



“Coming to Terms with Race” Reflections
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HEATHER FELTMAN: Today I'm joined, thankfully joined, by several voices to bring you today's message. These voices are ones that gifted their time to take part in a class that we were so blessed to be able to offer around the topic of race for four Thursdays in a row. Folks gifted their time to come together to look at this issue and this topic. Reverend Packman and Sarah Rohde and myself are so grateful and thankful for those who came together into this safe space to look at this. Look at this issue around historical perspectives, theological perspectives, and still questions of while we wrestle with how to move forward and live in this journey, in this chapter that has yet to be written. I do want to say a word of thanks again to those who are sharing this, their reflections and words. It's not easy. It can be a little scary. And also just another word of thanks to Reverend Packman who, you know, is doing his dissertation around this topic of race. And our Bethlehem community was just so blessed to be able to have him be willing to give his time and energy to put something together for us to reflect on. So again, I'm so thankful to everyone for that. I do want to just share a few comments myself as we move into hearing from our fellow disciples. I've been thinking all summer, really, about the power of decisive moments. You know, those times in our lives when we actively choose a particular pathway or way of being. You know, we all want to be the one who steps up, leans in, does the right thing when it matters most. And when that moment passes and the adrenaline rushes all over, we are left to live according to what we felt at that moment of a decision. What is new is that the long protest by people of color has been joined at last with a rising sense of horror and shame among white Americans. The veil of some of our eyes has been lifted, a moment

amplified and intensified. Yes, probably by the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus revealing even further racial disparities in this country that we white Americans have yet to fully see or realize. Do not let anyone tell you that this is the first time people of different races, classes, educational backgrounds have come together to fight for a common cause. It has always been such a coalition of the faithful that has brought about change in this country. Black, white, and brown, rich and poor, young and old, everyone is needed. Everyone has a part to play and an offering to make. For when that decisive moment comes in the midst of a whirlwind and we feel called to act, we do so trusting less in ourselves than in the power that the spirit is compelling us forward. Here is the surprising truth. "Acceptance of our imperfect perceptions, incomplete understandings, our woefully inadequate actions and rather small place in the scheme of things is paradoxically and wonderfully empowering. For when that decisive moment comes in the midst of a whirlwind and we feel called to act, we do so trusting less in ourselves than in the power of the spirit that's compelling us forward. You know, we don't have to be perfect, which is good because we won't be. We don't have to take on the entire world; only our small corner of it. We'll never know the ultimate significance of our words and actions." We simply don't know. "'But what a relief it can be to accept contingency,' writes the poet Christian Wiman, 'to meet God right here in the havoc of change.'" "The truth is that we don't yet know if this will be the time, whether we as a nation are ready and willing to make the kinds of changes we so desperately need. We don't know where whether our efforts will bear fruit." But what we do know, what I know is this. Wherever we are in the continuum of change, change around racism and other injustices, there are ways to be faithful to that vision, to be part of the coalition of the faithful. Whether this is a turning point in yet season of preparation, whether we are successful today or whether we fail, we can do what God asks of us, which is our part faithfully, imperfectly, in an ever-changing world in which we, too, are being changed. So we will keep talking and discerning as a community. We cannot rewrite

how this story began, but you and I, as part of that faithful community, we can impact what the next chapter of the story looks like or even maybe how the story ends. Thanks be to God. Amen.

RICK BEATO: Hi, I'm Rick Beato. I've been asked to say a few things about "Coming to Terms With Race," the excellent class that we had in July for four weeks. I'd like to thank Andrew Packman who managed to convey some significant facts and explain the complex strategies that have deepened the racial divides in this country in such an efficient manner over the years. He did it in a way that all school teachers could really learn to adapt how to make their virtual learning worthwhile. We learned quite a bit of history. My overall take is that United States history itself must be updated and revamped from top to bottom because racism has become the outline of our history in many ways, as we seem to keep on fighting a Civil War that supposedly ended 155 years ago. The third session was the one that was the most important, the hardest, the one that was most difficult to accept. We discussed words that were familiar but that we didn't really understand. Studying racism in Chicago's housing covered blockbusting, redlining, restrictive covenants, these are words that I had heard. And as we began to learn how clever and insidious these, the system had become, I felt that I was missing something, that I knew something that wasn't coming to me. It took a couple days, but a couple days after our meeting, Chicago Tribune offered a look at Lorraine Hansberry's play "A Raisin in the Sun." And I had actually thought a bit about the play, almost as if it was like a coincidence that I thought of this great old play. It wasn't a coincidence. I already knew about restrictive covenants. I can't imagine how I would handle what Walter Lee Younger had to go through in that play. That play had already told me what restrictive covenants were, but my personal experience allowed me to just think of them as words. I don't think of them as words anymore. The hookup to the play brought it all to life to me, and I know that's what Hansberry was trying to do. It took

this class for me to put two and two together. Thank you, Andrew, for what you have done because you've given us a chance to understand and to feel some of the things that have happened and that really need to be combated. My last word would be to tell you, look up the Langston Hughes poem "A Dream Deferred." That's where the title "A Raisin in the Sun" comes from. It's one of the most heartbreaking poems you'll ever read. Thank you.

JIM KAUTZ: Hi. I'm Jim Kautz. And I participated in the conversation that we had for a few weeks in July on coming to terms with race that Andrew Packman had put together, a very informative group of discussions with a good community of our Bethlehem friends that were involved in that. And an awful lot, I think, was realized from that time in discussion and the realities I think that are really present today regarding racism and regarding how deeply embedded it is in our community at large were, and still at this time, many people deny that that's the case. It's, I think, pretty easy to see how years and years of roadblocks and disenfranchisement that was put before the black community really helps bring us to where we are today and why there's such a huge imbalance and great inequity between what we as a white community and white population sees as our reality, verses what the black community and black people see as theirs. And they're starkly different. And I think the class and the discussion that we had really help define that for me. So as an end product of that, the thing is, what do I do about it or what can we do about it? And I think my takeaway is that it's basically more another group of questions. It's not that I found any great answers to be had to resolve anything. I think resolution will take time, and I think it will be a difficult one. As many years are gone behind us, the years ahead I think will be just as challenging but will take, I think, great effort. So what can I do? And I think the thing that I come back and to and questions for myself is, how do I engage and not just with people of my color but people of color in my community or elsewhere? Then the question is, what's the

mechanism? How do I do that? How do I put myself in their midst, because where I live and the paths that I take each day, at least here in my community, I don't come across hardly anybody of color. I work in the city, and I do see people there, but how do you engage with somebody on the street and just stop and say I want to talk about racism. It would seem to be a bit of a leap of faith to do such a thing. So my challenge is to find a way to do that. What would be the appropriate avenue, and it could be a challenge. I'm quite sure it will be, but I think that's my challenge, and I would ask God to help me do that and find a way to be dedicated to make some ground and some headway in this discussion. This class was a great, I think, foundation for that, and I hope to make some headway. Thank you.

PAT GEAMAN: Hi. My name is Pat Geaman. I'd like to thank Pastor Sarah and Heather and Andrew for the opportunity we've had to study race in our congregation. I would say that I am not a racist. We have had black neighbors in Georgia, here in St. Charles. And I certainly didn't think that I was a product of white privilege. But after taking Andrew's class and learning how the black veterans were fairly excluded from the GI Bill and were then targets of the redlining in the housing industry, I was just astounded that it was so embedded in our society. I certainly hope that we can continue learning about how the resources and opportunities have been lacking for the black community and everything was skewed to promote the welfare of the white community. It has just been an amazing, eye-opening experience, and I hope we can continue studying and that there will be, eventually, a much better race relations in our country. Thank you.

PETE ELZA: Hi, Bethlehem. Pete Elza here. So, thoughts on Andrew Packman's sessions on race. If you've ever seen the movie "Midnight in Paris," forgive its troubled associations with Woody Allen, you may recall there's a man who's nostalgic for post-World War I Paris, with Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Picasso. He gets to time travel

there, and he meets a woman who herself is nostalgic for the Belle Époque, which is a pre-World War I time in Paris. To paraphrase, he whispers to her, "Those people don't have antibiotics." So as you can see, nostalgia may not always paint a clear picture of the past, and I hear, in a lot of discourse now, nostalgia for a time when we had more respectful discourse and we treated each other with more respect in American history. I oftentimes think that's pointed toward that post-World War II period where we've ridden from the Great Depression to being on top of the world, essentially. But as we've seen from what Andrew described to us, not everyone was on top of the world post World War II in the U.S. People of color, in particular, continued to be discriminated against, individually and systematically. So when I've been reflecting upon that, I think of the Christian perspective that the fall was long ago, and we have been on a path to Kingdom Come for some time. Continuous improvement, if you will. And so while I may not be able to go back and fix or even currently make reparations for what happened in housing, federal housing practices, '40s, '50s, and '60s, I guess, personally, I'm taking it upon myself to start thinking harder about what's happening right now that maybe locking things in, locking in those same disparities for the future here in the 2020s so that we're not, essentially, digging out, digging sand out of a hole. Whether it's affordable housing or voter disenfranchisement, I hear these topics reported in dialogues. And I'm not an expert in either, but just to get me thinking of what personal actions can I take now to make sure the 2020s aren't referred to by future generations as just another time when we locked in more disparities.

Amen.