

Conversations around Race

Over the many anti-racism workshops I have attended in the past 10 or so years, I have observed that people, myself included, have a strong desire to share their own stories around race. They share stories about things they have witnessed, early memories, uncomfortable situations, difficult opinions from difficult people, and their own feelings of confusion, guilt, anger, resentment and every other emotion possible along the spectrum of emotions. I often observed that people seemed determined to share these stories no matter how relevant they may have seemed to others and no matter what the workshop leader was trying to get to. Again, I include myself in that observation. It seemed to me that if this drive was so powerful, it might be important to give people a forum for such expression. And for myself I discovered that as I told my stories, and listened to others, I began to think differently and that led to acting differently.

This conviction is what led me to propose a session of “Sharing Our Stories of Race in America” as part of an inter-faith and inter-racial group that I was involved with a few years ago. Some of the stories shared in that session were so powerful, beautiful and awful that I will never forget them. More recently I attended a couple of workshops about using personal stories as a means of finding ways to connect over conversations around race, which, as we all know is often a notoriously tricky topic to have conversation around. It was eye-opening to see how our stories can help us connect with each other without triggering defensive responses.

And so, during this time when so many avenues of connection are disrupted due to the CoVid 19 pandemic, with too many of our communities reeling from the whip-lash of peaceful protests turning into riots, and with too many people in positions of power who seem either intent on fanning those flames or in deep denial about the righteousness of the anger and fear and desperation that have driven people into the streets, I wanted to work for connection and understanding.

I am interested in starting a group on Zoom to talk about issues around experiencing race in America. I am thinking that we could meet on Zoom once or twice a month to share our stories around various topics. I would send out a “prompt” or question to think about before the session, such as, “Describe how you first become aware of ‘race’?”, or “Think of a time you witnessed something that struck you as a racist act? How did you handle it?”, or “Tell about a time you experienced being treated differently from others in a situation? How did that feel?”

I envision us having an opportunity to share our stories, without interruption or discussion until everyone has had a turn to share. We could set aside time after we share to have conversation around the stories we heard, taking care to be loving to each other, mindful of the damage we can do to each other with our words. I wouldn’t want the sessions to be any longer than 90 minutes and I would do my best to be a moderator for the discussion, but I’m not particularly “techie” so we’ll have to see how I do with Zoom moderating.

If you think you would be interested in being part of such a group, please indicate your interest by responding to me at Tdnsns1@aol.com. I would welcome participants from outside our congregation as well as long as there is room. Once I have an idea how many people are interested and the times they are available, I will finalize the plans, set up the sessions and send out Zoom invitations to anyone who indicates an interest, along with the prompt for the session.

I am excited about the prospect of having these conversations. I hope you will be too.

Saunis Parsons