

ALKI UCC PEOPLE S LITURGY
NOVEMBER 15, 2020

Our Call to Worship
A Dream of Salvation
by **Joseph A**

And so it came to pass that
within a generation
Truth no longer was a whisper
but a flood of clarity,
pain was no longer shunned
but shared freely,
guns and all weapons of
bad intention or ill feeling
were melted down to their base metals
and fashioned into implements of healing,
all who were hungry
were fed,
all who feared
were reassured,
all who were pariahs
were brought into the human fold,
all who were filled with the bile of hatred
were cajoled with sweetness and caring,
all who suffered needlessly
from their own lack of faith in themselves
were shown the blazing light of true wisdom,
all who had hearts weighted by greed
freed themselves from the onerous weight of possessions,
all who loved ignorance
were exposed to the rapture and wonder of learning,
all who learned to usurp themselves
and others with power,
recognized their own impotence,
all who were crippled and torn apart by disease
became aware of their true worth,
artists and lovers of knowledge and thought
were finally appreciated,
all without homes
found shelter in the heart of humanity,
all who were fractured
were made whole,
all who were obsessed by race or creed
were freed of their limitations,
all limited and pernicious ideas
fell to oblivion from their own weight,
all who would have become demagogues
found a life of true service,
all ideas born of avarice and rooted in war
were finally dead,
all embraced all.

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Exodus 20: The Ten Commandments

Alki translation, November 2020



Hey peeps, I'm it. Not money, not status, not your car. Don't have symbols over substance. Worship me and only me. I'm glad you love that other person because that's me, God! Focus on the things that allow you to be a servant of God.

De-prioritize material stuff in this world and selfishness. Appreciate, but don't worship, human creations. So remember that God means different things to different people, be open to listen and show the compassion and love that comes from God. Respect my message.

When you curse, you are really shouting at God. When you misuse strength in the name of the Lord, it's like having an idol. Everyone uses the name of God to reinforce their own opinions so be careful when you claim that God is on your side.

Listen and think and feel before you speak. Don't elevate your own agenda to what rules your life.

By avoiding work on the Sabbath, you create space to live in quiet and discernment, to better experience the world and your gratitude for it because you need time to reflect on your blessings. Life is lived outside, outside ourselves, outside our works, outside our own homes. Breathe, know I am with you and remember to embrace the Sabbath for your own healing and care so you can do my work as I call you. Make sure 1 day a week your focus is on me so you can let go of your burdens and be present to the Spirit.

Don't harm each other.

Embrace and compel truth that is informed by science, mind and heart drawing upon God's faithfulness, courage and love.

Kirstin D:

A command to be charitable and fight poverty.

The Ten Commandments command people not to covet the things of others, but they don't command people to be charitable and fight poverty. Though it might be unclear how charitable we need to be, or how much we should give up to fight poverty, we all should be charitable and fight poverty to some degree. In light of the extent of need and poverty around the world along with the general human tendency to do nothing about it, an adequate list of fundamental moral rules should instruct people to combat as much poverty and need as they can within reasonable limits.

I teach in a school that is a mini U.N. From the first day I started at Meridian, we were charged with the following: Teach your students the curriculum, but more importantly teach them to be good caring human beings. To really notice what is happening and to act on it, comfortable or not. When I look at the commandment to be charitable and to fight poverty I think of the following things that happen at my school regularly.

- Teachers and students who bring food for our food pantry, for those students who won't be able to eat on the weekends or holidays.
- Students who share what they have freely and without question. Sometimes it's a pencil, sometimes it's more than that.

One of the things about poverty and fighting it in a school like mine is to create avenues out of poverty for my students. Ten years ago the State of Washington created the college bound scholarship. Any student who is eligible for free or reduced lunch, in the 7th and/or 8th grades can sign up for the scholarship. We make sure that 100% of our eligible students sign up. This gives the students 4 years of tuition and board at any Washington State College/University or Trade School

The best way to fight the poverty that my students experience is to give them the tools to allow them to break out of the cycle of poverty that many families have been in for generations.

Cinda S:

The world is crying out for another Commandment: "Thou shall care for My Creation, the Earth." This dovetails with "Thou shall have no other idols", for the idolatry of money, status, and material possessions produces mass consumerism, and that is what is destroying our earth with climate change.

Genesis has God decreeing that humans are to have dominion over all creation; but this translation has led us down a destructive path. Instead, the translation and thus the directive as to how we are to conduct ourselves, should be as stewards of God's blessed creation. We are to care for the earth through our stewardship, inspired by God's love for all and for us.

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Sue B:

I have loved the Caste book group. We tackled a very tough book and learned new information about our country's hidden history. We had a safe place to discuss hard subjects like slavery, current events and good vs. evil.

I have learned a lot and have thoroughly enjoyed the group discussions. I am proud that our church is addressing such a timely and painful topic.



Julia C:

First I am going to read a brief book review written by Lawrence O'Donnell – whom many of you know as a TV news anchor.

“Like Martin Luther King, Jr. before her, Isabel Wilkerson has traveled the world to study the caste system and has returned to show us more clearly than ever before how caste is permanently embedded in the foundation, and unseen structural beams, of this old house called America. Isabel Wilkerson tells this story in prose that is so beautiful, the only reason to pause your reading is to catch your breath. You cannot understand America today without this book.”— Lawrence O'Donnell

I agree with that!

There was one part of this book, early on, that felt like an awakening to me. This focused my learning as I kept reading (excerpts taken directly from the book, but edited for brevity):

A Nigerian-born playwright came to a lecture the "Caste" author, Isabel Wilkerson, gave at the British Library in London. The playwright said, "You know that there are no black people in Africa."

Most Americans, weaned on the myth of drawable lines between human beings, have to sit with that statement. It sounds non-sensical to our ears. Of course there are black people in Africa. There is a whole continent of black people in Africa. How could anyone not see that?

She said: "Africans are not black. They are Igbo, and Yoruba, Ewe, Akan, Ndebele. They are not black. They are just themselves. They are humans on the land. That is how they see themselves and that is who they are."

She continued, "What we take as gospel in American culture is alien to them. They don't become black until they go to America or to the UK, it is then that they become black."

It was in the making of the New World (America) that the Europeans became white, Africans black, and everyone else yellow, red, or brown.

It was in the making of the New World that humans were set apart on the basis of what they looked like, identified solely in contrast to one another, and ranked to form a caste system based on a new concept called race. It was in the process of ranking that we were all cast into assigned roles to meet the needs of the larger production.

The author shares another, similar quote from James Baldwin: "No one was white before he/she came to America."

So my first revelation is that in Europe, Africa, and all over the world - people were not identified by their skin color until 1619, 400 years ago, when the first Africans were abducted and forcibly shipped to America to work as slaves.

In addition, according to the modern understanding of human genetics, all people throughout the world are members of the same species with no fundamental differences between. Race is, in fact, a human contrived construct.

I learned so much from this book, and I highly recommend it. I have not finished it yet, so I still do not know what the author's "call to action" will be, for working to undo caste and racism, but I look forward to applying my new understanding in ways that may be helpful.

Cinda S:

Reading *Caste*, I felt the ground shift underneath me. Since I was 17, I've enjoyed relationships with the Black community on many levels, and have been involved in anti-racism work for most of my adult life. The book brought a whole new understanding of the many things I have experienced over my life, revealing all the societal "rules" I always seemed to be breaking in relationship with BIPOC people. How my white family, friends and colleagues would cringe or outright act out their displeasure at my associations. It would be simple to just say that they are racist, though I knew them not to be.

Caste helped me to understand that the ancient structure of caste was alive and well in my life, indeed all around us, everywhere we go, and that it is much much more than just race. This system of ranking is a living, breathing entity that grants or withholds status, honor, resources, privileges, benefit of the doubt, and basic human kindness simply based on the color of one's skin.

I have chosen a poem being read by a group of beautiful BIPOC women, called "Catch the Fire" by Sonia Sanchez. While I was reading *Caste*, I was also watching HBO's *Lovecraft Country*, a crazy over the top supernatural story with racism as one of its central monsters. I am watching the scene of the Burning of Tulsa 1921, in which our protagonist is escaping the murderous fires set by white folks enraged at Black people for being successful. She is defiantly marching through the flames with the book of truth clutched in her arms, and this poem is being read. With *Caste* playing out in my mind, watching the horror unfold on the screen, I found myself deeply sobbing.

Penny M: See worship video on YouTube for Penny's reflection.

Russ T:

In America, we try to excuse caste's presence by saying that we are a "middle class" society, but by that term we have admitted to an upper and a lower class, also. When we think of the lower class, we are forced to look at people of color being members, often through no fault of their own, but because of other caste members needing people below them.

This has poisoned us all. Isabel Wilkerson, in Caste, says, "A caste system builds rivalry and distrust and lack of empathy toward one's fellows. The result is that The United States, for all its wealth and innovation, lags in major indicators of quality of life among the leading countries of the world. She quotes Gary Michael Tartakov, another writer on caste: "This is a civilization searching for its humanity, it dehumanized others to build its civilization. Now it needs to find its own."

I feel powerless; anything I have to offer seems small and ineffectual. Perhaps that is why I thought to read "The Darkling Thrush" as an offering of hope.

The Darkling Thrush

by Thomas Hardy
I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-grey,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

Shannon P:

In a moving viral photo, a 6-year-old girl named Armani from Paris, Tennessee holds a poster that reads, "We said 'Black lives matter.' We never said 'only Black lives matter.' We know 'all lives matter.' We just need your help with #BlackLivesMatter for Black lives are in danger!"

Verona R:

A Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

