



Heaven and Justice

We are in the midst of two national emergencies: the one about race, which keeps us furious and sad, and the one about the virus, which keeps us afraid. Both of these bring us to the most profound questions of our faith.

When Jesus spoke about Heaven, he was telling us that he longed for it to come to earth. His vision was for justice, here. He taught us to pray “Thy Kingdom come on earth, as it is in Heaven”, in our practice for justice. He believed that our greatest work was to make sure our siblings were safe, and had enough to eat, had self-respect and love. I want to write about how our religion demands action of us.

Luke has a story about this. The Parable of the Good Samaritan draws the reader to think about what happens when someone we love is assaulted with cruelty. The opening of this parable is a study of how Jesus got goaded by a person in power. Then the parable itself is also a story about someone who was attacked by the roadside. Both parts of it give us the chance to reflect on our own relationship to God and to race. We don’t often think about the build-up to the parable, but the beginning of the chapter is about how Jesus gets mocked and insulted and how he handles it.

The bullying of Jesus by a “teacher of the law” painful. This lawyer is soon to be a part of the team who wants to kill him. Already, the lawyer is trying to get Jesus to be defensive. Greasy with sarcasm, the lawyer tries to trick Jesus. “Good teacher”, he says, even though he has gone on record as thinking Jesus is *not* a good teacher. Jesus manages to tell him a story about mercy. But the challenge today is to see the prelude to this story as a flag going up in the middle of an assault. It describes a powerful cruel man against an unarmed teacher. It is a story about danger.

The goading of Jesus is also painful because we know Jesus was Black. The description in the Bible says that his feet gleamed bronze. (Revelation 1:14). His skin glowed with the burnished bronze of a beautiful dark metal.

In our country, the questions of how we think about race and illness are overlapping. In proportion, more Black and Brown people are dying of Covid19 than white people. To make matters much worse, violence against

healthy Black and Brown people is high. Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd are dead. Christian Cooper was assaulted with lies and threats.

For our members of the church who are Black, I hope you can find time and prayer for yourselves today. This is a devastating week, and it is one of a long series of devastating weeks and years. We stand beside you.

For our members of the church who are non-Black members of color, I know this pain is all too familiar to you, in this heart-breaking time. We stand beside you.

For our members of the church who are white, let us join together to speak and act and work.

I want to invite our church to begin an electronic workshop about the Blackness of Jesus, and how we can become an anti-racist Church. One family in the church proposes we start with dialogue, and are reaching out to the police to consult. Another family is beginning with stories of unexamined bias. A third is thinking about art. Three others are thinking about action. I have attached here a dialogue about Ibrahim X Kendi's book *How to be an Anti-Racist*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73idH6hAqAY>

I also offer some curricula for Home Church School. What would it look like if we meditated on the bronze gleaming feet of Jesus? What collages can we make, or poems can we write, about the blackness of Jesus and our own devotion? What are our stories of bias? What are our next steps? Send them to me: Revrebecca at aol, and I will edit them together and we will publish them.

"Who is my neighbor?" asks the taunting lawyer. The answer is Jesus himself, walking in Minneapolis and Central Park, shining bronze in the sun, telling us that Heaven is breaking into our midst, and our work is to listen to it.