

Lent 2: Telling the Truth about Our Churches and Race:

Baptismal Question:

Celebrant: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People: I will, with God's help.

Core Questions:

Who are we? What things have we done and left undone regarding racial justice and healing?

Pray the Collect for This Sunday

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Read the Scripture Together: *Mark 8:31-38*

Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Reflection: Follow Me

In the gospel, Jesus speaks about his own suffering, and then tells his followers that in order to save their lives they must lose them. The willingness to lose in order to be saved is a challenging truth for communities to face. Sometimes it shakes us up when we are rebuked by another member of the community, as Peter was by Jesus' strong words. There is grace and truth in examining the ways we have knowingly and unknowingly hurt others, and letting go of false assumptions. Jesus invites us to take in the truth and learn the paradoxical path to life.

In the Labyrinth: Telling the Truth about our Churches and Race

We cannot become what God created us to be unless we also examine all the things we think we know about life and community. Who do you say that you are as a church community? To whom do you need to listen to learn ways that you deny the truth about others? What do you, as a church, have to lose in order to include those who have felt excluded?

Make it Real: Inside/Outside Exercise

Gather in groups, ideally of no more than eight people. Share the Conversation Tips from the welcome letter. Now invite people to pause and recall a particular time and place when you felt welcome, as if your voice, ideas, and presence were valued (if it has never happened, imagine it in detail). Pair off and tell the story to a neighbor, for about one minute each.

Next, recall a particular time and place when you felt unwelcome, as if your voice, ideas and presence were not valued or received. Share with the same neighbor. Then reflect in the small group. What did it feel like to share about being welcome? Unwelcome? To hear someone else's story? What did you learn?

Now as a whole group, take a large sheet of paper and draw a circle within a circle.

- What racial, cultural, and ethnic groups experience their voices, presence, and ideas as valued and welcome in your congregation today?
- Which groups have been welcome and shaped your church's story since its founding? Write those groups in the inner circle.
- What racial, cultural, and ethnic groups are not present and/or not welcome in your congregation today, although they are in the same or a nearby town, area, or region?
- What groups have been unwelcome or on your church's margins in the past? Write those groups in the wider circle.

How do you feel as you recall and share these realities?

Where do you see possibilities for growing into Beloved Community? Name them together.

Closing Prayer

You may wish to give thanks for God's grace, wisdom, and abiding love, and for the honesty, courage, and vulnerability people demonstrated. You may return to the promise of forgiveness and new life that we receive in Jesus Christ.