

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

The Rev. Dr. Scott Couper

Sunday, January 17, 2021

Second Sunday after Epiphany

“From One, All”

Second in a series of six entitled “The Season of Light and Knowledge”

Acts 17:16-28



Friends, it is such a pleasure to host Trynity and Z this morning as they encourage us to support and attend the Martin Luther King Day celebration event tomorrow. I am so proud of Youth for Change and the leadership of the ROOT Social Justice Centre who have under incredible pressure ensured that our community recognizes and celebrates a true giant of the Christian faith and a true patriot who served our country honorably.



To honor Dr. King, it is crucial, in part, for White North Americans to repent for our country's racist history. We need to repent, not necessarily because we *personally* participated in our country's racist past, but because as a nation we still benefit from the historic exploitation of indigenous people through the theft of their land and from the oppression of people of color through the theft of their lives and labor.



Just as it is important for Whites and the nation to repent, it is important for Christians to repent. Sadly, Christians have historically justified slavery and racism using the Bible. As we learned in the series on Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural address, Christians fought a titanic battle. The South utilized the Bible to justify slavery and the North utilized it to condemn the practice. And even then, truth be told, Christians in the North and South agreed that

Blacks were inferior to Whites, they just differed on how they should be treated.



One need not revert all the way back to the American Civil War to demonstrate that Christians have historically justified and sanctioned racism. We need only look at recent history, during the days of segregation, to see how Christianity bolstered systemic racism in our country. By understanding that racism has been woven into Christian thinking for hundreds of years, we are better able to be sympathetic to the idea that it has not yet been disentangled from the fabric of our nation.



This morning's scripture reading is one that illustrates the manner in which Christians have been complicit in the racist underpinnings of our nation. In 1960, Bob Jones, founder a University in South Carolina, delivered a message

entitled “Is Segregation Biblical?”. In his speech, Jones answered his question affirmatively using this morning’s scripture.

IS SEGREGATION SCRIPTURAL ?

by

Dr. Bob Jones, Sr.
Founder

BOB JONES University
Greenville, South Carolina



Jones preached:

‘Now notice-this is an important verse- the twenty-sixth verse of the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all of the face of the earth” (in some of the best original manuscripts, the word “blood” is not there, but it is not important anyhow, because the thoughts are the same). “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth...” But do not stop there,”... and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” Now, what does

that say? That says that God Almighty fixed the bounds of their habitation. That is clear as anything that was ever said...'.¹

If you did not catch it, Jones argued that the verse “from one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (NIV) is proof that God desires that all nations, or races, be segregated into demarcated regions. I find it curious that Jones did not find it ironic that it was Whites who forcibly removed Black Africans from the “fixed bounds of their habitation”. Furthermore, I find it stunning that Jones would not reference Paul’s exhortation that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatian 3:28) nor reference the famous hymn in Christ Jesus “there is no East or West” (New Century Hymnal 394 and 395).

¹ Clarke Morledge, “Racism, Police Authority, and the Misinterpretation of the Bible”, *Veracity (Sharing the Joy of Discipleship)*, July 13, 2016. Found at: <https://sharedveracity.net/2016/07/13/racism-police-authority-and-the-misinterpretation-of-the-bible/>, accessed January 16, 2021.



Rather than dwell on Bob Jones' and others' scriptural misinterpretations, let us look to science and what it can teach us about matters of faith. The same scripture that Jones cited states, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth". Now, we know from biology, specifically genetics, that mitochondrial DNA is passed maternally. In layman's terms, that means that all human beings are descended from one homosapien mother.² Without the knowledge of modern science, the first century writer of Luke-Acts can be forgiven for claiming that all humans came from one *man*, Adam. Yet, we know from biology that all humans instead came from one *female*, Eve. In this way, the phrase 'From One, All' is biologically *and* biblically accurate.

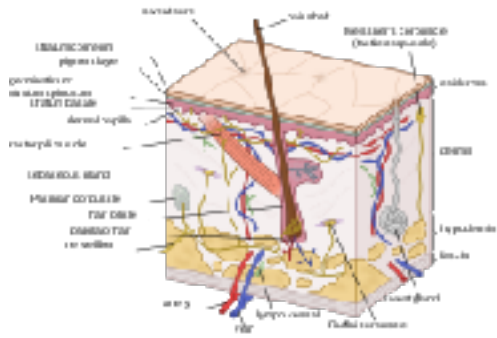
² Josh Clark, "Are We All Descended from One Female Ancestor?", *How Stuff Works* (Science), no date provided. Found at: <https://science.howstuffworks.com/life/evolution/female-ancestor.htm>, accessed January 16, 2021.



Biology teaches us as people of faith that there is one human ‘race’, and not really many so-called ‘races’. In fact, the concept of race is a far more a social construct rather than a biological one.³ Biology also teaches us that all so-called ‘races’ are actually ‘mixed’ races. There really is no ‘pure’ race. Historically, the characteristics even scientists used to classify human beings into races were arbitrary. For example, one scholar showed that “classifying humans according to fingerprints, type of earwax, body hair, possession of the lactase enzyme, blood groupings, sickle-cell gene mutation, stature, and body size produce different groupings that do not correspond to the groupings we usually come up with when we classify people by skin color.”⁴

³ John Piper, “Is There Such a Thing as Race?”, *Crossway*, July 2, 2020. Found at: <https://www.crossway.org/articles/is-there-such-a-thing-as-race/>, accessed January 16, 2021.

⁴ Colin Kidd, “Tellingly, there has been no consensus among race scientists as to the number of races of humanity. The answers range from three to over a hundred races.” *The Forging of Races: Race Scripture and the Protestant Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3-6.



Last but not least, biology teaches us that physical traits such as skin color are comparatively superficial when characterizing humans. There are other emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and relational traits that compose our rich characters.



Now, do not understand me; there are important differences that characterize groups of human beings. I do not mean to say that all human beings are all the same. Yet, if groups of people are to be differentiated or classified, it is better that they be classified as ‘ethnicities’ rather than ‘races’. ‘Ethnicity’ refers to some physical characteristics, but it primarily emphasizes cultural ones.



IMAGO DEI
THE IMAGE OF GOD

Let us conclude this morning by highlighting that our faith tradition teaches us that all humans are created in the *Imago Dei*, the Image of God, (Genesis 1:26).⁵ This is what Martin Luther King, Jr. preached. King was a wonderful prophet of God and as people of faith we ought to strive to promote his theology and values. For both biology and the Bible support him.

This is the word of God, and it was delivered to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.

⁵ J. Danny Hayes, Ouachita Baptist University, *Ouachita Stories*, “What Does the Bible Say about Race?”, blog, June 23, 2020. Found at: <https://obu.edu/stories/blog/2020/06/what-does-the-bible-say-about-race.php>, accessed January 16, 2021.