

July 18, 2021

**RESPONSIVE READING:**

Together in a Sacred Space

By Lorelei Greenwood-Jones

Leader: In this sacred place, we need not be alone. We seek a listening ear, a warm heart, open arms.

*Congregation: In this sacred place, we join together against the waves of negativity and oppression in our world.*

L: We are a community of individual beings, living our own lives, yet coming together now and then in joyous celebration of Spirit and one another.

*C: Our differences do not divide us; rather, they are a source of interest and discovery. We need not think alike to love alike.*

L: Here, joys are shared, and sorrows comforted. We are Seen and Heard and Believed.

*C: My compassion overflows; our hearts reach for others.*

L: We are a gathering of like-hearted people, and here are our hearts filled. We hear the wisdom and counsel of our ministers and that of one another.

*C: We have much to learn from each other, so many different colors of truth and ways and methods.*

L: In this sacred place, may we find what our spirits desire, and what our spirits need. May we be grounded in love and sharing.

*C: In this sacred place, may we find acceptance and consideration. May our actions and words echo what we learn here.*

## READING:

TEARS WE CANNOT STOP- A SERMON TO WHITE AMERICA  
BY The Rev. MICHAEL ERIC DYSON. Rev. Dyson is a highly regarded Baptist minister who has been a professor at numerous colleges and universities. He has written dozens of books, several of which have won awards.

This EXCERPT is FROM THE CHAPTER titled PRELUDE TO SERVICE

As a side note, IN THIS BOOK, HE REFERS TO WHITE AMERICANS AS “BELOVED”

....Beloved, a massive white rebellion was fomented in our midst, a rebellion driven by resentment of a black man in charge, resentment, too, of the widely perceived, yet grossly exaggerated, black benefit under Obama—that black folk got an unfair leg up, all because, finally, for the first time in 220 years, a black man darkened the Oval Office. It is hard to overstate just how poisonous Obama was believed to be in the precincts of a spurning, rebutting whiteness, a whiteness that measured the seconds until he would no longer be in that white house, in our, or rather, their, White House. Millions of whites couldn't wait to return power to the white hands from which it had been cruelly snatched for eight years, couldn't wait to celebrate the victory of the most brazenly white man to claim the presidency since Andrew Johnson.

Beloved, there is a truth to Trump's election that many of you refuse to see: too many white folk are willing to imperil the ship of state because they lust for revenge. It is, in truth, wevenge, the unrepentant mutiny of a rogue white crew. They seem willing to cast aside a seasoned leader because of her gender, and her connection to the previous captain. Instead, they have embraced a fatally inexperienced skipper who threatens to wreck the vaunted vessel of government in the rocky waters of political ignorance.

Whether he wishes to be or not, Donald Trump is the epitome, not only of white innocence and white privilege, but of white power, white rage, and, yes, even of white supremacy.

The greatly stepped-up harassment of people of color, and Muslims,

and immigrants in the wake of Trump's election points to the sea change in our naked tolerance for such assaults, in the permission granted to diabolical forces that rob us even more of comity and support of the commonweal.

Donald Trump harms our nation's positive racial future.

Yet, beloved, there remains, after all, the blackness that is prophecy, the blackness that is inexplicable hope in the face of savage hopelessness. The great black prophet and mystic Howard Thurman says it best.

At the time when the slaves in America were without any excuse for hope and they could see nothing before them but the long interminable cotton rows and the fierce sun and the lash of the overseer, what did they do? They declared that God was not through. They said, "We can not be prisoners of this event. We must not scale down the horizon of our hopes and our dreams and our yearnings to the level of the event of our lives." So they lived through their tragic moment until at last they came out on the other side, saluting the fulfillment of their hopes and their faith.

Beloved, if the enslaved could nurture, on the vine of their desperate deficiency of democracy, the spiritual and moral fruit that fed our civilization, then surely we can name and resist demagoguery; we can protest, and some how defeat, the forces that threaten the soul of our nation. To not try, to give up on the possibility that we can make a difference, can make the difference, is to give up on our past, on our complicated, difficult, but victorious past. Donald Trump is not our final, or ultimate, problem. The problem is, instead, allowing hopelessness to steal our joyful triumph before we work hard enough to achieve it. (4;40)

## REFLECTION

Acceptance and action-I need to accept that America is not what I thought. I, in fact, we must face the fact that systemic racism is at the foundation of our country. How can we move on if we must deconstruct our foundation? How can we do this without the house falling on top of us?

In New England we celebrate the beginnings of our country and its history. We birthed some of the greatest minds of the world. I, and many others, think of ourselves as liberal and conservative. We live free or die and still have the court report in the paper, a modern scarlet letter. We have progressive laws and aggressive lawyers. I moved here in my youth because I felt safe in Massachusetts to vote my principles and my pocketbook. I come from Manhattan as many of you know and this place, Cape Cod, is my summer vacation, my proverbial heaven on earth. After 6 years of schooling in New England, I knew I could live here forever.

But I have been living in a bubble. Many of us have been.

Only recently have I learned of the too many Black towns, places where Black and brown Americans were living successful and joyous lives were burned to the ground, but even more, 100s of towns, were submerged in water, like Lake Lanier in Georgia and Central Park reservoir in NYC. My family paid top dollar for an education that purposefully left out of the “advanced” history textbooks of my education. The fact that Tulsa and the Black Stock Market were burned to the ground may have been the token story, but the magnitude of death and destruction done to Black and brown communities in the “modern” age is deplorable. I must accept this history and the tears, and the anger I feel. We must face these facts. So I read, Reverend Dyson struck a chord with me as *Tears We Cannot Stop* follows the format of a church service. This is a format I am well accustomed to as the daughter of a retired Episcopal Bishop. I connected with his analysis of race relations as portrayed through the elements of spiritual rituals, which should truly be the place where race is left at the door, but it isn't. As our own Rev. Dr. Kristen Harper writes in her book *The Darkness Divine*, it was in fact declarations from the church that created such a divide between humans based on race.

It is as though, in 2016, when writing *Tears We Cannot Stop*, that the Rev. Michael Eric Dyson predicted the events of January 6th, 2021. His analogy of a ship brings to mind Whitman's poem "Oh Captain, My Captain". I repeat what he wrote, "...too many white folk are willing to imperil the ship of state because they lust for revenge." White people in this country are filled with hate. So much of this hate targets our Black and brown citizens. The FBI reported a 20% increase in hate crimes during Trump's time in the White House.

But as Reverend Dyson points out, this hatred and racism existed before he took office. In the past decade, white supremacy has been on the rise across the globe and in the US, in our own UUA church, as we have learned from Kristen. We must act...not just for Kristen but because of her and beside her. Kristen and every Black and brown human.

As a church we have done so much and I want to start there. With gratitude. Our monthly stand-outs. Our weekly food service to the poor and homeless of our area. Our work with local government and business to make our area safe for all to grow and truly know their inherent worth and dignity. Our self growth with book clubs and small group ministries. But we need to DO more. By this I mean, within ourselves. I am confident this church will expand its work to reach out to, support and listen to Black and brown people. I have seen incredible progress in my 27 years here. But we need to work on ourselves for there to be true change in our culture's race relations.

We must accept that White Privilege runs rampant in the entire country and here on Cape Cod. We must accept it as part of our tenets to serve, we must act to educate and reflect in order to do our own daily individual anti-racist work. And it will be work.

All the books I read from today have suggestions in them for becoming more anti-racist and of course simple and spiritual activities you can do as a part of your individual spiritual journey to be anti-racist. But again, you must forgive yourself, because we will make mistakes and have fears. We will stumble and learn to be humble. As the Dalai Lama teaches, we must accept this deficiency too, in order to change. "Acceptance is the sword that cuts through all of this resistance, allowing us to relax, to see clearly, and to respond appropriately." So we must engage when we see prejudice. Be mindful of every moment. Listen and learn. And when we make mistakes, ask ourselves as Archbishop Tutu does, How can we use this as something positive?

When we all work towards accepting the racist society in which we live, and learn to be in the moment, listening, we will be living our UU principle that we are all born with inherent worth and dignity. And we MUST work. We cannot give up, we must try. As Mr. Dyson says, "To not try, ... is to steal our joyful triumph before we work hard enough to achieve it." And I believe in this church and that together we will work hard to be anti-racist and in that we will succeed in living our principles, and therefore find true joy.

But of course we must first begin. I'd like to finish by reciting our own Rev. Dr. Kristen Harper's poem, from her new book, entitled

Excerpt of *It Begins With*:

...It begins with understanding,  
not making judgments about Christian, Buddhist, Hindu,  
Humanist, or Earth-centered faith. Understanding that there  
are many ways to believe,  
all valid, all restorative, all equal.  
It begins with accompaniment-following, not  
leading,  
learning, not teaching, supporting, not just taking.  
It begins with commitment  
to stay with each other through the discomfort and anger,  
to bridge the barriers, to build trust.  
It begins with accepting the joy and the challenges,  
the quirky or protective actions,  
the need for space where you may not be able to  
follow,  
the need for distance that you may not be able to  
bridge.  
It begins with believing  
the experiences so foreign from your own:  
the daily fights for dignity,  
the trauma of a life of surviving the gauntlet of hate and  
ignorance,  
the mixture of laughter and tears, passion and  
sorrow.  
It begins--whether a relationship, a friendship, or a  
partnership--it begins with you. (10:07)