

Clergy Conversation with Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi June 17, 2020

Rev. Debra Mason offered a devotion. She emphasized that for a Christian, loving your neighbor is not optional; it is a command. The Bible said anyone who does not love his brother or sister cannot possibly love God. God's love empowers us to love others. Loving our neighbor takes us from just concern to reaching out to others.

Bishop Cynthia opened by explaining that in African American culture, when you gather around the kitchen table, you can say pretty much anything you want to say. "Today I am talking to you not as a Bishop, but as Cynthia, a black woman in America. When you are around sitting around the kitchen table, everyone will be honest and often there's disagreement and squabblingbut when we leave the kitchen no one else knows what went on.

The Bishop recited the names of several African American people who have been murdered at the hands of police and pointed out that they were ordinary people who had hopes and dreams, ordinary people whose skin just happened to be black and they were murdered. To gain insight into African American culture, she encouraged people to watch the funeral of George Floyd, either the entire four hours or two video clips she shared. (Links below.) "Every time I see that video I am almost brought to tears. George Floyd was a real man, not a perfect man, but a real man who allegedly passed a counterfeit \$20 bill -- and for that one police officer and three others thought it appropriate to snuff the life out of him. His daughters, his sons will never see him again for a \$20 bill. That story is repeated over and over and over again in the black community. You just happened to see one of them. It is not something that is made up or exaggerated. It happens in the black community.

"My own father in his own community was in a car with his brothers. They were stopped and asked, "What are (n-word) like you doing in a nice car like this?" They had saved up their money to buy the car. They were put in jail. The youngest brother ran and thankfully wasn't shot. They were not allowed to call anyone and they weren't released until the next afternoon. That was 65 years ago. It's real. It is still happening today.

My question to you is how many black men do you know? Not colleagues..Do you know any black men well enough to invite them over to an informal dinner? If you don't know any black men that well, make that one of your goals. **Just to get to know somebody of color better...** well enough that you can invite them to sit around your kitchen table and they won't be suspicious.

Around the table, I will say that I am suffering from African American Trauma Disorder. (Don't Google it. I made it up.) Symptoms of that disorder are kind of like post-traumatic stress disorder, except you never leave the conditions that cause the trauma. It makes it difficult for me

to be diplomatic. Usually I try to be diplomatic, but this syndrome has got me and it's hard. I am frustrated, I am angry, fearful for the black men in my life. It leads to things like diabetes and hypertension --overeating and obesity... that's why so many African American folks have that disorder. To make it worse. In the African American community, generally we don't trust doctors... because of things like the Tuskegee experiment, where African Americans were Intentionally infected with syphilis in order to test the impacts of the disease. Or Henrietta Lacks, whose cancer cells were harvested and used without her permission and many companies made millions of dollars off her cells, while her family remains destitute. Then you don't get treatment. And many don't have health insurance, so we don't get treated. The only pre-existing condition is that you are black in America.

The TREATMENT PLAN:

1. I need you to confront microaggressions and white privilege whenever you see those things. You might need to educate yourself about microaggressions and white privilege. It's a risk, but I need to take a risk every time I leave my house..my husband takes a risk. As a black woman and man, we take a risk. If you take a risk.....you may have a little discomfort. I am asking you to take a risk. You have privilege as white Americans. Use your privilege to say something to people around you.
2. Help a sister out. Help a brother out. Engage politicians in discussions about race and if a politician does not have dismantling racism as part of their plan, don't vote for that person.
3. Stop saying, "We don't have any black people around us so I can't do anything about racism." Some of the work around racism must be done in communities where there are not black people Say something. You are still benefiting from white privilege. Ask your cable provider to offer BET channels...not just the ones where we are singing and dancing.

Do small group work to discuss these issues.

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

Where can we get accurate numbers on how many blacks are killed by police?

There are not any absolutely accurate numbers on the number of blacks --or whites--killed by police because police departments are not required to upload that info to any database.

Personal examples of experience with racism effects:

When Raphael & I were preparing to move here, particularly as he was coming, we made a list of all the things he needed to do.. Change address, etc.; Go to the local police department to let them know that there was a black man living in the neighborhood right in this affluent community. Coming back from a district event in southwestern PA, we stopped at a restaurant that had two levels -- main floor and basement. The hostess asked if we wanted to eat downstairs, and we went down. There was no one there..it was more of a bar with a few tables.

We said we wanted to sit in the main dining room, where there were empty tables but only white couples seated there.

How is it different in WPA and Baltimore? There is a much smaller community of allies here than in Baltimore. There is a much higher level of ignorance of racism and white privilege. In Baltimore, you could say to someone, "You know that feels kind of racist." They would say, "Tell me more. Here they would say, "No it's not...and here's why...."

How do we talk about race without using rude descriptors? What language do we need to learn? People of color refer to themselves of various labels. Some people prefer black, African American, person of color. Multiracial...The best thing is just to ask the person. Ask. Say you don't want to offend; let's just talk and then allow yourself to be a learner. You don't have to know everything...That's part of white privilege... I really want to engage in conversation with you, but I don't know.. Tell me what's offensive.

How do we help people to know that racism exists when they don't personally see it in their own communities? White privilege says that "If I don't see it, it's not real." Your world is not the universe. Then, with permission, you share people's stories. Put on the to-do list to encourage people to broaden their circle...to broaden the newscasts they watch, the shows, every now and then watch something different. The show Blackish shows a lot of those things about white privilege that white Americans may not know.

What does safe space look like for you? The place where if someone does say something offensive and I point it out to them, they are willing to change. They won't fight me on why I should not be offended by that. Where people do feel free to be themselves and they are conscientious about changing not resisting changing. Setting parameters...things that we know are offensive, Let the person of color explain it themselves. Invite them into the conversation...truly as an invitation, but honoring it if they don't want to.

How do you respond to Candace Owens and other African Americans who say black crime is the real problem? All people of color go through developmental processes. One of the normative stages in that process is to hate things about yourself or your people. You take on the views of the oppressor. It's a typical stage of racial development. All of the facts that are shared are true. There are some causes having to do with systematic racism. You can't have been enslaved for numbers of years and can't have had a systematic separation. It becomes nonsensical to blame the victim for what has happened to the victim.

Is it a false dichotomy that you cannot support Black Lives Matter and the police? I don't know any good police officer who does not want the police to be an organization that is respected and trusted by the community. There is not a dichotomy. You need to do both. The Black community wants law and order...We want the police to operate under the rules and laws of our nation. No dichotomy there. I don't see the struggle in doing both.

Will you comment on Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton...? President Obama was still victimized by white privilege. Just because you have gotten to a place of economic comfort or political power does not mean that you are not part of this system. White people are a victim of white privilege too. The African American community is a diverse community so you will find different opinions about Jesse and Al.. They are a part of our kitchen table...you won't hear a lot about dissatisfaction with them because they are part of our family...at the kitchen table. No leader in the history of the world has ever been without controversy....There is good and bad about every leader who has made some kind of change in our world. Every leader has had mixed reviews from the public. Even Jesus...if you ask some people, as Pontius Pilate did.

How do we respond to anger and rage? Being angry is not a sin... It is what you do with that anger that can be sinful. Acknowledge their anger and rage and hang in there long enough to understand it. Then help to steer the conversation to some productive way to manage that rage. What is something productive that can come from that rage? Understanding why doesn't mean you have to agree with them. As clergy people, it is important for us to have that level of empathy to come to a productive level of what to do.

Is the white community guilty? We must acknowledge the role the Methodists had in the development of the KKK. There are churches in this Annual Conference that hosted KKK gatherings and are used to try to recruit KKK members. Churches have contributed to and been complacent in the systems of white privilege. There are things that all of us have not done and could have done to address racism and white privilege. We need to acknowledge and accept that. If you are uncomfortable with that.... I am uncomfortable being a black woman in a white denomination...Nobody can say their hands are completely clean.

RESOURCES

Watch or Read:

Just Mercy, *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, the movie 13th, *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson and *The New Jim Crow* by Michele Alexander.

Listen to the videos of the George Floyd funeral, especially the video montage:

<https://youtu.be/m3KPFxiGnrU>

and

Baptist Pastor Steve Wills, a white man who was directly speaking to white people. My opinion is that of all the preachers, he was the best speaker at the funeral.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hv9O8OoaCqk>