for justice. Advent point towards fulfillment and can provide a lens to consider how life is currently incongruent with what will be. The season invites us to name what is incongruent with God's justice and God's righteous.

The devotions that have been prepared allow us to balance this need to name what is incongruent with God's purposes and to dwell in moments when the "kin"dom living happens. Drawing from Isaiah 11, these devotions give us opportunity to pause and to think about the disparities in how life is and how the "kin'dom will be while at the same time never losing an orientation of hope that comes from the promise of the coming of the Root of Jesse.

It is the hope of the Pro-Reconciliation/ Anti-Racism Team that you will use these devotions as a

way of focusing your attention on how racism places us out of sync with God's purposes. We also hope that they will help you to commit/recommitment with longing and expectation to the work of dismantling racism within our congregations and our society.

Isaiah speaks out against the conditions of his society that resulted in the marginalization and impoverishment of the peasantry. Today, we must continue to speak out against the conditions in our society that result in the marginalization and impoverishment of persons of color. Yet, Isaiah does only speak words of judgment. In the eleventh chapter, Isaiah speaks of a time of hope and promise. A day when all of creation will reflect the purpose and the glory of God. This is the passage that we would ask you to consider during the four weeks of Advent.

The Reverend Dr. Beth Rupe
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Moline, Illinois
Pro-Reconciliation/ Anti-Racism Team

December 1, 2013
The First Sunday of Advent

I never knew I was white, until I was 16 years old. One day, as I was a newly minted driver taking my brother's Camaro for a ride, I noticed my hands on the steering wheel. Of all things to notice, while driving, it was how white my hands were. In that moment, it was as if I had made a startling discovery. "I am a white person."

I'm told that people of color know from the day they enter this world what color they are whether they want to or not. Color is a defining moment that serves to classify and codify and stratify the world in which we live. It's only white people who can live with the myth of color-blindness. It's part of a privilege that goes along with thinking that everyone has the same experience and opportunities that I do. I may want that to be true with my whole being, but history and experience serve as reality reminders. Yet, when we open our eyes, see what is, and devote ourselves to seeking a new way, things can change.

It was a small change, a shoot from a stump---and a profound beginning. In a rural/suburban community where I served, I reached out to my White UCC colleague and the African American Pastor of the Second Baptist Church and together we inaugurated a Martin Luther King, Jr. remembrance. It was epic night in January. The spirit moved in ways that none of us could have imagined. All three congregations, community leaders, and media packed into the Second Baptist Church, and the Holy Spirit came to greet us. Make no mistake: God loves it when we are together.

We were changed that night---seeing each other, being in the neighborhood, worshipping as one, dreaming Martin's dream, and raising enough money to start a MLK scholarship for a graduating minority student from our local High School. It was a beginning. A birthing of possibility.

Honestly, I think the memory of that first event keeps them coming back year after year. It's not the same as that first night, but the possibility that one day we might just get to that Holy Spirit "peaceable kingdom" again keeps the dream alive.

Prayer: Inspire us Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see each other as you do. Not color-blind, but cherishing our differences. Help us to listen to each other's history and experiences with hearts ready for understanding. And, give us the courage to choose to come together for the blessing of your presence in ways that we dream of. May that dream keep us moving toward the moment when all your people will live the fullness of joy, peace, justice, mercy, hope and love.

The Reverend Dr. Teresa Dulyea-Parker
CCIW Regional Minister and President

December 3, 2013
Third Day of Advent

Coming to Spiritual Introspection: Birthing the Peaceable Kingdom

"[The Root of Jesse] will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
Or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness
He will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for
The poor of the earth…..Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness
The sash around his waist." Isaiah 11:3b-5

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good [people] do nothing." (Edmund Burke)

When I first started with the Pro-Reconciliation Anti-Racism Team I was surprised when some would say to me, "Dwight, you know me and you know that I have never treated you badly." They were correct but the work of doing anti-racism work is to see the wounds that racism cause for all of us as it operates in the systems of our land. Most of us start from our personal actions and if we feel our actions are okay then we feel that we have done our part and that is enough. Racism goes far beyond our individual actions. Racism involves living in a country that has been birth by a set of values that were exclusively stated for white men. People of Color and women were excluded. Were the founding "fathers" bad men with evil intent? I do not think so but the evil was that their focus allowed for the exclusion of some.,

Wayne Greeson writes: "When good men do nothing, evil triumphs. Evil, sin (including racism) and those who perpetrate it must be opposed. When Good men do nothing, they are no longer good. Many have the mistaken notion that good is merely the absence of doing that which is wrong. Not so! One is good not merely because he does no evil, but because his is actively working for the good."

One day a young African American kid went to a local burger place for a burger and fries. While in line, a group of young white men who were part of a Klan Rally happening in that town on that particular day came up. Upon seeing the African-American kid that began to taunt, spew racial slurs at him and making veiled threats. There were other white people in line and not one of them said a word. Not one offered any support or protection. The kid got his food and left with the young white men still spewing that racial poison.

My question is, "Why didn't one of those good white people who was in line that day and witnessed the series of event speak up?" When it comes to facing the sin of racism we all need to spend time in spiritual introspection. Each one of us has a role to play in creating the 'Peaceable Kingdom. We are called to see with spiritual eyes and to listen with spiritual ears to bring God's shalom to all.

Prayer: God of the Peaceable Realm, we pray that you will help us to look within when we encounter racism, and any other form of injustice. We love you and we love our neighbor but it

is hard to speak or act as peacemakers. Let your Spirit of introspection convict us and embolden us to be willing to intervene with justice and compassion. Amen

The Reverend Dwight Bailey
CCIW Pro-Reconciliation/ Anti-Racism Team

Footnote:
Wayne Greeson, "When Good Men Do Nothing" . The Church of Christ in Zion, Illinois.

December 5, 2013
Fifth Day of Advent

Isaiah's image of the peaceable Kingdom is a favorite biblical image of reconciliation. In the ecosystem of the peaceable kingdom the lamb, goat, calf, and yearling trust that neither the wolf, leopard nor lion will harm or destroy them. And, just as importantly, the wolf, leopard, and lion have learned to see the lamb, goat, calf, and yearling as more than the source of their survival.

When seeking to understand God's will, I find I am more successful when I keep in mind one of Jesus' more humorous object lessons: the person who is concerned about getting the speck out of a neighbor's eye that she does not see the log protruding from her own.

When I remember to check first for a log protruding from my own eye, I remember to look first at my role and possible complicity. I also remember not to take myself too seriously.

A scene from Disney's "Finding Nemo" movie has helped me see one of the logs protruding from my own eye as I try to answer God's call to promote reconciliation. Much of the "Finding Nemo" movie follows Marlin, an overprotective clownfish father, and Dory, a highly forgetful and overly trusting blue tang fish, in their ocean journey to find Marlin's son.

In the middle of their journey, Marlin and Dory encounter a group of sharks trying to create an ocean version of Isaiah's peaceable kingdom. Marlin and Dory find themselves involuntarily escorted to a clandestine meeting of three sharks trying to live out their new and genuinely held commitment to the belief "Fish are our friends, not food." As evidence of their commitment, each shark was to bring at least one fish friend to the meeting.

No matter how well-intentioned, the sharks' efforts go horribly wrong. The invited fish do not feel that the sharks are their friends. Instead, the fish are clearly (and rightfully) uneasy, anxious, and fearful. The sharks, meanwhile, are oblivious to how their overtures of friendship and delight at having fish at the meeting are increasing the anxiety and discomfort of their guests.

Through this scene I am reminded that Isaiah's image is not one that eliminates or downplays the real and historic differences between the cultures and experiences of whites and persons of color. Instead, Isaiah's image is that of those with profound—and seeming irreconcilable—differences learning to live and flourish together.

Even though the sharks' attempts to promote reconciliation were ineffective, they did grasp Isaiah's vision of reconciliation. The sharks did not fall into the trap of believing that the peaceable kingdom required they become fish, or that the fish become sharks

Unsuccessful as they were, the sharks' attempts at reconciliation were not an attempt to make themselves into fish or the fish into sharks. They were trying to figure out how sharks and fish could live and flourish together.

I believe God's call to dismantle racism and promote reconciliation is not a call to downplay or eliminate our differences, but to create a society in which people of all races and ethnicities live, work, and flourish side-by-side.

The Reverend Nelia Beth Scovill
Jackson, WI
Pro-Reconciliation/ Anti-Racism Team

December 8, 2013
Second Sunday of Advent

All Means All

But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people (Gospel of Luke 2:10, NRSV)

About a year ago, I was honored to preach for the first time in my life, in English (as a second language), toward my beloved congregation at First Christian Church of Downers Grove. It was First Sunday of Advent, with beautiful first lighting of candle which symbolizes "hope."

Before I came to this wonderfully loving Disciples church, I had nothing to do with experiencing or understanding the depth of hope— as a woman of color. I realized serving a mainly Anglo-American congregation as young Korean student minister, with African-American woman as a Senior Pastor, is a considerably rare privilege. From then on, everything I now know about racism, anti-racism and efforts of interracial reconciliation I learned in the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church).

Having received abounding love, year-long internship at FCCDG has taught me that the Communion table is open to all. I have never encountered such openness before. Envisioning truly beautiful table of Christ— neither exclusively mine, nor yours— was easy to imagine, yet too many churches I had participated often ended up in disputes and divisions, quarreling over the ownership of table, sanctuary and even Christ.

Perhaps this is why precisely (but sadly) I was so surprised by the weekly celebration of Communion in Disciples and their inclusivity. Believe it or not, I belong to a suspicious generation to whom it is a big surprise when Christians actually live by the core of message of Jesus— love regardless of race or color.

Against all odds, I have become a witness to the welcoming and embracing humility and hospitality of Disciples of Christ. As a native South Korean woman studying in Chicago, I cannot exaggerate how much I have been supported and grounded within community of diversity, and mysterious unity. In all things, there is love in what Disciples do. And this love was, is, and will be absolutely good news to me and my fellow colleagues of color, all of whom are struggling as sojourners in foreign land, and as "Gentile" to many Americans whose history in this vast land is much longer than ours.

When I first arrived at the airport in Chicago two years ago, I looked at myself, thinking "I feel like a 'Gentile' here." Since then, I rapidly open my eyes in Chicago to the issue of segregation, poverty and divisions within churches, all intertwined with "race." From afar world's most ethnically homogeneous nation, transitioning into world's most multiethnic city has been interesting, difficult and scary. Nevertheless, I have survived so far only because I met Disciples who believed in and practiced the dream of Advent, the ideal of Jesus worth pursuing for a new kingdom of God where justice, peace and reconciliation govern for ever.

In Disciples, my experience as Gentile in U.S., I must say, could be equivalent to Jew in the time

of Jesus. In other words, I have been received without any discrimination in our local congregation and our region. I was allowed to participate in the Regional Assembly worship planning and Long Range Planning and Visioning team, despite my racial and linguistic difference. My joyful privilege as a believer in Christ has been possible due to countless Disciples who open the Holy Table to all believers regardless of racial, economic, political and cultural particularities.

My dream is to carry on the ministry and study in partnership with North American Pacific/Asian Disciples (NAPAD), whose anti-racism work in Disciples of Christ has been embraced as essential ministry. For Asian Disciples, for both American citizens and people of non-American ethnic heritage, NAPAD is a home, church, office that facilitates and supports gospel of Jesus to be spread among people of Asian tradition. I have been grateful for I could work and study on the ground where the precedent Asian ministers have toiled for interracial reconciliation in the States.

However, bringing good news to 'all' people is an ever-ongoing work. Our region sets up anti-racism work for at least forty years ahead. When it comes to the issue of race, the last General Assembly experience has shown me it is very hard to draw a consensus even among Disciples churches. Anti-racism will be a life-long hard work for every Disciple, and this is exactly why we are called to be reconciler and bridge-builder between different cultures, ethnicities and even nations. Disciples of Jesus have worked miracles, not by their will, but through the power of reconciling Spirit. So this message of holy and righteous Simeon still remains a dream of ours, an ideal but worth pursuing for.

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel' (Luke 2:29-32).

The salvation of Jesus extends to all people, and it is the vision coming through the promise of Bible. Through the light-carriers for the Gentiles in Disciples of Christ (Christian Church), I found my salvation in the surpassing love of Christ, through faith community in and outside our region. It was an undeserving love for this Gentile woman of youth, but I learned that there is no limit to the love of God.

In this year's Advent season, I wholeheartedly pray that you might as well renew the blessing of love that reaches all people in every nation, regardless of skin color. During sing alongs, passing of the peace, or even social hour, I hope we can enjoy the opportunity to get to know our neighbors although they do not look similar to us. Holding and shaking each other's hands, greeting with gentleness and smile. Even when there is disagreement and discrepancy due to our differences, I believe as we are in covenant with God, in partnership with Christ, we should encourage multiple generations of color, to carry the light of gospel to the ends of the earth—together.

In the name of Christ, peace to all, love to all. And all means "all."

Hyein Park, Master of Divinity Student at the University of Chicago Divinity School

December 10, 2013
Tenth Day of Advent

The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him, The Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding, The Spirit that give direction and builds strength, The Spirit that instills knowledge and Fear-of-GOD. *Isaiah 11:2, The Message*

The peaceable kingdom is evident when I am reconciled to God and to all the children of God. How can I be reconciled to all peoples without the "Spirit of wisdom and understanding?"

Growing up and living most of my life in small, Midwest, rural white communities, I understood that culture: the lifestyle, language and worldview of white Midwest, rural America. The only "understanding" I had of anyone from a culture different from mine was from the stereotypes I heard from family, church, school and the media. I bought into the lie that all people had the same rights and access to services and goods that I did; and that if they were poor or in jail, it must be their fault. These "understandings" were not reconciling me to God's children, but building walls between us.

But the life-giving Spirit of God hovers over me. By joining the journey of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to become a pro-reconciling/anti-racist church that Spirit began to bring me wisdom and understanding.

The hardest understanding was to face the lie that all people did not have equal access to goods and services, but that I received these things because of my white skin. It was not easy to understand that what I considered normal—a loan for a house or car, medical treatment for my children, trust, and a job—was not normal for many People of Color.

A few years ago I was in another city to do an anti-racism training on behalf of Reconciliation Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). My training partner, a Person of Color, and I were going to check into our hotel in order to rest and freshen up before our training began that evening. There was a mix-up in our reservations. After phone calls back and forth between the hotel and the Reconciliation office, we thought everything was straightened out. I was assigned my room and went up to relax. When I came back down a couple of hours later, my training partner was still sitting in the lobby waiting for his room. The hotel was waiting for a fax that would guarantee payment. But why wasn't I still waiting in the lobby? White privilege.

As I acknowledged my white privilege, it became easier to form authentic relationships with People of Color. And as relationships developed I gained new understandings of other ways of being. I learned that while in white society silence often signifies acceptance of what is being said, in other cultures silence from a person means he/she is waiting to be invited to speak. In some Native tribes, cutting your hair is a sign of mourning, and yet boarding schools insisted the

Native children's hair be cut. They were left wondering who had died. These new understandings lead to reconciliation, a breaking down of walls that society builds between us.

Am I "wise" and "understanding?" Of course not! But I thank God for opening my eyes, for a new worldview that can vision all peoples living together in the peaceable kingdom. This is the vision, the hope, I cling to during this advent season as I prepare for the coming of the One who reconciles all people to God.

Martha Herrin
CCIW Pro-reconciliation/ Anti-racism Team Co-Chair

December 12, 2013
Twelfth Day of Advent

Let the Little Children Lead Them

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them." (Isaiah 11:6) NKJV

Off we go to the airport. The weather was warm, the sun was bright, the breezes were gentle and everything seemed alright with the world. This was my two year grandson's first trip on an airplane. He marveled at all of the sites as we walked through the terminal. He wanted to get out of the stroller, which we brought along for our connivance to move rapidly through the airport. However, we were so early we wanted to make this an enjoyable time for him too, so he was allowed to walk alongside of us.

We moved along the walking rail to reach our goal. My grandson looked up at me with a big smile. People rushed by us focused on their own schedules with little concern for those around them. Still we were having a great time. Finally we reached our terminal. We sat and waited patiently to board our flight.

"Look!" shouted my grandson. "Airplanes!" His eyes were wide as sauces and his face glimmered with glee as he gazed at the enormous size of the airplanes. They were much bigger then he had seen in his books at home. My daughter, his mother took him closer to the picture windows for him to get a better view. As they came closer to the window a little girl about his size waved at him and he smiled and waved back. Suddenly her mother pulled her away and said, "No! No!" Then she quickly picked her up. My daughter and I were somewhat startled but not too surprised. We smiled and she smiled back. I glanced back at the mother and her little girl. The father and the mother were talking softly. Then the father put the little girl back down on the floor. The child walked close to where my grandson and his mother were standing. Both her parents and I watched closely to see what would occur next. The little girl began talking to my grandson as they both watched the airplanes together.

I could see the nervousness in the eyes of the mother. The father gently laid his hands on her lap to calm her fears and whatever else was racing through her mind. The two children giggled and pointed at things they saw in the window. Then they stopped watching the planes and began chasing each other in a circle and continued laughing. Her mother picked her and sat her in her lap. She began to cry. My grandson went to walk towards her. But we told him to stay with us and let her mother hold her. "What's wrong?" he said.

What is wrong? Racism had once again reared its ugly head. Although our legislative system may have written laws against racism, it continues to be a thriving living organism in the minds and hearts of humankind. For some, racism has become so deeply instilled in their being

that it has broken and destroyed the bonds that connect them to Christ. They have become so desensitized with their own self proclaim entitlement that they have created a division in God's family. "…God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27) NKJV. There are no superior and inferior races of people. The race is the human race that God created.

God was well pleased with the behavior and attitudes of the two children. He looked at their hearts and not the color of their skin. "Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he is doing is pure and right." (Proverbs 20:11) NKJV. God loves us and he wants us to love one another. When we fall short of the promises of God he provides us with the opportunity to repent. We must practice Colossians 3:10-11, (AMP) "And have clothed yourself with the new [spiritual life], [which is ever in the process of being], renewed and remolded into, [fuller and more perfect knowledge upon] knowledge after the image (the likeness) of him who created it." God loves us enough to not want us to stay in a state of sin. He wants to elevate our love for one another not by word only but in our thoughts, attitude and deeds. We must become like little children, devoid of the sin of racism.

"These things I command you, love one another." (John 15:17) NKJV. It is not a request. It is a command. No, one commanded the two children to laugh and play together. It was instinctive. Let us be instinctive for our love towards others. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) NKJV. We need spiritual strength to do what is right and holy in the sight of God. We can and most move beyond personal excuses for clinging to racism, that's my natural upbringing; we spoke and acted that way all my life. We are new creatures in Christ. Let your newness show in your attitude, language and actions.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, teach us to love each other with our whole hearts. Teach us to tear down the strongholds of racisms by practicing what you have taught us, to love our neighbor as our self. Although our fears may cause us to stumble let our courage rise up to identify the racism in our environment and move us to elect official who have the heart of righteous ever before them. Let us be a people who invest are time and talents into efforts that support anti-racism policies and practices. Last but not least forgive us of our short comings and give us the opportunity to reflect in our hearts and actions as we strive to live more peacefully and lovingly before you. Let the little children lead us in what is pure and right. Amen.

Humbly submitted,
Pastor Crystal Chinn

December 15, 2013
Third Sunday of Advent

Birthing the Peaceable Kingdom: What to Do about the Mod Squad?

They reminded me of a curious but odd facsimile of "The Mod Squad." (***The Mod Squad*** was a groundbreaking "hippie" undercover cop show that ran on ABC from September 24, 1968, until August 23, 1973. The concept was to take three rebellious, disaffected young social outcasts and convince them to work as unarmed undercover detectives as an alternative to being incarcerated themselves.)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mod_Squad - cite_note-1The group of young social outcasts I met had come into the small town I lived in from a city not far away. I did not think they were undercover detectives but there was "one white, one black, one blond."

My first encounter with them came about after hearing there were three people who had slept in the park. I went out to the park and visited with them. The next day was a chilly and rainy Saturday so I invited them to spend the night out of the elements in our church building. As a young pastor, I saw a need and simply sought to address it. I did not think about any negative reactions from others or about adverse consequences because of my invitation.

It was the late 1980s in a small town and the church was never locked. As I drove them from the park to our church, the white male and white blond female told me they had gotten a lot of strange looks as they had walked in the small town. Their hippie clothing stood out. I asked if they had seen others who looked like them and the black man laughed at that. I took them to a room in the church and they said they would be comfortable with their sleeping bags and then I went home.

When I drove home, my wife was concerned that they have food to eat that night and the next morning. So, she took them food at the church. It was evening and getting dark. As she entered, a bright light flashed into her eyes and she was asked what she was doing there. She said she was the preacher's wife and was bringing food into the kitchen. The policeman told her he had received a report there were some strange people in the church. She told him that I had invited them to stay there and the policeman left. When my wife got home and told me about her experience, I realized that I had better let more people know what was going on. However, the word was already spreading.

The next morning, a Sunday, there was quite a buzz in the church about the strange people who had slept in the church. People gathered into the sanctuary for the worship service. And then, the last ones to enter that Sunday morning walked right up to the vacant front pew facing the pulpit. Heads turned to see the odd mod squad. It was as if the whole church couldn't breath and needed a big gulp of air. But, I was glad to see that the threesome was willing to join in the worship service. A little boy walked across the aisle and handed them a bulletin.

After the service, a representative of the elders of the congregation gave the three people bus tickets to head on the journey they said they were going to take to the west. I suspect that was not simply out of the goodness of the elders' hearts. Something just had to be done!

Now, that was not the best representation of the heart of Christ that was shown. Not even close. In fact, I was disappointed in the elders.

At least the little boy with the bulletin got it!

Isaiah 11:6 *...and a little child shall lead them.*

Prayer: O Lord, may a little child lead us to be peaceful and welcoming in the spirit of Jesus Christ. And may we do your will to help our church and our society be more gracious, kind and fair. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Reverend Evan Williams
Sunnyland Christian Church in Washington, IL
Pro-Reconciliation/ Anti-Racism Team

December 17, 2013
Seventeenth Day of Advent

The Road Less Travelled!

Robert Frost wrote a profound poem about taking the road less travelled. In it Frost takes the reader on a journey through the choices that we make, and the decisions that are made within that life. In today's high-tech, multi-layered world we may think that there are no more roads less traveled. Yet, as we reflect on the image that an Old Testament prophet paints for us the reader we can see that there is still the unpaved road that must be taken. This path that we must walk is a path that opens to our heart a picture of a world where color and creed are seen as attributes rather than deficits. The path that Isaiah takes us down is a road where Dr. King envisioned when he proclaimed the prophetic words,

> "I have a dream that my four little children will **one day live** in a nation where they will not be judged by **the color of their skin** but by the content of their character I have **a** dream ...I have a dream that one day in Alabama., with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the wards of interposition **and** nullification, one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black **girls** will be able to join hands with little white boys **and** white girls **as** sisters and brothers." (Martin Luther King Jr. I Have a Dream 1963.)

As a church and as one that claims Christianity this vision of the road is where we must gather together. It is a time to witness that the road less travelled is one that leads to the peaceable kingdom. A place where we as the whole Body of Christ gather together and walk together. It is a place where we are able to see that we can hold hands as black and white. We can break bread as children of God. It is a place that is present and willing to be explored when we are ready to accept and see the depth that comes with pro –reconciling thought. Isaiah cries out to us from the depths of his soul asking us to become whom God calls us to be. Advent is about the coming and the arrival. As we continue down the path towards that precious birth which we honor. Let us be prepared to live out the calling which is placed before us this day. Let us embrace and embody the meaning of togetherness within the body of Christ.

As Disciples of Christ it is our honor and duty to witness to the gift of diversity within humanity. We were founded on the understanding that God works uniquely within all of creation. This Advent season allow God to shine brightly as you walk towards the peaceable kingdom acknowledging the glorious beauty that comes from all creation. Let the road less travelled lead you to the peaceable kingdom. A place that truly shines brightly with the love that God shares with all humanity. Let this be a time of our willingness to see past the obstacles of hate and bigotry, and see more clearly the vision that Isaiah places before us.

Prayer: almighty God today open my eyes to see, my ears to hear, and my heart to love all of creation. Help me to walk this day towards a reconciling future with all of humanity. All this I ask in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Reverend John Huxtable
Pro-Reconciliation/ Anti-Racism Team

December 19, 2013
Ninteenth Day of Advent

Children Should Be Seen and Heard

"...and a little child shall lead them." Isaiah 11:6

My sons and I were discussing the challenges black boys face in school. It had been one of those "teachers get on my nerves" days for all of us. The irony--I am teacher by vocation. Thus, I understand how quirky we educators can be sometimes. In the middle of the discussion one of children asked, "Mom, have you ever experienced racism at school?" I did not hesitate to share what happened to me in fourth grade.

I attended what seemed to be a pretty diverse elementary school. As I reflect and remember the various faces in that fourth grade classroom, there was an egalitarian society of 9 and 10 year olds who loved snack time and kickball at recess. With the exception of one white girl, the rest of us who rode the bus were African American girls and boys from the "projects" a few miles from the school. The walkers in our class were predominantly white or Asian. I thought we all liked each other. I took it for granted that we respected each other's differences and gifts. Our white teacher hugged and chastised us all the same. If she felt this way, surely my classmates shared the same sentiments.

Yet, one event stands out in stark contrast to the "peaceable kingdom" that was our intermediate school world. The school bus was quite late one day. After arriving over two hours behind schedule, those of us riding the bus finally went to our respective classrooms. Upon

entering my class, an Asian female student commented, “Awww, the ‘bus people’ are here! I thought we were going to have a peaceful day. It was so quiet without them.” Mind you this happened over thirty years ago, but her remarks are as clear as if uttered just yesterday.

“The ‘bus people’ are here.” The A’s and B’s on my report card were just as good as my Asian peer’s grades. My academic skills had been lauded with the same degree of encouragement as hers. Yet, on that day, I, we, the “bus people” were not accepted for our intelligence or humanity. We were not welcomed that day. Our social identity as people who did not own a house, as children who did not live in the neighborhood, as students who did not have the privilege of walking to school was the order of the day. Perhaps this skewed, flawed socio-economic and socio-cultural view had been on the table or an undercurrent all along. Out of the mouth of a 9 year old little girl, a child, a broad, piercing statement about race and class had vomited. “And a little child shall lead them”?

As I think more about my son’s question, it occurs to me that he nor his friends think of race or ethnicity as adults do today. It is nothing for them to play with a Latino, Asian, Polish or biracial child. They freely ask to spend the night here or attend a party over there. Their concern is getting the invite, not who extends the invitation. Yes, boys up to a certain age have issues with girls, but their concern with who belongs to what racial group is, for the most part, not up for discussion. “And a little child shall lead them”?

When I was growing up, my family made it clear that children should be seen and not heard. Now that I have outspoken, loquacious sons of my own, I get it. Yet, I am not so sure

about this. What children hear us say, they in turn will eventually say. It was what I heard that 9 year old Asian girl say that still resonates with me. It was what I do or do not hear children today saying about race and ethnicity that gives me some degree of hope. I am not naive to think that racist discourse or prejudiced activity will disappear. However, I aver and believe that children do offer a model for teaching adults how to work together, live together and play together. Yes, "a little child shall lead" us into a peaceful "kin-dom."

The Reverend Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, Ph.D.
Chicago, IL

December 22, 2013
Fourth Sunday of Advent

"Lions and Tigers and Bears"

You've seen them. You know, those videos of animals of different species eating and playing together? I saw one just today of a mother dog with her puppies and a little kitten was in the midst of the puppies. And you've heard of one type of animal taking on another animal very different from what they are, and nursing it. I love those videos. It gives me hope. And every time I see one of those pictures, I remember these words from Isaiah: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them."

Don't you sometimes wonder how all the animals on Noah's ark got along? All together in one space – and we get stir crazy if we're cooped up in the house for more than one day. I think it has a lot to do with peace. If those on Noah's ark can get along for 40 days, and the wolf and the lamb can live together, don't you think we humans should be able to live together?
I am constantly amazed at the conflict that goes on in our churches. You would think that a house of worship, the place we come to meet God, would be free from conflict. But sometimes it seems as though there is more conflict in churches than there is in places of business. Why do you think that is?

It's been said to me that because we are humans there will be conflict. But more than in a place of business? Really? What's going on here?

I wish I could answer these questions, but I'm not sure there is a good answer for any of these questions. It seems to me that we disagree on most everything. Right now, our Federal government is shut down for the first time in 17 years. The simple reason is because Republicans and Democrats can't get along. I think the real reason is a little more complicated than that. The solution, however, is simple.

If each one of us treated others like children of God and as brothers and sisters, conflict would be diminished. I know, it's easy to say. I'm not sure Jesus kept that in perspective. He said, to love not only our neighbors but our enemies. He said to care for those without basic needs. And he came to the Jews and the Gentiles. Jesus didn't care about color, race, species, status in life, or gender.

The author of Isaiah envisioned a kingdom where all was peaceful. Isn't that something we all must envision and strive for? I know it sounds like a huge undertaking but we need to start somewhere. Like the story goes – what's the best way to eat an elephant? One bite at a time. The best way to erase racism is one step at a time. It can be done. We've seen examples of this in the animal world. Aren't we smarter and more loving than a lion?

Let the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord. Amen.

The Reverend Jan Harris, Pro-Reconciliation/ Anti-Racism Team

December 23, 2013
The Twenty-third Day of Advent

. . for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord . . .Isaiah 11:9b

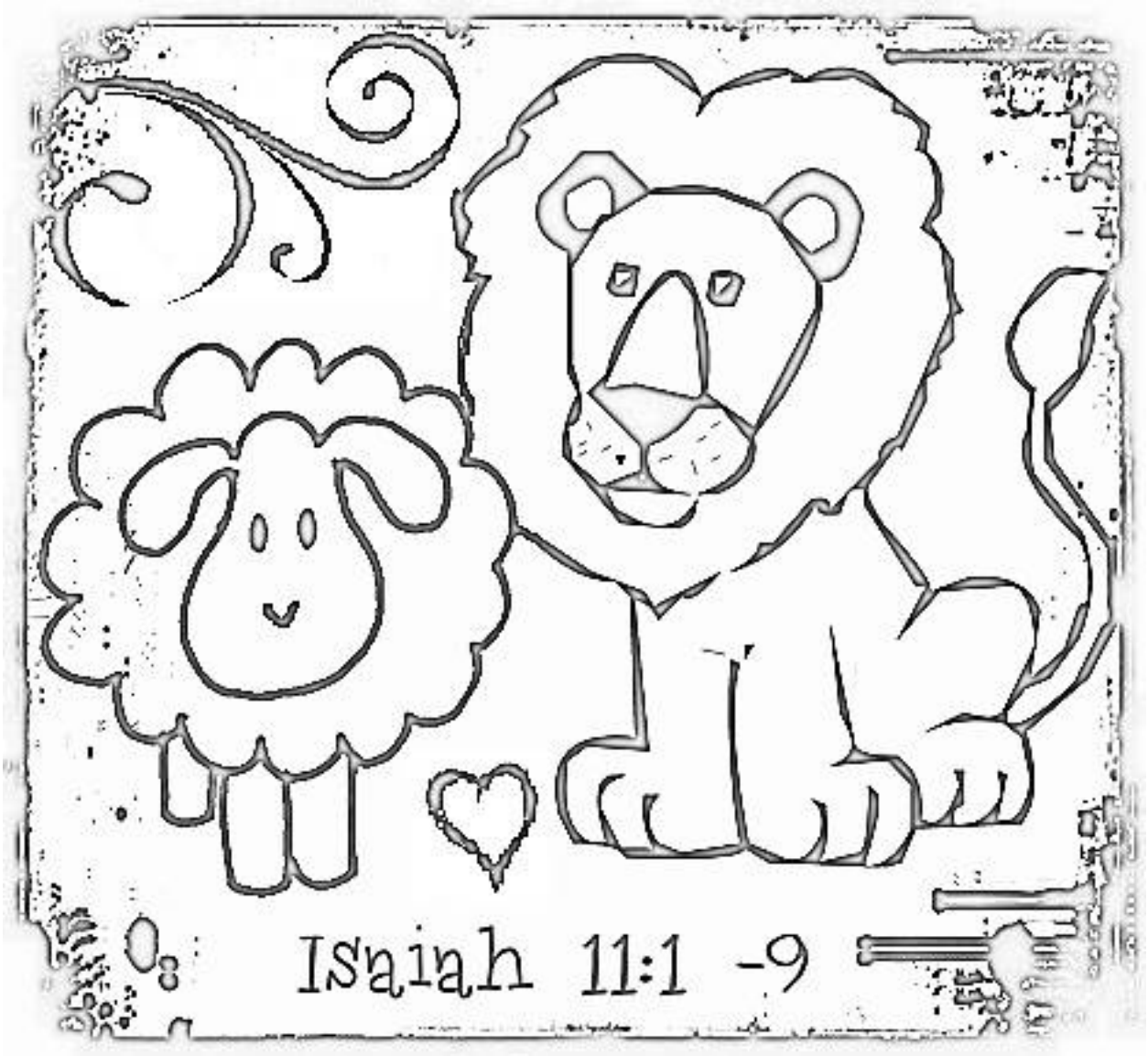
Growing up rural northwestern Oklahoma and eventually attending a very small school system, I lived my early years in a very white, protestant place without the benefit of any diversity of cultures. I grew up without the knowledge of what it means to differ significantly from my neighbors when it comes to race, religious traditions, ancestral background, and local culture. As I write that I realize that white, protestant, European American culture isn't that homogeneous—but that was my impression as a child and young adult. And even though I grew up where most Native American tribes were exiled, I lived in a community that was distant from those reserved lands. Even my college experience lack diversity. For whatever reasons the classes I took tended to have more white students than persons of color.

My foundational experiences of racism and racial tensions were either derived from television or books or the bigoted language of family and close friends. I was naïve about problems of racism, cultural diversity, and power structures. Yet I remember that I also knew that the ignorance and fear of other races, cultures, and religious traditions were wrong, I just couldn't have explained why. Yet I was also ignorant and afraid. I argued about racist or bigoted language. It was painful to hear, yet I had no real experiences with which to contradict it. And I was a young girl/woman who had little voice or power of her own. I remember seeing beauty and attraction in men and women of color; I knew the talents and gifts of distant celebrities—but I always heard that the successful people of color were exceptions, never the rule.

I am still ignorant of the breadth, width, and intricate complexities within our particular culture's systems of racism. I suspect for some people like me they are still seem quite distant and strangely close all at the same time. It is only through God's wisdom and knowledge—and our awareness of how much of it we lack—that we will take any strides toward the God's great gift and vision of a kin-dom of peace, security, and joyful experiences of diversity.

Prayer: God of wisdom and understanding, open our minds and hearts, our ears and eyes to the fullness and abundance of your world of diversity and wonder. Fill us with your spirit, as your son was filled, so that we are instruments of your compassion alongside justice, your love alongside responsibility, and your faithful providence alongside transformation. In Jesus' wise and holy name. Amen.

The Reverend Amy Wharton
Robinson, Illinois
Pro-Reconciliation/ Anti-Racism Team



Graphic Design
By Mallory Cherrington
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Moline, IL
December 24, 2013

Christmas Eve

"From the Lunch Table to the Banquet Table"

Jesus' connection to the lineage of both Jesse and David solidified his ability to bear fruit. Jesus is plugged into God, and so shall we plug in as well…

I am comfortable with all people. Typically, I do not meet a stranger. Usually, I am considered friendly and open. However, I never considered myself as a bridge builder between ethnicities, cultures, peoples, and systems. Candidly speaking, I had a shy disposition, and thought that would disqualify me for what seemed like such a bold and vulnerable public position. Also, truth told, it seemed to me that the relational, cultural, and systematic issues between "People of Color and Whites were way to deep for my personal involvement. As I felt that I did not have anything to prove, I was on my way, living my life in which my sincerest desire was to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all who would listen. As I was doing this in a noncontroversial way, It did not seem to me that it would be helpful to join any groups or take on any tasks. It was a good plan until the day I met a social-justice pastor from Chicago, IL, the Reverend Dr. Harvey Lord. Dr. Lore came rushing through the front doors of the Christian Theological Seminary with force, and without wasting any time or energy abruptly pointed his finer at me. He said, "You are a Bridge Builder." I did not know was to make of this guy. I did know that he was violating my personal motto and plan, which was "I am not to be a part of any groups or task force geared toward controversy." In haste, I stood up and yelled at the top of my lungs, "No I am not."

Friends, that personal encounter with God through the person of The Reverend Dr. Harvey Lord escorted me to the place on the bridge that is a point of no return. What happened next was my having to understand and accept that the Gospel Message was one of liberation, freedom from oppression, and a push towards redemption and reconciliation for all humankind. If I was going to preach it, teach it, or proclaim it in any way – I first had to put it on. So, I began trying to wear it, and the insight it brought changed my life drastically.

Maybe, I was called to be a "bridge builder." Maybe, I was called to be a twenty-first century change agent. Maybe, I am one who would spend the rest of her days telling a story that at the heart is meant to bring all people together instead of instigating a credo of separation? Maybe, I am called to be a branch just like Jesus was, one who came from the tree of David and the stump of Jesse. Jesus is the one who is sent forth and comes from God branching out to touch as many lives as possible. Yet every story, mission or commission has a significant backdrop – a story behind a story – a birth decree. Here is mine.

The year was 1978, and the place was Rosemont, a town in Eastern Pennsylvania outside Philadelphia. I was in fourth grade Rosemont Elementary School, one of the twenty-five students who attended the stern and disciplined classroom of Mrs. Marcel Hahn. I remember Mrs. Hahn vividly. She was a young Pilipino woman with curly dark hair, short stature and she wore an ink pen necklace. At that time, she was married to a young, aspiring white politician. Together they encouraged our class.

I was not born in Pennsylvania. I was an implant from the inner city of Cleveland, Ohio, sent to live with her maternal grandmother because of the deterioration of the Cleveland Public School System. My mother believed that the schools in PA were educating their students better, and that children had a chance at being successful in their studies. We lived in a place called, *'The Mainline.'* To me, a Clevelander, it was just another name for ritzy suburbia. However, the rich history of war, antiquities and the founding of a commonwealth hovered over the borders between both Buck and Montgomery counties truly making this a prestigious place to live.

In the late seventies, the Mainline was not home to many Blacks. The few exceptions were Blacks who happened to be successful teachers, lawyers and doctors or of course, maids. My maternal grandmother was a maid. She did day work for one of the well-known families in the area. Knowing this family since the late nineteen-fifties, she actually traveled from Ohio to Pennsylvania to help raise their children. My grandmother , who was affectionately referred to some as "Boots," had made quite a name for herself on the Mainline. She was as an excellent worker, admired by her employers and their friends. She was a great cook, a great bingo player and had a beautiful alto voice-singing in the Church choir. Fondly, greeted at the stores and around town, the highlight of her life was having me choose to come and live with her. I had quite the grandmother!

Overall it was a great experience. Once enrolled at the new elementary school, I understood that moving to Pennsylvania did afford me the opportunity to have a better education. My home was great. My neighborhood was fantastic. Though at the time I had no sense of cultural diversity, the kids were culturally diverse. We had Eric Gold on our school bus and Susan Mao from China. I enjoyed my school and adored my classmates. In my eight year old mind, Rosemont elementary school was the place to be.

It was the place to be until "that day" – the day I first witnessed the evil effects of racism. This is the day when I discovered that there is a noticeable cultural difference between black and white people. Friends, it was the day when I learned what it means to go from being a young, innocent and ordinary fourth grade student to one thrust into the throes of young political lobbyists, fighting for a seat at the proverbial lunch table.

Why the Lunch table? Because, the lunch table was where we as a class sat each day, sharing stories, lunches and other classroom gossip. The lunch table was the place where the young girls put on their favorite fruit smelling "bonnie bell lip-gloss." We were all young children eating, talking and looking forward to sharing recess, together. Yes, the lunchroom and the lunch table was the place to be. We could have forty-five minutes un-interrupted together time. It was my favorite time of the school day. Not only because, I could get my favorite chicken salad or 'peanut butter and marshmallow' better known as the 'fluffer-nutter' sandwich. It was a place where I could take a break from my studies. Yet, that day in the spring of 1978, the lunch table moved from being a place of safety, security and friendship to a place where all of the imageries of bitterness, mistrust, anger and racial barriers would be assembled.

All was well at Rosemont School until that gruesome day when there was only one seat left at the lunch table, a seat right between my friend Amy and me. Amy was a nice girl, who happened to be bi-racial. Although, she had lighter skin; she had more Black features than White, these features made her an outcast. She was seen as a risk and was isolated. As my dear white

friend, Annabelle searched the table over and over again trying to make sure that there were no more seats amongst the White students there came what I would describe as the most piercing screeching sound. It came from another eight year old. She yelled these hurtful and harmful words from the other side of the lunch table, "Watch out Annabelle you're surrounded!"

As an 8 year old, I was not quite so sure what those words meant, but the tone, intensity and flavor behind them still resound in my ears today. As Amy and I listened to her yell those words, and watched the other children begin to laugh; a wave of heat rushed from the top of my head to the bottom of my toes as the fluid of embarrassment, fear and shame came over my heart. This was different from what I felt when being accused by my white Girl Scout Leader of having not worked hard to earn my Girl Scout badges. Yes, I was harassed because, I earned the most badges out of any member of my Girl Scout troop. This is not what I felt when all of the Moms were angry at the fact that I sold more Girl Scout cookies than everyone in both the junior girl scout troop and the brownies collectively. They wanted to give my prize to my white friend because she was the one who had been the top seller for three years in a row. What they did not understand was my advantage of having grandmother who had connections with all of the other Black domestic workers. Yet, what happened that day at the lunch table left me confused. I was in the midst of racism right before my very eyes. My immediate response was "surrounded by what?" Annabelle was surrounded by two friendly, young girls of color. As a matter of fact, she was surrounded by the love, openness and acceptance of what my mother thought that the educational system in Pennsylvania should look like on a daily basis. I left that table scared. Ultimately, what I thought of as the place to be was not where I wanted to be any longer and so, I moved back home to Cleveland.

It has been more than thirty-five years since, the lunch table incident. I have sat, witnessed and even been challenged to a higher degree of understanding in the area of what it means to be together around the table. Some would say, Christal "You were a child and children are children." They would say that the children did not know any better at the time. I would say, that the children were only repeating what had been said in their homes. However, they did not have any understanding of the cost and damage to come. In having extensive training and work in what it means to be pro-reconciling and anti-racism, I would say that Children learn racist behavior from their immediate sphere of influence. Our homes, parents, teachers, and even pastors teach and train behaviors that lead to the dehumanizing and exclusion of others. The table is an important place to be. It is the place where we are fed. It is the place where we are heard. It is the place where we connect with others. Today, for me the table has even more significance because, I am one who presides over the table of the Lord. The table of the Lord or communion table is a place where all are welcome. For me, it is a place where all can come inside from the torrential downpour of racism and other oppression hovering over our lives; rest and receive a meal that costs you and me nothing. Jesus paid the cost.

From time to time my mind goes back to that day in the lunch room back in good ole Rosemont School. I often ponder how life is laid out for you-even when you cannot see it. It was destiny that planted in me an understanding that race is more than a game at a very early age. Lack of racial understanding is the interruption of friendships, fluffer-nutter sandwiches and innocent child's play.

I am sorry to say, that I believe that it was on that day that 'the seeds of discrimination, separation and difference' were birthed in me. It is true that many things will be birthed in this life; children, ideas, jobs, plan, and meals. We shall find that the birthing process is not easy. It does not come without a struggle. And usually, it takes more than one individual to birth anything into existence. Birthing does not come without pain. It does not appear without some fear, vulnerability and separation. Once an idea or baby is birthed, it is no longer inside us anymore. It is separated and standing on its own.

Today, I thank God that I understand the importance of the table. I have been gifted with significant opportunities to sit at many more lunch tables, board room tables and communion tables. I have been able to sit across from my friends; people from all walks of life. Folks from different countries, cultures, colors, ethnicities, faith traditions and thought processes joining in the united voices through faith in the one idea of connection. We have shared a meal, deep conversations and vulnerability around the issue of race relations, in the United States and around the globe. These times of conversation have been refreshing, redeeming and most importantly, pointed towards what it means to be pro- reconciling.

It has been those times of openness and vulnerability which have helped me to heal from the pain and confusion felt at such a young age that was inflicted by a child who did not understand the cost of what she was saying. Through the quest for reconciliation, new relationships and deeper faith stories with all persons, I identify and witness to a Jesus' whose connection to the lineage of both Jesse and David solidified his ability to bear fruit.

Jesus is plugged into God, and so shall we plug in as well. This is a time and season for all the Children of God connected by the Spirit to understand our call to bear fruit. We have been offered a connection that is greater than our own small piece of the world. We have been invited to take part in this universal clarion call of reconciliation. It is time to be a living, breathing witness to the power of the living God. It is time to testify to God's uninhibited plans for our lives. We too are branches, sharing in the same ability Jesus had in bearing fruit. No branch can produce by itself. It must have help.

The key is allowing Jesus to become part of our growth and production. The production process for us today is to love, live, operating, serving and worshiping in the Unity of the Holy Spirit. And this can be done, if we let go of our personal agenda and grab God's agenda. I dream of the day when the color of one's skin is not going to be the major concern. I dream of living during a time when people will be honored for who they are, and the love they bring to others. I dream of the hour when the sin of racism will be totally and completely eradicated. I live for the moment when the Kingdom of God will be reconciled and on full display for all to see. It is coming. It shall be a great time. Let's gather the harvest, and prepare seating for all at the banquet table of reconciliation and abundant life.

The Reverend Dr. Christal Williams
CCIW Associate Regional Minister