



Note: I've written and spoken about race several times. For reasons that are becoming clearer to me the topic continues to occupy a lot of my brain space. Here's a small attempt at bringing some of those thoughts together into something that I hope will be "devotional" in some sense, meaning that it will cause us to think critically about God's intention for human relationships.

During this time of extreme racial unrest and polarization in our country I've been intentional about reading and listening to things that would not only educate me but would also make me uncomfortable and challenge my perspective. In one of the best books I've read in a long time, *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and its Urgent Lessons for Our Own*, Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, Eddie Glaude Jr. writes these words:

*"If what I have called the 'value gap' is the idea that in America white lives have always mattered more than the lives of others, then 'the lie' is a broad and powerful architecture of false assumptions that support the everyday order of American life, which means we breathe them like air. We count them as truths. We absorb them into our character."*

The idea that white lives have always mattered more than the lives of people whose skin color was anything other than white, coupled with the premise that we have built an intentional structure of false suppositions to support that claim has been an ongoing cause of deep reflection for me. I've particularly been thinking about my childhood years when nothing even remotely resembling African American history was taught in my schools; when messages from family members taught me to fear people of color; when I didn't bother to notice - because my eyes had not been trained in that skill - the ways in which races were segregated; when some members of the all-white church I attended began to flee for the suburbs as the surrounding neighborhood began to change. In the process not only have some disturbing memories flooded back, but I'm feeling cheated.

When I was in school fifty years ago I should have been exposed to the things I'm learning only now. There was a parallel history unfolding that was unknown to me, and I was only being taught half the story. What if I had known then what I know now? What if an entire generation of white kids would have had their minds opened to an entire stream of history unlike their own? Maybe our society would be farther advanced than it is today. Maybe we wouldn't be so polarized. Maybe there would be fewer George Floyd incidents, less need for protests and demonstrations, and more attention given to narrowing economic disparity. Maybe we would have already successfully addressed things like mass incarceration, job equity, and fair housing policies. Of course, it's impossible to predict, but I like to think we would have moved the needle forward.

I don't have to remind you that Jesus did not limit his interactions to people who were "like him" racially, culturally, sociologically, theologically, economically, or otherwise. He surrounded himself with people who did not look like him. What we got as a result was a snapshot of what Dr. King and John Lewis later called "the beloved kingdom," a time and place in which God's mercy and grace were evident among all people.

We might be behind the curve on that a little bit, but I'd like to think we can still get there. It will require some intentional reflection, a willingness to be stretched, an openness to new learning, a reluctance to judge, training our eyes and ears to see and hear things from a different perspective. Besides the book mentioned at the beginning of this piece, here are a few resources that have helped to nudge me forward:

*How To Be an Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi*

*His Truth is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope by John Meacham*

*The 1619 Podcast (produced by the New York Times)*

*Nice White Parents (produced by the New York Times)*

And let's talk sometime. Let's share experiences. Knowledge is power.

In Christ,

Pastor Chuck

Let us pray. Lord, sometimes we are not aware of the histories of others that are being shaped and formed at the same time as our own. And we don't even realize that our histories intersect and intertwine to create one story. Open us to the experiences of others, so that we may see how we are all connected, and that we are all your children.

Amen.