

Would you please pray with me?

Holy Creator, God, we thank you for your presence in this room with us this morning. Even though you are our guest and the one we come to honor we need to put you to work, work opening our eyes and souls, work changing us to walk in the way Your Son, Jesus, came to demonstrate for us. Fill us with love for all of your creation and give us the need to stand up for that love. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

I am hoping that everyone remembers David. Jonathan may be more of a stretch. David got famous when he killed the Giant, Goliath, but he was still the son of a shepherd from a tiny village, even though God had chosen him to become King to replace Saul.

The friendship of David and Jonathan is one of the great dramatic stories of the Bible, and this chapter is especially poignant. After David tells Jonathan that he fears for his life, Jonathan doubts him. They decide to do an experiment: David will skip dinner and Jonathan will observe King Saul's reaction.

What follows is like a classic gangster movie or Shakespearean drama. When he figures out that David is hiding from him, Saul calls Jonathan all kinds of vulgar names (son of a "stubborn, rebellious woman," is the way the translators delicately put it), and accuses him of being a traitor to his own family. Saul is so furious he actually flings a spear at his own son.

Later, Jonathan uses a secret message to let David know that Saul has gone off the rails. Jonathan meets David in the field and they both weep, knowing that David will have to flee for his life in order to survive.

What I find timely about this story is that Jonathan literally cannot see the danger David is in. He is blinded by his royal privilege. He cannot imagine that his own father would keep secrets from him, or that Saul has such deep wells of resentment, jealousy and fear. So when David asks, "Why does your dad want me dead?" Jonathan responds with disbelief. "My Dad? No, you must be mistaken."

I believe white Christians have often behaved like Jonathan. When people of color have said, "white supremacy is killing us; mass incarceration is unfairly targeting us; economic injustice is keeping us down; voter suppression is stealing our political power," well-meaning and friendly white Christians have said, "No, you must be mistaken." Eager to avoid conflict and smooth everything over, white Christians have skirted conversation about racial injustice with platitudes about colorblindness and "just loving on people."

During the last year, as white nationalism and white supremacy have grown in volume and influence, I've heard many stories from Jonathans being stunned at the hatred that

has come out of the mouths of their own family members. Sometimes when they try to discuss things with friends and family who are passive racists, they are called traitors, or worse. Some are alienated from their families or disinvited from holiday meals.

It's important to note that Jonathan himself is not a bad guy. He's an ally, one of the good ones! The author is sympathetic to him. Jonathan even says to David, "What do you want me to do? I'll do it" (v.4). He's deeply devoted to his friend, and plays a supporting role.

But he also loves his father, and he simply cannot see what David is talking about until he's the one who is threatened by Saul's jealous rage. He cannot see the simmering, frightened anger masked by the polite conversation at the dinner table. The question for those Jonathans who wake up and see that their friends are really in danger is this: How will you demonstrate your friendship? Will you keep making excuses? Or will you join them?

This brings me to our Gospel lesson. If this story doesn't bother you, you need to read it again.

Jesus has traveled out of Jewish territory. A woman in the crowd only identified as a Canaanite woman from that region starts making a fuss and becomes a nuisance, shouting "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." Jesus seems to ignore her and after this goes on for a while his disciples forgetting all he had been teaching them, urge him to send her away. She is being a pain in the butt and drawing attention away from their understanding of His purpose. Besides, she is a woman and even worse, a foreign woman. Jesus finally reacts saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I don't have time for this; I came to save the Jews. I am too busy teaching Jews about God's love to listen to this suffering mother."

The woman was not deterred. She comes right up to Jesus, kneeling before the famous teacher and healer and again asks for his help. Finally, he responds to her but he is not even trying to be nice. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Can this be coming from the Jesus to whom I have dedicated my life? The Jesus who taught us to Love our neighbor?

You have to give the woman credit; she did not give up. She picks up on the slur and builds on it. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Jesus finally responds, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Was Jesus bested by the woman? Did he calculate that the quickest way to get rid of her was to give her what she asked for? Or was he always teaching? The woman persisted out of love for her child and was rewarded. She asked nothing for herself.

I have been working with others this week to respond to what happened in Charlottesville and the events that followed. As a Christian who believes we are all

called to live in God's love for all creation, I could not let it go unchallenged. I think we all need to respond. Not necessarily by taking to the streets, but we can't ignore the growing hatred. Here are some actions we can do:

- **Pray.** Pray for yourself and everyone who wants to dismantle racism. Pray for our churches, as we communally discern how to faithfully respond. Pray for those who are racist, that they will be liberated from this sin by God's loving touch. Pray and listen.
- **Denounce white supremacy as a sin that is contrary to the Gospel.** Do so via your social media platforms, and in conversation with your neighbors. Make it clear: White supremacy is contrary to the teachings of Christ.
- **Call on your community leaders to do the same.** Call upon your town council members, mayors, representatives, and your governor to be just as clear as you are. Write letters to the editor and to elected officials. Advocate for policies that address systemic racism. White supremacy has been a part of our state's history for far too long. It should no longer be welcome.
- **Help support justice organizations and build a community of justice seekers.**
- **Educate yourself and others.** Attend a training that will help you to not only practice talking about race with other people, but also work to disentangle your daily life from the racism that is endemic to American history and culture. Workshops and other training events are periodically offered by the Maine Conference, UCC, as well as by community organizations like Maine Wabanaki REACH (<http://www.mainewabanakireach.org/>).
- **Think about your sphere of influence:** your neighborhood, your school, your senior center, your church, your workplace. How can you bring light into your circles of influence through conversations and actions that promote transformation, insight, and change?

We can't ignore the growing hatred and bigotry in our state, our country, and our world. Change has to start with us.

Let's pray together. Loving God, help us to be one with all of your creation, recognizing that you made each of us as a unique individual. You assure us that despite our differences and diversity all you created is good. Keep us looking for that goodness in Jesus' name. Amen