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Nothing Can be Changed Until it is Faced

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By Rev. Rashim Merriwether

Ethnic Faith Communities, Arkansas Conference

James Baldwin once wrote: “Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced”

These words written many years ago have not lost their relevance or intuitive foresight as we are faced with addressing the issues of systemic racism. I would even submit it is applicable to my own process of reflective discernment as a Pastor, Christian, Husband, Father, Son, Friend, and Human. I struggled with James Baldwin’s words because it

revealed the rawness of the overwhelming situation, I and others like me are forced to deal with each day.

We are directed to find ways to navigate the structures, systems, mechanisms, and unfortunate moments with a divine measure of grace and understanding. Our pain is real, our suffering irrefutable, but we are told that we must wait for permission to be heard, pray for understanding, and be patient because this is not convenient or the right time. We must not cause too much of an issue, because it could harm connectional status or our acceptance by our peers. Or one of my favorites, "It's not what you think, but just part of the process..." But, my response to all these things is this, "Whether Pastor, Christian, Husband, Father, Son, Friend or Human, are all identities which I can affirm or withhold at my own discretion, but the one thing I will never be able to deny is the melanin in my skin, and it is that which becomes the precursor to my existence. I am identified as the Black ____, always reminded first of my color rather than the content of my character.

As society has come full circle, it has once again come face to face with the ugliness of its historical record on systemic racism against people of color in this country. The world has been called to give just cause or reason for the countless acts of racism that have been committed overtly or covertly. Whether by admission or acts of neutrality, it all becomes couplable actions that allow the problem of systemic and systematic racism to survive through the next generational cycle reinventing itself into politically correct attitudes and terminologies, filled with micro-aggressive acts and recasting itself into something palatable till the next George Floyd incident.

It is with this earnest understanding, I believe James Baldwin's words speak prophetically to the world, our nation, society, and the church that we are all creations made in the image of God. I have chosen a few books which help illuminate the issues surrounding systemic racism, how it works; how it survives; how it changes, and how only love can conquer the system of hate.

"White Fragility" by Robin DiAngelo

"Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation" by Derald Wing Sue

"The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness" by Michelle Alexander

"Strength to Love" by the Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Each of these authors brings honest, intuitive thoughtful conversation to the issues of systemic racism. Their collective words have foundations in science, theology, psychology, sociology, and the human condition. It is in the honest dialog; each author helps the reader to identify systemic racism at its core. These books challenge the reader to be

reflective, proactive, and intentional in processes which are focused on self-transformation and dismantling the structures and systems of racism.

Unless we are willing to face the truth that systemic racism is a reality and identify its entrenched connections within the fabric of society, we will not be able to take responsibility and make this a transformative moment. We are called to be disciples, who make disciples of Jesus Christ, for the transformation of the community and the world.

Matthew 22: 37-40 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

As the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church, begins to process the definitions, structures, systems, and nuances of systemic racism let us govern our minds and hearts with these three simple questions:

- What is at stake?
- Where is Christ in this conversation?
- How does this restore, foster, and create an accountable relationship with God, and others?

For more on the Arkansas Conference’s Dismantling Racism Initiative, visit arumc.org/dismantling-racism-initiative/.

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