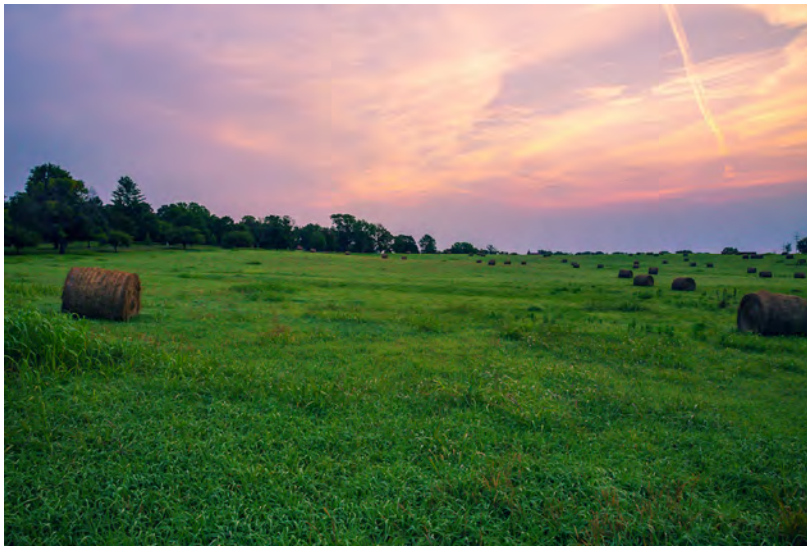


Traveling a New Path

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NBA recently hosted a 2.5-day Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Training, co-sponsored with Reconciliation Ministry and the Greater Kansas City Region. Afterwards, Ron Lindsey shared this Moment for Mission at Union Avenue Christian Church in St. Louis, in support of the Reconciliation Ministry Special Offering.



On the Friday of Suzanne Webb's retirement celebration, my iPhone said I walked **38,600 steps** – which is roughly 20 miles. And then on Homecoming Sunday, my iPhone logged another **27,000 steps** – another 13 miles. Then the next morning I got in my car and drove another 290 miles to Leavenworth, Kansas.

I share this *because ... well, because*, I'll never be able to return to that place where I started from.

My friend and mentor and pastor has retired, and no matter how far I travel I can't change that fact – **and I wouldn't want to if I could**. The other reason I can't make my way back to the place I started from is because I spent three days in Leavenworth – **at a retreat center not the federal prison** – gathered with ministry colleagues, participating in Disciples' anti-racism, pro-reconciling training.

Participating in that training is a new requirement to maintain standing as a minister in the Christian Church Disciples of Christ. The training I attended was sponsored by the National Benevolent Association and Reconciliation Ministry, **and it was transformative**. There were 35 of us from all across our country who came together to challenge **our old ways of thinking about racism** and commit ourselves to

traveling a new path – a path that will demand new ideas **and renewed commitment to be a pro-reconciling witness and church for the world.**

Okay ... so what does that really mean? It means my discomfort has been transformed into understanding. It means my eyes were opened to the sins of racism – my own personal race prejudice and bias, and the deeply ingrained systemic and institutional power that have provided me with privilege while holding others down.

You see ... any **idea** that suggests one racial group is **superior** or **inferior** to another group **in any way** is a racist idea. And we – more specifically, the people in our nation who hold power, dating back to our founding fathers – we have constructed a complex structure of systemic racism so deeply entrenched in our culture that we've come to tolerate the notion that some lives are worth less than others.

Here's what I learned about myself after traveling those 325 miles: You can be someone who has no intention of being racist, who believes in and fights for equality, but because you're conditioned in a world that is racist and live in a country that is structured in racism, you yourself can perpetuate those ideas ... no matter what color you are... NO MATTER HOW WELL INTENTIONED YOUR HEART.

That sin of racism didn't first emerge on American soil. We read about it in the Bible, and Jesus warned us of the dangers of marginalizing certain peoples among us.

But here's the thing, folks ... we're talking about racism in America this morning ... and if we're going to talk about racism in America, we also have to speak to the issue of racism in the Church.

And that's difficult, unsettling work, but Jesus didn't say bury your head in the sand and everything bad in this world will disappear ... he said FOLLOW ME ... follow me and I'll show you how to love your neighbor ... follow me and I'll show you the heart of God ... follow me and together we'll build the Kingdom of God right here, right now.

That's our challenge, my friends. Jesus calls us to follow, and that means we have to examine our personal beliefs and behaviors **and how we carry those beliefs and behaviors into Christ's Church.**

It won't be easy – it isn't easy – but it's the only way forward if we're going to call ourselves followers of Jesus, Disciples of Christ.

Now, if you're initial reaction to what I've said this morning is anger ... or shame ... or guilt ... or denial ... **or even uneasiness**, DON'T GO THERE! Because I didn't spend my weekend thinking of ways to shame you ... or make you feel guilty **because of your white heritage** ... or demoralize you because of our history of racist sin. **I got up here this morning to confess my own sin and ask you to join me in building God's kingdom – right here ... right now.**

And so ... if you're so inclined, your first step is to join me and contribute to our RECONCILIATION OFFERING this morning. The work they are doing can be life changing ... I know.

Thank you ...

As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at www.nbacares.org.