



**The Pastor's
Portion**

June 7, 2020

Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul

HERE THE DOORS OF THE CHUCH SWING OPEN ON THE HINGES OF LOVE AND PEACE

Revkewatson3@gmail.com



BLACK LIVES MATTER



**NEW LOG IN CREDENTIALS
FOR SUNDAY WORSHIP AND
WEDNESDAY
PRAYER/STUDY.**

Join Zoom Meeting BY VIDEO

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87330604676>

Meeting ID: 873 3060 4676

BY PHONE:

646-558-8656 ACCES CODE
87330604676#

JOIN US FOR MID WEEK BIBLE
STUDY ON WEDNESDAY AT 7PM

BY VIDEO

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87567605330>

meeting ID: 875 6760 5330

**BY PHONE 646-558-8656
ACCESS CODE: 87567605330#**

Ahmed Abrey
 Breonna Taylor
 Sean Reed
 Steven Taylor
 Arian McCree
 Terrance Franklin
 Miles Hall
 William Green
 Tamir Rice
 Eric Garner
 Michael Brown
 Michael Dean
 Antwon Tose
 Samuel Mallard
 George Floyd
 Finan Berhel
 Sean Reed
 Arian McCree
 Terrance Franklin
 David McAtee
 Natosha McDade
 Deandre Ballard
 Botham Jean
 Robert White
 Anthony Smith
 Ramarley Graham
 Manuel Loggins
 Trayvon Martin
 Wendell Allen
 Kendrec McDade
 Larry Jackson
 Jonathan Ferrell
 Jordan Baker
 Victor White
 Dontre Hamilton
 John Crawford
 Ezelle Ford
 Yassin Mohamed
 Alfredo Olango
 Jordan Edwards
 Stephon Clark
 Danny Thomas
 DeJuan Gilroy
 Patrick Harmon
 Maurice Granton

**IN MEMORIAM
 OF ALL THE
 BLACK AND
 BROWN MEN
 AND WOMEN
 KILLED BY THE
 POLICE IN THE
 LAST 8-10
 YEARS. (THAT
 WE KNOW OF)**

Miles Hall
 Darius Tarver
 William Green
 Kwame Jones
 Devon Bailey
 Christopher Whitfield
 Anthony Hill
 Eric Logan
 Jamarion Robinson
 Gregory Hill
 JaQuavion Slaton
 Ryan Twyman
 Brandon Webber
 Jimmy Atchison
 Willie McCoy
 EJ Bradford
 Manuel Ellis
 Detrick Griggin
 Jemel Roberson
 Jonathan Hart
 Julius Johnson

 Jamee Johnson
 Michael Dean
 Robert Forbes
 Maurice Gordon
 Charley Keunang
 Tony Robinson
 Walter Scott
 Freddie Gray
 Brendon Glenn
 Samuel DuBose
 Christian Taylor
 Mario Woods
 Quintonio LeGrier
 Dante Parker
 Kajieme Powell
 Laquan McDonald
 Akai Gurley
 Romain Brisbon
 Jerame Reid
 Gregory Gunn
 Akiel Denkins
 Alton Sterling
 Terrance Sterling
 Philando Castillo
 Terrance Crutcher
 Keith Scott

The people of God must stand against racism and state sanctioned murder in all its forms.

If you are ready to study racism and white supremacy, please contact me. I am a UCC Nationally certified trainer in **Sacred Conversations to End Racism, de-center Whiteness, and dismantle white supremacy. If you are interested in forming a group to engage in a comprehensive study of the false construct of race in America, please contact me to arrange for a group study.**

SERMON: THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP:

In these days, I have been thinking of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who wrote a prominent theological treatise called the COST OF DISCIPLESHIP.

The forward to the book titled The Cost of Discipleship tells Bonhoeffer's story:

“When he graduated from Seminary at the age of 21, His dissertation subject was this: **WHAT IS THE CHURCH?** It was described as a theological miracle, and he was primed to enter into ministry, but in the Lutheran church one had to be 23 before entering ministry, so Bonhoeffer had a few years before he was ready to be ordained into ministry. So, what did he do? Bonhoeffer

came to New York to study at Union, which was very much inferior in intellectual and theological gravitas ...but God would not put his time in New York to waste.

But in retrospect Bonhoeffer's time in New York was not to be marked by what he learned at Union but rather by what he experienced at an African American church in Harlem. One Sunday in September 1930 a fellow student from Alabama took Bonhoeffer up to the Abyssinian Baptist Church.

What the young German saw there took his breath away. The congregation was on fire with faith, shouting and rejoicing in the worship and during the sermon, too. And their many activities during the week reflected what they did on Sunday.

Dietrich saw that they were not merely religious, but that they were real Christians, disciples of the Christ they worshiped. So they were not playing church but rather were the church, the people of God living out their faith with a joy Bonhoeffer had never seen, neither in the churches in Germany nor in the white Protestant churches in New York.

From that Sunday on he went to the Abyssinian Baptist Church every week, even teaching Sunday school and

becoming involved in the lives of many of the congregation. He would never be the same. Whatever faith resided in his head in the next months descended to his heart and from there suffused his whole being.

When he returned to Germany in 1931, everyone saw that he was somehow different. For one thing, he now attended church regularly. Although his family had always taken God seriously and had had private devotions, regular church attendance was never a priority. But there was another aspect to his faith, too. Bonhoeffer had seen in New York how the African American Christians spoke up about the injustices done to their brethren, especially in the American South, and Bonhoeffer quickly saw a parallel with the Jews in Germany."

In Germany, Hitler came into power, and quickly was coopting the faith community, coopting religion for purposes of power and domination...sound familiar?

"Bonhoeffer himself took the lead very early on, giving a radio speech just days after Hitler's election as chancellor in 1933. In it Bonhoeffer explained that the popular German idea of a strong leader—or Führer—was not based on God's idea of leadership but on a mistaken

idea that made an idol of the leader and that made him not a real leader at all but a misleader.

And this was only the beginning. Bonhoeffer knew that God was calling him to wake up the church to what was happening. But as with the prophets before him, Bonhoeffer's cries fell mostly on deaf ears. For one thing, the church in Germany was not used to standing against governmental authorities. The Lutheran church and the German state had long had an amicable history, so when Hitler became the head of the German state, almost no one could see the troubles that lay ahead. The typical religious pieties—that it was not the role of Christians to be involved in politics or that it was their role only to pray and “preach the gospel”—were all trotted out and firmly believed.

By the time some church leaders saw what was happening, it was simply too late to do anything. By then, Hitler had consolidated his power to the extent that it was impossible to oppose him. The window of religious liberty in Germany had been shut. Bonhoeffer was deeply grieved by the inaction of the German church, but he vowed to do all he could nonetheless. In 1935 he started an illegal seminary to train men who

were not mere ecclesiastical types but who understood what it meant to follow Jesus with their whole beings—to be real disciples.

Two years later, the Gestapo shut this seminary down, Bonhoeffer took it underground. The Nazis, however, were relentless. Eventually they forbade Bonhoeffer to teach at all, and then even to speak in public. His options for serving God were being winnowed down to nothing.”

“Bonhoeffer's made a dramatic decision to become a spy and enter the conspiracy to kill Hitler has been the subject of decades-long debate and controversy. But Bonhoeffer knew that to sit on the sidelines while innocents were being murdered was to be complicit in their murders.”

Ultimately, Bonhoeffer made the decision to engage in this conspiracy and it led to his being killed as a resistor of oppression. That is the COST of DISCIPLESHIP.

As I watch the news accounts of what is happening in country, the apathy to become engaged in matters of civic concern, or to engage the issue of corruption and depravity in many in our law enforcement communities, the failures in the criminal justice system, the way the COVID exposed the deep social inequities in poor,

black and brown communities, the ongoing injustices raging against people of African descent, ----I am hearing the nagging voice of Bonhoeffer reminding me that there is indeed a **cost of discipleship**.

Martin Luther, who started the Protestant reformation said: **A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing is worth nothing,**

In our text today comes from the gospel of Matthew at the 28th Chapter: starting at verse 26.

⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”^[a]**

A careful look at this passage forces to look at the core of Jesus' teachings.

First let's note that once again, in order to access Jesus, in order to hear from him we

have MOUNTAINS TO CLIMB. Jesus will always direct us to a higher place to a higher consciousness, to a better and more lofty way of being. So here we go, climbing that mountain again! And once on the mountaintop with Jesus, we learn that ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO HIM....and implicit in this statement, **it is given to those who follow him, to his true disciples.** And Jesus commands his disciples that it is not enough that they are following him, despite their doubt, despite their fears, he is commanding them to go and MAKE DISCIPLES...

What is it that Jesus wants us to obey, and what does he want us to teach people to obey?

The passage compels us to look at our church and ourselves, and to decide in this moment who we want to be. Do we want to be a social club with the veneer of Christianity, or do we want to do the hard work to do our part to achieve social change, to love God, our neighbor and our enemies, do we want to do the hard work *to transform the world, to make other disciples?*

Discipleship has a cost. We are followers of a poor, brown skinned Palestinian Jew who in his time started a moral revolution. If we are true

followers of Jesus, we must DO WHAT JESUS DID.

In *The Politics of Jesus*, Dr Obery Hendricks identified how Jesus demonstrated his politics:

He spoke against the oppression of the poor, he treated the needs of the people as holy, he gave voice to the voiceless, he exposed the workings of oppression, he called the demons by name, he saved his anger for the mistreatment of others, he took blows without returning them, and he did not just explain the alternative, he demonstrated the alternative.

Rev Dr. Obery Hendricks clearly identifies the Politics and ethics of Jesus. He says 3 core principle grounded Jesus' foundational ethics of his faith: *Mishpat*: which means justice: the establishment or restoration of fair equitable and harmonious relationships in society and *sadiqah*: which means righteousness, the loving and just fulfillment of our responsibilities to others as the ultimate fulfillment of our responsibility to our God.

Finally, *Hesed*: which means steadfast love. Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. And, love your enemies. These are

the ethics of Jesus, in essence this is the Politics of Jesus.

It's not politics as we define them in this perverted age when we reduce everything to Democrat Republican or Independent. when we reduce our politics to who we vote for or who we support to run for office. In fact, our choices for who represents us is supposed to reflect our ethical and moral choices. It is supposed to reflect who we are as people of faith, if we have faith, and at minimum to reflect what we believe NOT ABOUT OUR MONEY OR OUR INVESTMENTS, but about how we feel about our fellow human beings.

The politics of Jesus forces us to look at the bigger picture: It forces us to look at whether WE are treating the people and their needs as HOLY and then we must consider whether we support elected officials on every level of our government from the dog catcher to the President, who do the same?

Jesus' main and central teachings: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself. Also, love your enemies. This is the thrust of his teaching, in a nutshell. And then, someone asked Jesus, who is my neighbor? (really, you need to ask that?) But maybe you are asking,

Who is my neighbor? And if you think your neighbor is the person next door to you, let me help you: I am your neighbor, and I live nowhere near you. The people in Bed Stuy Brooklyn, and Far Rockaway, and Harlem are your neighbors, the people in Watts, and the South Side of Chicago, and Miami Florida are your neighbors. Your Black and Brown skinned fellow human beings are your neighbors.

In his book the Cost of Discipleship, Bonhoeffer says :

“You are the neighbor. Go along and try to be obedient by loving others.”

Neighborliness is not a quality in other people, it is simply their claim on ourselves. Every moment and every situation challenge us to action and to obedience. We have literally no time to sit down and ask ourselves whether so-and-so is our neighbor or not. **We must get into action and obey—we must behave like a neighbor to him.** But perhaps this shocks you. Perhaps you still think you ought to think out beforehand and know what you ought to do. To that there is only one answer. You can only know and think about it by actually doing it. You can only learn what obedience is by obeying. It is no use asking questions; for it is only through obedience that you come to learn the truth.

With our consciences distracted by sin, we are confronted by the call of Jesus to spontaneous obedience.”

We are at a crossroads, all of us, not just this church but all people who identify themselves as “Christians”. The message of Christ commands us to a very difficult work. It is, as Rev Misha said on Wednesday, mostly aspirational. If we are to be honest, we will admit that it is hard to love your enemies, it is hard to love yourselves and it is hard to love your neighbor. We think we love God, and I won’t dispute that, but love of God also requires sacrifice, it requires discomfort, it is not always hearts and flowers, it is often painful and messy.

Bonhoeffer did not have a choice when he was faced with a murderous dictator like Hitler.

You have young people today, people of every religion of every ethnic description, African descendent people, and Euro descendent people, Asian, Native American, China, South Korea, Middle Eastern,people all over the world who are saying that the inequalities, the racism, the white supremacy, the police brutality, the disparities are just too much and must stop. They have risked lives and health to speak up and to take action. And now, they are

leading the way to follow the path of discipleship.

Of course, to distract us, to bring us down from the mountain, in the midst of the protests and the outcry, many have focused on the looting, the destruction of property. They ask, well, why do they have to loot? And I am going to ask, like Trevor Noah asked, why NOT loot? And I don’t condone looting, but what I recognize and feel and know all too well is that America has broken, has breached, has violated the social contract with African descendent people. America has failed to live up to basic human norms and agreements to protect us, the people who were kidnapped and snatched from our native land to build this country for the profit and benefit of European descendent people.

America has engaged in a systemic pattern of looting of the very lives of African Americans for centuries. So what? Is property more valuable than human lives. Did anyone complain about looting when the lives of African descendent people were being looted? I did not hear any outcry then. It is enough. Now is the time for the church to stand up and to speak out about the injustices against people of color. If not now, when? And if not the church, acting under the

authority and power given to us by the Holy Trinity: Jesus, The Holy Spirit and God, then WHO?

Will the church? Will you?

Jesus is calling for the true disciples, and true discipleship is costly.

I want to pose the question and be bold about a possible direction for this church: Do you think this small church of faithful yet privileged mostly European descendent people can become a church that stands up, as it did for LGBTQ rights, to be a church that actively advocates for the eradication of white skinned supremacy and privilege? Are you willing, West Center, to be disciples of Christ, stand against racism and white supremacy, pray for justice, advocate for changes in this oppressive system that continues to oppress people of color?

This is the truth, and I can testify that the cost of being a disciple may mean you have to sacrifice some relationships, you may have to sacrifice time and money, you may have to sacrifice rest and comfort, you may have to sacrifice your privilege and your status. But again, as Martin Luther said:

A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing is worth nothing.

This is our promise church: Jesus was emphatic: I will be with you even until the end of the age! And that is the promise: through the fear and the pain, through the joy and the turmoil, through the protests and the pandemic: I will be with you until the end of the age. And that my beloved is good news!

A CHALLENGING BENEDICTION:

May the Lord torment you

May the Lord keep before you the faces of the hungry, the lonely

The rejected and the despised.

May the Lord afflict you with pain for the hurt, the wounded

The oppressed, the abused, the victims of violence.

May the Lord especially afflict you with the pain for the most recent victims of police violence/state sanctioned murder over just the last 8-10 years

May God grace you with agony, a burning thirst for justice and Righteousness

May the Lord give you courage and strength and compassion

To make ours a better world, to make your community to make your Church a better church

And may you do your best to make it so, and after you have done your best, may the Lord grant you Peace.

Bishop Woodie White
(adapted)

VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS: My virtual doors are open for anyone who wants to talk, needs a listening ear, is lonely or in need of help.

YOU CAN CALL IN OR JOIN BY VIDEO: **Join Zoom Meeting**

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Meeting ID: 870 2516 1476

OR DIAL IN:

646-558-8656 ACCESS

CODE:87025161476#

LOVE ALWAYS WINS!