

WEDNESDAY FAITH CONNECTION  
Dr. David Renwick  
June 17, 2020  
**The Early Church & Race**

**A Discussion**

- Not of Policies, or Strategies,
  - BUT of Biblical stories, principles and foundations
- Not just about Race
  - BUT about Difference
- Not only about warmth and caring (*prejudice*)
  - BUT about structures (*systemic obstacles in the way of justice*)

**Especially helpful as a “way into the discussion”**

Beverly Daniel Tatum (retired President, Spelman College)

- “Why Are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria – And Other Conversations About Race?” (1997, updated 2017).
- “*Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom*” Harvard Educational Review, Vol.62, 1992. Available online at <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Talking%20about%20RaceTatum.pdf>

**Dr. Tatum -- Definitions and Distinctions**

**1. REC Identity** → Racial, Ethnic and Cultural identities are *never easily separated*

**2. Prejudice**

A preconceived judgment or opinion, often based on limited information.

**3. Racism:**

A system of advantage based on race (*a deeper problem than likes, dislikes, etc.*)

**And then this comment:**

I assume that all of us may have prejudices as a result of the various cultural stereo-types to which we have been exposed.

To distinguish the prejudices of students of color from the racism of White students is not to say that the former is acceptable and the latter is not; both are clearly problematic.

However, a distinction must be made . . . because it is only the attitudes of Whites that (my italics) *routinely carry with them the social power inherent in the systematic cultural reinforcement and institutionalization of those racial prejudices.*

**What does our knowledge of God  
tell us  
about our relationships with each other?**

The first Christians (the early church) believed in God revealed in Scripture and experienced as – Father, Son & Holy Spirit

**SUMMARY**

**1. God the Creator:**

A Passion for all humanity

- Genesis 1:26 (*Image*)
- Revelation 7:9-11 (*Heaven*)

A passion for Healing the Divisions esp. in the Prophets:

- Isaiah 59:2 (*separation*)
- Amos 8:4-6, 5:24 & Micah 6:8 (*justice*)

**2. God the Son: Jesus**

Jesus' Passion for all people:

- Matthew 8:5-10 (*Centurion*)
- John 4:1-10 (*Samaritan Woman*)

Jesus Offending to Awaken

- Luke 4:16-30 (*at Nazareth – widow of Zarephath; Naaman the Syrian*)
- Luke 10:25-37 (*Samaritans*)
- Matthew 15:21-28 (*Syro-Phoenecian woman*)

Jesus' Understanding of Privilege

- Luke 12:48 . . . *to whom much is given, much be required*
- Luke 22:26-27 . . . *as one who serves*

**3. God the Holy Spirit**

The Ideal

- Acts 2:1-18
- Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11

Struggle to adapt to the ideal

→ Structural Changes

- Acts 6:1-11 *Selecting the right people*
- Ephesians 2:11-22 *Changing the Temple Image (the Dividing wall)*

→ Personal Struggle

- Acts 9:1-16 (esp. 15) *Paul's Conversion & Commission*
- Acts 10:1-35 (28-35) *Peter's “conversion”*

## 1. God the Creator:

### a. A Passion for all humanity

The “Grand Vision” seen in

- the first book and
- the last book of the Bible

### Genesis 1:26

*In the Beginning (The Garden of Eden)*

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;

### Revelation 7:9-11

*At the End (in Heaven)*

9 I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God

## 1. God the Creator:

### b. The story in between the beginning and end is one of

- Sin -- leading to violence and division between people and people
- Redemption – God’s passion & call to heal the injustices in these divisions,
  - especially thro’ the Prophets of Israel,
  - who highlight God’s passion for justice (>600)

### i. Sin and its Divisions

#### Isaiah 59:2 – Division with God

Your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God

#### Genesis 3:12-13, 6:11 – Human Divisions: Blame & the Growth of Violence

*The woman gave me . . . the serpent beguiled me. . . .* Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and the earth was filled with violence

Genesis 11:1-9 – Babel: God steps in with an action that “divides” in order to shrink human hubris: many solutions have unintended consequences . . . not God’s ultimate will!

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. . . . 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves;

6 And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”

8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

9 Therefore it was called Babel . .

### God’s Passion & Call to repair the Divisions

#### Micah 6:8

8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but

- to do justice,
- and to love kindness (mercy),
- and to walk humbly with your God?

#### Amos 8:4-6, 5:24

4 Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, 5 saying, “When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat.”

5:24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream

## 2. God the Son: Jesus

### I. Passion for all people

“*Like us, not like us*” – in his relationships, and stories

### a. Jesus Interacts with and Welcomes “Others.”

#### i. Matthew 8:5-10

(A foreign soldier)

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus entered Capernaum, a (Roman) centurion came to him, appealing to him <sup>6</sup> and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.”

<sup>7</sup> And he said to him, “I will come and cure him.”

<sup>8</sup> The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.

<sup>9</sup>For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it."

<sup>10</sup>When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.

## ii. John 4:1-10

(A woman of a different religion, from the wrong group!)

<sup>7</sup>A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

<sup>9</sup>The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

## b. Jesus Makes people feel uncomfortable to awaken them – → He was "an equal opportunity offender."

### a. Luke 4:16-30

(a passion for justice . . and . . )

<sup>18</sup>"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,  
<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

<sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

<sup>22</sup>**All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.** They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

(Jesus should have quit while he was ahead!!)

<sup>24</sup>And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.

▪ <sup>25</sup>But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; <sup>26</sup>yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

▪ <sup>27</sup>There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

<sup>28</sup>When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.

<sup>29</sup>They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff!  
. . but he walked away . .

## Matthew 15:21-28

("offending" a foreign --Syro-Phoenecian -- woman)

<sup>21</sup>Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

<sup>22</sup>Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

<sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her at all.

And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."

<sup>24</sup>He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

<sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."

<sup>26</sup>He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

<sup>27</sup>She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

## Luke 10:25-37

(The "offensive" Good Samaritan as a hero + his bending over backwards to bring healing)

<sup>33</sup>**But a Samaritan** while traveling came near him;

1. and when he saw him,
2. he was moved with pity.
3. <sup>34</sup>He went to him
4. and bandaged his wounds,
5. having poured oil and wine on them.
6. Then he put him on his own animal,
7. brought him to an inn,
8. and took care of him.
9. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two denarii,
10. gave them to the innkeeper,
11. and said, 'Take care of him;
12. and when I come back,
13. I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

<sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

<sup>37</sup>He said, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

## II. Jesus' Understanding of Privilege

Luke 12:48 . . . everyone to whom much is given, of him shall much be required

Luke 22:26-27. . but I am among you as one who serves

## 3. God the Holy Spirit

### I. The ideal -- given to the early church at Pentecost: a reversal of Babel

#### Acts 2:1-18

(the call and power to speak into/translate into another culture)

When the day of Pentecost had come, the *(followers of Jesus)* were all together in one place.

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”

8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

- 9 *Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia,*
- *Judea*
- *and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,*
- *10 Phrygia and Pamphylia,*
- *Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene,*
- *and visitors from Rome,*

both Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

14 But Peter, raised his voice and addressed them, saying, 16 this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 ‘In the last days it will be,  
God declares,

- that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,

- and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
- and your young men shall see visions,
- and your old men shall dream dreams.
- 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,

in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy (=speak God’s Word).

“Joel” in Paul . .

#### Galatians 3:28

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.

#### Colossians 3:11

In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free;  
but Christ is all and in all!

## II. Fulfilling the Ideal was not easy!!

(the call and power to speak into/translate into another culture)

### a. It took structural change

#### Acts 6:1-5

6 Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. 2 And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables.

3 Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task . . .

5 What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose (NOTE THE GREEK NAMES)

1. Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,
2. together with Philip,
3. Prochorus,
4. Nicanor,
5. Timon,
6. Parnenas,
7. and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

An aside . .

## [ Acts 13

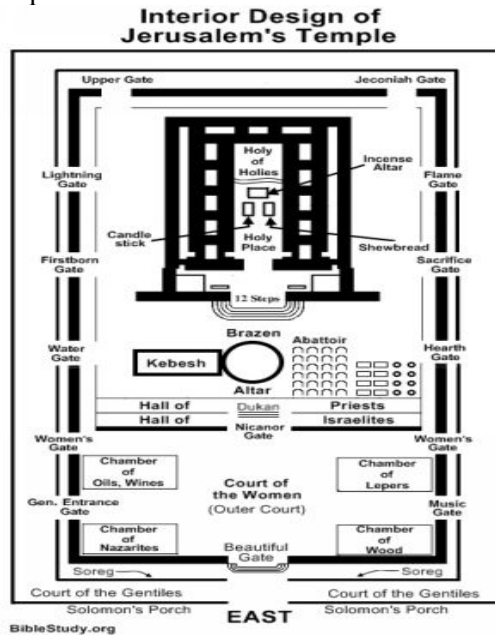
13 Now in the church at Antioch there were **prophets and teachers**:

- Barnabas, *Simeon who was called Niger*, Lucius of Cyrene,
- Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul.

2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”]

## Ephesians 2:11-22

Another “structural change” . . . Breaking Down of the Dividing wall of the temple . . .



## Ephesians 2:11-15

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off (*outside the temple!*) have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> **For he 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.**
- <sup>15</sup> He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances,

**that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace**

## II. Fulfilling the Ideal was not easy!!

b. Saul (Paul) and Peter – had to be “knocked over the head” to get the message

**Acts 9:1-16** (N.B. v.15)

- **Paul's** New Vision & Commission

3. **suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.** <sup>4</sup> *He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”*

. . . (In Damascus) <sup>15</sup> . . . the Lord said to a man called Ananias, “Go (to Paul), for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before **Gentiles** and kings and before the people of Israel; <sup>16</sup> *I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*”

**Acts 10:1-35 (28-35)**

- **Peter's** New Vision “conversion”

<sup>11</sup> He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” <sup>14</sup> *But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.”* <sup>15</sup> *The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”* <sup>16</sup> *This happened three times*, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

<sup>25</sup> On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. <sup>26</sup> But Peter made him get up, saying, “Stand up; I am only a mortal.” <sup>27</sup> And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; <sup>28</sup> and he said to them, “*You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.*”

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation (GK: *ethnos*) anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

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