

Allegories on “Race” and Racism
TedX Talk by Dr. Camara Phyllis Jones
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First Allegory

Japanese Lanterns : Colored perceptions

The colors we think we see are due to the lights by which we look.

These colored lights distort and mask our true variability.

What is “race?”

A social classification, not a biological descriptor.

The social interpretation of how one looks in a “race”-conscious society.

Second Allegory

Dual Reality: A restaurant saga

I looked up and noticed a sign that said “Open.”

Racism structures “Open/Closed” signs in our society.

It is difficult to recognize systems of inequity that privilege us.

Those on the outside are very aware of the two-sided nature of the sign.

“Is there really a two-sided sign?”

What is racism?

A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call “race”)

Unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities

Unfairly advantages other individuals and communities

Saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources

Levels of racism

Institutionalized racism: Differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society, by “race”

Examples: Housing, education, employment, income

Medical facilities

Clean environment

Information, resources, voice

Explains the association between social class and “race”

Personally-mediated racism: Differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intents of others, by “race”

Differential actions based on those assumptions

Prejudice and discrimination

Internalized racism: Acceptance by the stigmatized “races” of negative messages about our own abilities and intrinsic worth

Examples: Self-devaluation

“White man’s ice is colder” syndrome

Resignation, helplessness, hopelessness

Accepting limitations to our full humanity

Third Allegory

Levels of Racism: A Gardener's Tale

A story about the soil in which we grow

 Institutionalized racism illustrated

 Personally-mediated racism illustrated

 Internalized racism illustrated

How do we set things right?

Who is the gardener?

 Power to decide

 Power to act

 Control of resources

 Dangerous when:

 Allied with one group

 Not concerned with equity

Fourth Allegory

Life on a Conveyor Belt: Moving to action

Three steps to take when confronting racism:

 Name racism

 Ask how is racism operating here

 Organize and strategize, work with others to dismantle the system that supports racism

Questions for Conversation

Share, as you feel comfortable, a time when you became aware of having a perception of color that you hadn't realized you held.

Have you experienced the reality of a two-sided sign in society? If you have, what did that feel like? If you haven't, reflect on why that may be. Share your thoughts as you feel comfortable.

Who do you identify most with in the Gardener's Tale? The red flowers in rich soil? The pink flowers in rocky soil? The gardener? A combination of all three? Share as you feel comfortable.

Thinking specifically of your congregation, can you identify a time when you saw people excluded or treated differently because of difference? Difference is not just race, but includes ability, education, income, orientation, gender, age, and other kinds of classifications used to categorize. Share as you feel comfortable what steps, if any, you took to move to action.

Framing from the Confession of Belhar

4. We believe

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged
- that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

5. We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.