

“Association Without Assimilation”

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Lift ev'ry voice and sing
'Til earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on 'til victory is won

These are the words penned by James Weldon Johnson in Hymn #519 in the United Methodist Hymnal... they are also the words that have been adopted by most African Americans as the “Negro National Anthem”. I would imagine because it reeks of pain and still offers hope for a brighter tomorrow... Thus, we lift every voice and sing.

The Psalmist wrote in the 34th division of the psalms...

“I will bless the Lord at all times and His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

I think sometimes we believe that we can only praise God when things are filled with sunshine and gentle ocean breezes, but praising God always is more than that... our African forefathers taught us that it also includes times of sorry and grief, in Covid-19 times and in systemic racism times of civil unrest caused by unjust government, oppression and acts of violence against people of color.

I will bless the Lord at “All Times” and I won’t stop praising Him for what He has done and for what He is about to do. If you were in this space, I would invite you to say Amen.

Today, I’d like to take a few moments just to share in this limited time and space a word from the Lord and to give you a little insight into the realities of many of your brothers and sisters who may not look like you do.

I want you to get a glimpse of what living on the other side of the tracks look like, because for many in my hearing today, you have lost perspective or never even thought about what it’s like for others living in the land of the free and the home of the brave. I’d like for us to “Wake Up” to the reality of what it’s all about without being defensive or judgmental. As my children often remind me...
“Daddy, we just need you to listen and hear us before you tell us what we ought to do...”

Genesis 1:26-27

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

I ask that you sir and you mam, pray for me a I speak from the title...

“Association Without Assimilation”

To those who are not aware of who I am, I am Pastor Anthony Boger. Mine is a different journey than most in ministry and especially as it relates to my call to ministry in the United Methodist Church. Much of my 38 years in professional ministry has been in a truly multi-cultural and multi-racial context, even when it did not start out that way. I have served as pastor to Black churches where significant numbers of whites have joined in fellowship, I have served as pastor to White churches where a significant number of Blacks and other forms of minority groups have joined and found a spiritual home. Not multiracial or multicultural in a disrespectful or diluted way of ethnic pluralism where sharing a campus is called multicultural ministry or in an assimilated way where the dominant culture dictates the styles and forms of worship and then we call it Multicultural or multi-racial when in fact it is not that at all, but in a meaningful context of integration where everyone has a voice and adds value regardless of the language, ethnicity or racial biases in which one brings to the table of fellowship.

I am very much a Black man who is a graduate from a HBCU, (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). It was in this forum of higher education that I learned the value of having “Association without Assimilation” with other people groups. *In other words, how do we live the example of Christ, ministering to everybody and anybody without having to look like or act like someone else in order to be accepted by the group? How can we be together without acting or looking like one another?*

- “Association without Assimilation” means being fully accepted with all my cultural differences,
- all my ethnic distinctions
- without having to prove to anyone that I’m acceptable, even in my Black skin.

Who are you, who are we in Christ without having to pretend to be White, Asian, Latino or anything other than who we are in the fullness of God my creator who made me, and all of us in His image?

There is something else that I want you to know about me as a way of introduction.

- My mother was born a sharecropper in 1931 in Pace, MS,
- my grandmother born in 1901 was a sharecropper
- and my great grandmother, born right after the Emancipation Proclamation that was signed in 1863 by President Lincoln.

Yet, People say that we should forget about the enslavement of my fore parents even though the wealth of the United States of America was built on the backs of “free labor” that was brought to this country against their will.

This was not an immigration program,

1. this was not DACA,
2. this was not a welfare to work program,
3. this was the first holocaust
4. and plantations were the first internment camps before German Jews and before the Japanese encampments, but “plantationism” that lasted more than 400 years.

The very White House that our POTUS lives in was built with free labor, the economy that produced generational wealth for so many was built on the backs of the free labor in the cotton fields, tobacco fields and rice fields of the south.

This story that I tell is not merely a story found in a Black History book, but it is the life I have lived through oral tradition, that my parents who had to wash off the stench of it all for 100 years. But the stench rises every time an unarmed Black man or woman gets killed and justice for that killing goes unmeted.

People who have not taken the time to learn the history of policing would be ignorant to the fact that police came into existence in the south when the number of freed slaves was out numbering the number of whites and in an effort to keep control of what would rightfully be angry men and women, so militias were formed to keep Black people under control.

There has been a lot of discussion about Black Lives Matter versus All Lives Matter and based upon the philosophical premise of the Declaration of Independence I would say that you are absolutely right in theory, but historically and in actuality it has been shown that until Black people in America are seen as “human beings” and not merely a produce, a product or a livestock, then All Lives Matter ONLY when the “ALL” includes the Black lives that have been ignored and made second class within our policy making structures.

In his book “Forty Million Dollar Slaves”, William Rhoden makes the cogent argument that black athlete’s ‘evolution’ has merely been a journey from literal plantations to today’s figurative ones, in the form of collegiate and professional sports programs. Drawing from his decades as a sportswriter,

Rhoden contends that black athletes' exercise of true power is as limited today as when masters forced their slaves to race and fight.

As a Christian Black man who believes the Bible gives us everything we need for eternal life and godliness I think Christians must begin our opposition to racism with a biblical and theological analysis of the problem and with a biblical and theological presentation of the solution to the problem. Christians must also be thorough exegetes of both the Bible and of our own social locations, as we use common-grace resources and common sense under the authority of Scripture to eradicate the evil of racism in the power of the Spirit.

We must carefully and critically evaluate every idea in any organization in light of Scripture and under the authority of Scripture.

We must reject teachings in any organization that are contrary to Scripture.

However, the recent criticisms against Christians who affirm the scriptural truth of black dignity using the words "black lives matter" seem odd to me as a black Christian man in America. After all, the Bible affirms black lives are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27), and our country has a history of dehumanizing black people. The words "black lives matter" affirm a scriptural truth about black people.

Brothers and Sisters, black people should not have to fight for policy change in order to be treated right and justly... If we must we will, but we shouldn't have to do it all... if you treated your neighbor as you treat yourself then it wouldn't be necessary.

The Bible speaks clearly about God's vision to restore everything Adam and Eve lost in the Garden of Eden and his vision to redeem ethnically diverse individuals from different tongues, tribes, peoples, and nations.

Through Christ's death and resurrection,

- God makes sinners right with himself (Rom. 5:6–10),
- reconciles sinners to each other (Eph. 2:11–22),
- and restores and reconciles the entire universe (Col. 1:19–20).

Paul calls this cosmic redemption the disarming of earthly and demonic powers (Col. 2:14–15) and the unification of all things and all people in Christ.

Racism is opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and against God's vision to redeem and unify creation through Christ.

God recreates through Christ a diversity of different tongues, tribes, peoples, and nations into one new (but diverse) people.

God commands us to live in pursuit of reconciled community with one another and with our neighbors in anticipation of the age to come (Is. 65:17–25; Rom. 8:19–22).

Therefore, if “ALL” lives matter, it’s Only when Black Lives Matter... You can no longer overlook the injustices that are crystal clear... you can no longer not hire Black young men and women because they make you feel uncomfortable...

You can no longer put the camera only on them when they walk into your store...

You can no longer assume that all black men play basketball and football as a way out...

You must see Black People as creative, viable, valuable, intelligent and desiring something better.

God’s kingdom is an already-and-not-yet kingdom, whose king is a brown-skinned Jewish Messiah. The kingdom is filled with diverse people and diverse stories of beautiful image-bearers who’ve tasted the salvation of the one God, the one Lord, and the one Spirit by faith in Christ (Eph. 4:4–6).

As Christians, we must intentionally oppose racism because God through Christ empowers us and commands us to walk in love with the power of the Spirit. One way in which Christians walk in the Spirit is when we love our neighbors as ourselves (Gal. 5:13–14).

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh^[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

As a black Christian pastor of Asian, black, brown, and white people, I thank God that Genesis 1:26–27 clearly states God created all humans in his image and bestows upon us God-given dignity, and that he promises to redeem us, to reconcile us, and to restore the entire creation through Christ.

When black lives are dehumanized and treated as though they don’t matter simply because they’re black, Christians everywhere should be able to stand up and assert without hesitation and with their Bibles open that black lives certainly do matter, they deserve to have the same measure of dignity, the same measure of worth, and value, just as non-black lives certainly matter, have worth, dignity, and value.

God created black people in his image. God redeems black lives in Christ. Black lives matter to God because the Bible teaches, they matter.

But in your positioning, you cannot have the expectation that people look like you do, act like you, talk like you or be like you in order to have acceptance. ***That is unreasonable!***

Why can't we have association without having to assimilate to your comfort level?

Why does that young black man's braided hair intimidate you?

Why does the darkness of my skin offend you?

Why does a highly educated Black family moving into your neighborhood disturb you so much?

In closing, I admonish those within my hearing to wake up and get up and do something about this craziness.

You don't have to get on a plane to a third world country to live in mission, when you are needed in a mission field right here in the backyard of the California Pacific Annual Conference.

People are hungry, in need of education and opportunity. You can make a difference with your talent, your time and your money and with your influence.