

Some Black Christians Are Leaving Some White Churches

"At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing [that] Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation."

– **The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.**

There has been progress since King's infamous quote, and some traditionally white churches and denominations have made significant strides to be more inclusive. Some black Christians have made deliberate decisions to join white-majority congregations, with some doing so as missionaries of a sort, feeling called by God to integrate. Others just found a mostly white congregation where the worship style appealed to them.

But now, according to a March 9 story in *The New York Times*, some black worshipers are leaving white congregations, particularly white evangelical congregations.

The last straw for many, according to the story, was white evangelicals' support for Donald Trump in the 2016 election. Some black churchgoers apparently saw supporting him as equivalent to supporting racism, although voters who supported Trump did so for a variety of reasons, some having nothing to do with race.

Even before that, however, some black worshipers had already grown uneasy over the failure of their white pastors to address police shootings of African-Americans. One black congregant at a white-majority church told of hearing general prayers for the healing of a divided nation and occasionally of a donation drive for law enforcement officers, but little addressing the concerns of African-Americans about such shootings and other issues.

Then, as the *Times* article explains:

... white evangelicals voted for Mr. Trump by a larger margin than they had voted for any presidential candidate. They cheered the outcome, reassuring uneasy fellow worshipers with talk of abortion and religious liberty, about how politics is the art of compromise rather than the ideal. Christians of color, even those who shared these policy preferences, looked at Mr. Trump's comments about Mexican immigrants, his open hostility to N.F.L. players protesting police brutality, and his earlier "birther" crusade against President Obama, claiming falsely he was not a United States citizen. In this political deal, many [African-Americans] concluded, they were the compromised.

The exodus has been scattered, said the *Times*, "a few here, a few there -- and mostly quiet, more in fatigue and heartbreak than outrage." One black woman who

attended a mostly white church in Kansas City was disheartened to discover that most congregants didn't even know the name Trayvon Martin, the black teenager who had been killed by George Zimmerman in 2012 while walking home from a 7-Eleven in Florida. When she tried to talk to members about that incident, some whites asked why she was being divisive. (A jury found that Zimmerman acted in self-defense but the events were never clear-cut and many believe he provoked the confrontation.)

Race, politics, and religion: What should we do to better integrate our church?

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Acts 1:8

... you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (For context, read 1:3-11.)

This is part of Jesus' charge to his followers right before he ascended into heaven. Pastor and author Van Moody applies this verse to today as follows: "Jerusalem is your current surrounding and comfort zone. Judea means you must cross geographic boundaries, Samaria means you must cross racial and ethnic boundaries, and 'the ends of the earth' means you must cross all boundaries. Authentic Christians are called to erase boundaries, not create them and hide behind them."

Questions: How can we be more intentional about crossing geographic, racial, ethnic, and all boundaries to witness to the gospel?

Galatians 3:26-28

... for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (For context, read 3:19-29.)

This passage tells us that in Christ, distinctions of race, background, class and gender are irrelevant. In Christ, we are "all children of God through faith."

Questions: Do you think Paul, the author of Galatians, thought that being "clothed ... with Christ" eliminates major cultural barriers? What was Paul's intention with this statement?

1 Peter 4:9

Be hospitable to one another without complaining. (For context, read 4:7-11.)

Questions: Does hospitality imply seeking to be aware of the concerns of those present with you? Is it hospitable to assume that those present with you see things from your point of view? If there is a majority view in your congregation, does that excuse disregarding the minority view? Why or why not? What about if you believe that one of those views is mistaken?

Matthew 7:12

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (No context needed.)

This is one of the ways Jesus stated what we call the "Golden Rule," but note that he adds "for this is the law and the prophets," which was a way of referring to the Hebrew scriptures. In effect, Jesus was saying that treating others as we'd like to be treated fulfills the intent of those scriptures.

Question: How does this verse apply to the subject of this lesson?

Prayer for the Unity of the Church (BCP p.818)

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.