

A photograph of an abandoned church interior. The scene is dimly lit, with light streaming through a large window on the right, creating a dramatic atmosphere. The church features dark wooden pews with decorative carvings, a high ceiling with exposed beams, and a large window with a grid pattern. The walls are aged and show signs of wear. A white bookmark icon is positioned at the top center of the image.

A new tongue for a new day

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# WORDS WE MUST SAY

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*The Raceless Gospel Initiative* at Good Faith Media strives to undermine the credibility of the sociopolitical construct of race and its progeny in all Christian communities so that Jesus followers can live more deeply into their baptismal identity as expressed by the Apostle Paul to the community at Galatia:

**“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”  
(3:27-28, NRSV).**



# Introduction

“The effort to not know what one knows is the most corrupting effort one can make.”

| James Baldwin

How can you say that? How can you proclaim a raceless gospel? Have you seen the news lately? Are you not aware of America's history? Have you not experienced racism? Do you not see what is happening to our society? Our churches are segregated. In politics, we are divided.

My testimony as a baptized believer is often questioned by Christians.

Race is right in front of our eyes. It gets in front of us and distinguishes us from them. We bear witness to its progeny: racism, stereotypes, the marginalization and centering, deification and demonization of certain bodies. I see it but I also see race for what it is— a color-coded caste system.

Yes, I have experienced racism and seen the news. But I also have these visions that I cannot get out of my head.

It began with my introduction to Jesus and the belief that we could be members of *his* body, which is not to be confused with our own. Honestly, the raceless gospel didn't come up after baptism. At twelve years old, the waters didn't trouble me much.

It happened years later and after years of reading the Bible. One day, I read the words and heard them differently. I realized in an immediate and direct way that though his words were addressed to the community at Galatia, they applied to me. Paul said to those believers and to me, now listening intently:

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

Like so many presently and those who had fought for justice and equality before me, I longed for a response to race. I hated that its colored words got in front of me.

A four-hundred-year head start then eternalized in religious imagery, I thought I could never be free of it. But then those words came to me, not once but repeatedly. It was as if they were lifted from the page. Paul repeats it to the community at Colossae:

“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal, there is no longer Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all!”<sup>2</sup>

Paul writes of a re-creation, a rebirth through the womb- waters of baptism.

I was a new creature, a new kind of human being in and through and with Jesus. There was no road with a beginning and end or series of steps to complete. Instead, this realization of newness would happen every single day.

For seven days, I will offer words we must say if we are to deracialize our understanding of human being and belonging. They are words we must say if we are to rid ourselves of race and its progeny. What follows are scripture readings and reflections. Like the Genesis narrative, wherein “the evening and the morning were the first day,” the second day and so on, the creation narrative for the raceless gospel is outlined in this way. May they recreate something and give you a new tongue for a new day.

I do not offer you a new beginning. Instead, this is a reminder that we, as baptized believers, are supposed to be new creatures, new human beings. Let this serve as a kind of re- entry. Legs wobbly, we are words made flesh, dirt animated by God’s breath.

May our lives express the words we must say. Amen.

# Evening & Morning / 1

“From one ancestor, (God) made all nations to inhabit the whole earth...”

| Acts 17:26, NRSV

In the beginning, God created color-coded human beings, that is beige, black, brown, red, yellow, and white people. If we believe this, then we believe in multiple creation narratives or *polygenesis*. Polygenesis is the belief that there must have been separate creations for each of the races. The idea was circulated due to the belief that some human beings were less than human and therefore of a different order of creation.

The case was made that African and Indigenous people were barbaric, uncivilized, heathen, and yes, animals, specifically apes. It was argued that they walked on all fours. Separate origin stories were told by the likes of Paracelsus in 1520. In 1655, Isaac de la Peyrere, a French Protestant, wrote *Systema Theologicum, ex Prae-Adamitarum Hypothesi*, where he argued for the existence of pre-Adamite races.

However, St. Augustine is clear, and his doctrine is opposite that of Julian the Apostate:

“But whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in colour, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part or quality, of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast. We can distinguish that common human nature from that which is peculiar, and therefore wonderful.”<sup>3</sup>

Wonderful. Also, most anthropologists now agree that all human beings share a common ancestry. Ironically, they contend that all human beings originated from Africa. Enlightenment thinkers called it the “Dark Continent,” the *terra nulla*. Today, we can call it the home of all humanity.

Say it with me:

Human beings come from a continent— not a color.  
Africa is the cradle of civilization.  
We should all call her, “Mother.”

## Evening & Morning / 2

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’”

| First Samuel 16:7, NRSV

Race assigns social positions based on physical appearance. Some just look the part of a leader and others don't is the reasoning. In First Samuel, the writer is talking about the selection of the next king, which will be David and not his taller, older brother. One could argue then that goodness, readiness for leadership is not about an aesthetic appearance but the condition of one's heart.

But what about David's heart? He lusted after Bathsheba, a married woman and murdered her husband, Uriah, to cover up her pregnancy. None of us were there but the power dynamic in this relationship cannot be ignored. Whether their sexual relationship was forced, or partly her choice is a necessary conversation about a woman's bodily autonomy and a patriarchal system that empowers men to think that her body is his for the taking. Because David saw Bathsheba while she was bathing. So, he is Peeping David too.

Now that we are clear on this, let's focus again on how God sees us. It matters not our choice of clothing, the texture of our hair, the shape of our nose or eyes, the size of our lips, the social coloring of our skin (because we are not physically colored beige, black, brown, red, yellow, or white). Race offers an aesthetic righteousness. Goodness and likewise leadership is not a beauty contest. We are not chosen based on our outward appearance.

No, God wants to see our heart, who we really are. bell hooks writes in *Sisters of the Yam: black women and self-recovery*, “Commitment to truth telling is thus the first step in any process of self-discovery.”<sup>4</sup> So, say it with me:

God really sees me.

# Evening & Morning / 3

“For God shows no partiality”

| Romans 2:11, NRSV

God loves us all the same despite the claims of race, of minority and majority, inferior and superior, of apple of God's eye and peripheral existence. God has no favorite cultural group or corner of the world that the Divine likes to spend the most time. God loved us all right from the beginning.

One through seven, not on any of those days in the creation narrative recorded in Genesis did God rate human beings. No scorecards, we were not made side-by-side or in comparison. Thus, we are not created to compete for the earth's resources, for God's love and attention.

Instead, we were created for community and companionship. Jesus' gospel begins with everyone in mind: “For God so loved the world...” It is a given and is as the songwriter said, God's “got the whole world in (God's) hands.”

Further, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian, pastor, and martyr, wrote in his seminal text *Life Together*, “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this.”<sup>5</sup> But somehow we have made the requirements for Christian community more than this, more than going down in the water and through his body.

We all fit in because God didn't create anyone a little lower than anyone else. We were created in God's image and to have dominion over animals, fish, fowl, and creeping things— not each other.<sup>6</sup> No matter our physical differences, there is no distinction that garners more or less of God's attention. And as my elders would say, “God don't make no junk.”

Say it with me:

Endorsed by God  
Vastly, exceptionally, exceedingly  
Naked and unashamedly  
Uncategorizably and completely  
Without comparison,  
I am “very good.”

## *Evening & Morning / 4*

“Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another flesh for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.”

| First Corinthians 15:39, NRSV

Race gave colors a pseudoscientific system of classification that has since been debunked by the American Anthropological Association (AAA). But before the use of colors, humankind was divided into three categories: Negroid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid. All misnomers, the categories were developed in the 1750s by members of the Göttingen School of History.

Race is about ranking, and European Enlightenment thinkers were confident of their place at the top. What they weren't sure of was the number of races. Francois Bernier was a French physician who noted that geographers “have divided the world only according to the different countries or regions.<sup>7</sup> Bernier thought the world should be divided according to physical features, specifically parts of a person's face, body shape and bone structure. He is thought to be the first to attempt to classify all human beings.

But it didn't stop with him. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who coined the word Caucasian to describe the “white race” based on a single skull in his collection, said there were five races: Caucasian, Mongoloid, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Carolus Linnaeus said there were four races. Georges Cuvier and John Hunter both counted three. Paul Topinard had nineteen and placed them under three headings. Edmund Burke managed to find sixty-three races.<sup>8</sup> But who's counting anymore?

We just color people in and have removed all geographical connection: beige, black, brown, red, yellow, and white. We count five, don't we?

*Say it with me:*

There is one flesh for human beings.  
There is one flesh for human beings.  
There is one flesh for human beings.  
There is one flesh for human beings.  
There is one flesh for human beings.



## *Evening & Morning / 5*

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

| Galatians 3:27-28, NRSV

From finger pointer to pillar of the community, Paul writes from experience. From one-sided faith to all-including, this cultured, “member of the people of Israel” and “tribe of Benjamin,” this “Hebrew of the Hebrews”<sup>9</sup> and well-educated bigot, a good guy according to the law, who took his faith seriously, Paul thought he knew and had seen it all.

No water baptism but scaled eyes, he is given a new vision of humanity and never sees things the same way again. Paul, whose name was changed in his encounter with Jesus, goes from the persecutor to the persecuted. It is this Paul who served in coat check while Stephen was being stoned to death. This Paul was converted and writes of inclusion. He says it to the Galatians but also passes the message along to the Corinthians:

“For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free— and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

This is the work of baptism. It is not a dunking contest or a numbers game. No exclusion and no exclusivity.

Whoever you were and whatever you did is now water under the bridge. Baptism washes us of our past and of these categories. Therefore, Bishop William Willimon asks rightly, “What are we to do with a church that speaks to people on the basis of their gender or race, all the while baptizing them on the basis of Galatians 3:28?”<sup>11</sup> Good question.

*Say it with me:*

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ, there is no longer beige and black people, there is no longer brown and red people, there is no longer white and yellow people; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

## *Evening & Morning / 6*

“Do not lie to one another, seeing as though you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal, there is no longer Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!”

| Colossians 3:9-11, NRSV

This is rebirth and our new beginning: to know ourselves as made in the uncategorical image of our Creator and to live undivided lives that are in touch with everyone. The old way and its many divisions are what we must be stripped of.

And how massive and all- meaningful then is Christ's body. The knowing is so vast that it is still occurring. Paul says that we must strip down, take off all that was to put on what will always be. This Christian identity was never meant to be paired with or piled onto another way of being.

Race is an old self, a collection of color- coded identities. But Paul says all those categories and social positions should float to the top of the water during baptism. Dead in the water or if that is too dramatic, those labels are slippery when wet.

Now identified with Christ as siblings and citizens of a new “kin-dom” that is coming, baptism then is the entry way. The reenactment of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, it is not simply a new lease on life.<sup>12</sup> We decrease, and Jesus increases in us.<sup>13</sup> We go down and he comes up— but not just in conversation.

We become an extension of Christ's body. We don't merely identify with Christ, but we identify as Christ. C.S. Lewis said, “Every Christian is to be a little Christ.” Submerged in womb water, we are born again, becoming new selves, new human beings. Titus call baptism “the water of rebirth.”<sup>14</sup> In Christ, we all fit right in while entering our true selves more deeply.

*Say it with me:*

I identify with Christ and Christ's body.

## Evening & Morning / 7

“For (Jesus) is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”

| Ephesians 2:14, NRSV

Baptized believers, we confess that we are new human beings. It is a creation narrative rooted in Christ's resurrection. The deep waters of baptism hovered over us, and we came up. Born again.

No more huffing and puffing during culture wars, we took a deep breath and were filled with the Holy Spirit.

We are connected, identified with/in and through Christ's body. We are members of one another.<sup>15</sup> How then is the church in North America still segregated? Race.

Called the body of Christ and members of one another, Christians go their separate ways on Sunday mornings. We can set our watches to it. The quote by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. now stands in judgement: “It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is 11 o'clock on Sunday morning.” Hospitals, cemeteries, schools, restaurants, businesses, buses, and water fountains are all integrated— but not the church.

Jemar Tisby writes in *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, “The church needs the Carpenter from Nazareth to deconstruct the house that racism built and remake it into a house for all nations.”<sup>16</sup> Because Jesus' body is one of peace. So, what has the American Church been fighting over for these last four hundred years? And if Jesus cannot bring Christians from different cultural backgrounds together, then are we really members of his peace-making body?

Say it with me:

Jesus came and broke up the fight between us and them.  
He stood in the middle and stopped it.  
We continue fighting because we move Jesus out of the way.  
What words must I say to acknowledge this?

## End notes

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:27-28

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 3:10-11, NRSV

<sup>3</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 1950).

<sup>4</sup> bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: black women and self-recovery*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954,) 21.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 82

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 3.5-6, NRSV

<sup>10</sup> First Corinthians 12:13, NRSV

<sup>11</sup> William Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 6.4, NRSV

<sup>13</sup> John 3.30

<sup>14</sup> Titus 3.5, NRSV

<sup>15</sup> Romans 12:5

<sup>16</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 24.