

Becoming An Anti-Racist Disciple—John 13: 33-35

February 6, 2022- 5th Sunday after Epiphany

Love is such an elusive word. Love is one of those words everyone is pretty certain they know what it means, but try to define it and you struggle to put into words what you intuitively know. Even though we might have a hard time defining love we know it when we experience it. Think about your experiences of love, more specifically, from your own life what do you feel you can say about what love is and isn't?

Jesus' counsel to his disciples and to us is based on his experience of love: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." It's very specific isn't it? Love one another, as I have loved you. John the gospel writer doesn't leave us guessing—he invites us to use Jesus' life as a model of what true love looks like. For the Christian, the disciple of Jesus, love begins with learning. As Rev. Paul Walfall, a Black United Church Minister from Alberta recently wrote, "The disciple learns from the words, actions, and attitude of the teacher, and puts what has been learned into practice in their own life. There is an intentionality in this process. It is not passive. The disciple intentionally learns and follows the teaching of the one they follow. As disciples of Jesus we are called to continue the work of Jesus and to continue to proclaim the wonder and the expansive and extravagant love of God. To proclaim means in both speech and action."¹ Rev. Walfall expands on this to talk about what it means to be an anti-racist disciple of Jesus.



As Rev. Walfall points out Jesus was no fence sitter. Love compelled him to stand with those in whom the image of God had been diminished by unjust people and systems. Where does the white anti-racist disciple of Jesus begin. Rev. Walfall gives us some practical advice for everyday living.



The anti-racist disciple of Jesus recognizes privilege, recognizes the advantage of skin colour, not for the sake of guilt but for the sake of wanting those advantages for everyone. The anti-racist disciple speaks up, doesn't let racism slip by for the sake of politeness. The anti-racist disciple seeks not only to welcome people of diverse backgrounds into white spaces but invites the contributions of Black, Indigenous and people of colour to transform those spaces. To not only

¹ Walfall, Rev. Paul, *Becoming an Anti-Racist Disciple*, https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2021-10/antiracism-40_day01.pdf

welcome people with the expectation that they will conform to the way things are done but to invite people to contribute all of who they are, that the image of God will be reflected in who we are as a church.

Discipleship is not easy, anti-racist discipleship is not easy. To love as Jesus loved means taking risks and getting it wrong sometimes. To love as Jesus loved also means applying that love not just to others but to ourselves as well. To love as Jesus loved means not getting caught up in perfectionistic brow beating. It means forgiving yourself for the inevitable mistakes. Rev. Walfall says more...



Forgiveness frees the anti-racist disciple to keep going in humility. It's what allows us to persist, to keep going, to keep learning, to keep loving. The anti-racist disciple is in it for the long haul. They are not focused on being done with anti-racist work, on checking off boxes and getting back to life as normal...



To love as Jesus loves is to be committed to the anti-racist journey not as a destination but as a way of living more fully into the image of God in which we are created. For Black, Indigenous, People of Colour it's about holding fast to that image, claiming that image in the face of so much that would deny it. For white people it's about creating environments and spaces where that image of God in all it's diversity is allowed to exist, to thrive and to transform us...



This love, this divine extravagance, intentional acts that proclaim the divine image in all people will proclaim more loudly than any words, that we are disciples of Jesus, the true church in our time and place. May it be so.

I would invite you if you like to type into the chat or the Facebook comments what stood out for you from Rev. Walfall's comments, was there something in there that was meant for you?

Rev. Joe Gaspar