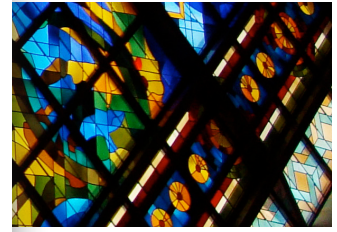




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



Resistance: Interrupting Racism from a Racialized Lived Experience

DAY 11

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Learning

One time I was asked in a meeting to contribute with a biblical image of racism. The one I chose was Goliath the Giant: big, loud, powerful, who kept the Israelites confused, doubting God, self-doubting their capacity, and terrified.

When we hear the definition of racism, we may feel like the Israelite army in the biblical account of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Racism produces a similar effect in most of us. It seems so powerful, it is everywhere—even in the church. It is supported by our systems and organizations. It is loud and scary. It is not an exaggeration to say that when most people hear racism, their hearts start pounding faster and their most common reaction is to fly from the scene by avoiding, derailing, or detouring the topic. Some fear to make mistakes, or to be labeled as racist, whereas what others fear is to harm their interracial relationships, once the word “racism” enters in the conversation.

In my journey as a person in the racial minority group (BI-POC), resisting racism has been a process of transformation and personal growth. I will share today some ways in which racism has impacted my life and identity, and how it has shaped my Anti-Racism Personal Purpose. Here is part of my story.

When I first arrived in Canada, I couldn’t understand why suddenly I felt different. My sense of identity was changing, and I wasn’t comfortable in my own skin anymore; it was confusing. Later, at one point, I started to connect the dots, and began to articulate my identity as a Latina in this context. This is important because identity is relational. It varies according to where we are. It doesn’t mean that we are not who we are anymore, but it is how who we are is perceived in the space we move in. For example, in Venezuela, when I introduced myself to facilitate a workshop, I never used the categories of race, or mentioned my

Even though I could see it, and understand the dynamics at play, it took me a few years to move from the personal to find my voice, to share what I could see happening with my “brown eyes.”

ethnicity at all. It was not in my radar at all. Here these two categories were at the front of my consciousness, and defined me above everything else.

In the following years I struggled with my growing understanding of systemic racism against my personal experience. It was painful, and the pain incapacitated me emotionally.

Moving from the personal meant for me to question my own shame of not having a Canadian accent, to affirm myself to accept and offer my gifts, to embrace being “racially different” and engage in my various contexts knowing

who I am. As an example, back home I used to preach and teach. I never had problems communicating. Here, learning English and speaking with a strong non-Canadian accent made me feel bad. I was internalizing my invisibility, my sense of otherness, and my gift of difference as something that it was my fault. It was a painful and simultaneously extraordinary time of learning.

Thus I arrived at a place of courage. I was empowered to share what I was seeing, to be able to describe the elephant in the room. I assumed it as my personal commitment and contribution to dismantle the giant's power over all of us, one stone at the time. When

most of us feel small in front of a Goliath, we may even wonder what difference we can make as individuals when we see it ingrained in our systems and institutions. It is even more daunting and disappointing for BIPOCs, because racism for us is a daily reality.

Racism can never be an expression of the community of God: We are all created in God's image, deeply loved and commanded to love one another, uniquely gifted and accepted in the Beloved.

Racism is a social construct that assigns superiority to one group above all others, but in Christ all these are abolished: "there is no Greek no Jew, no male nor female, nor slave nor free". This is the joy of our discipleship and our responsibility raising awareness and sharing this good news!

One of my practices is to speak the truth in love. I am not going around pointing out every manifestation of racism I see; we need to choose our battles, but I am committed to talk about it, to have an honest and respectful conversation about it with White people when I see the opportunity, especially people I have a relationship with. Unbelievably, transformation has occurred after many of these courageous conversations and relationships have become stronger. I am also committed to use every platform I have access to and continue to share my experience and what I see with my brown eyes. It is not the only perspective that exists, but it complements others.

Racism is not the problem of Indigenous and racialized people, as some may think. We all share the responsibility of resisting and undoing racism because both White people, Indigenous people and People of Colour are impacted by it. We can be BIPOC or a well-intentioned White person and still support racism, because there is no passive anti-racism. This is not either a journey of the racial minority group against the dominant, or vice versa.



Faith Reflection

God of Solidarity,
you who has called up to the ministry of justice for all,
may I feel your presence with me always, especially in times when I feel overwhelmed and isolated in my commitment to anti-racism.

God of Transformation,
you who walked this earth as the relationship-seeking embodiment of vulnerability,
grant me courage to speak from a place of love,
remind me that to name racism is not harmful, it is an invitation for growth and healing.

God of Peace
you who shown us our calling is to create peace in our heart, homes, and communities,
for the times when I witness or endure the pain of racism, be present with me in my grief.

May there be peace that enables healing.

May there be peace than enables justice.

May there be peace that enables liberation.

Amen



Children's Activity

It is often easier to teach about racism by talking about overt acts of violence; the concrete example is easier to name and discuss. However, one element of racism that is important to understand is the way in which it is a system creating a spectrum of violence. Racism is not just about isolated incidents, but the ways racism creates a lived reality of oppression that can feel ever-present. Here is an example of one way you can teach children about the larger impacts of racism through embodied activities.

- Invite your child to hold a glass of water in their hand that has just a drop of water in it. Ask them how heavy it feels. Continue to add small amounts of water in the glass while they are still holding it. Ask them to continue reflecting on how heavy the glass feels.
- Some guiding reflections and questions could be:
 - What is changing for you while you are holding this glass?
 - What feelings are you having right now? I think I might feel... (tired, worried).
 - What do you think should happen when the glass is too heavy for you to hold? We could... (make the person pouring in water stop, get help to hold the glass, empty the glass).
- Talk about how racism can make people feel like they are holding too much all the time. Working to end racism means stopping moments when we see something bad happen, and also making sure we stop all the small hurts from adding up too.

This exercise could be replicated with whatever items there are available in a household, such as books, stuffed animals, or sand at the park.



Group Commitment

Read the story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Using this image, consider the definition of racism in the United Church's Anti-racism policy, *That All May Be One* (page 82):

A system of advantage and privilege based on "race," in which one group of people exercise abusive power over others on the basis of skin colour and racial heritage. A set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions and actions based upon an ideology which accords inherent superiority of one racial or ethnic group over another or others.

- Racism is measured not by intent, but by its effect on those oppressed.

- Racism can be overt or covert, individual or systemic, intentional or unintentional.
 - Racism confers privilege on and sustains the dominant/powerful group.
 - Racism exists everywhere in our society, all institutions, and in our church.
1. Read the definition and unpack the message and ways of racism. Make a list of the ways in which racism appears in the world.

To become anti-racist, a White person (or group) needs to be convinced of the existence of racism and how it is embedded in the interactions and systems

around us. This informs the next question, still using the image of Goliath.

2. What might be the boasting messages of racism that you have heard or witnessed—in the church, at work, in conversations, or which you have personally experienced?
3. How are you personally impacted by these messages? Expand on this. If you are a White person, think about how your whiteness protects you, affirms your privilege, or anything else that you notice. If you are a person from a racial minority group, racism impacts you in a different way.



Advocacy

When we think of action, we tend to quickly think about doing something—joining a demonstration, writing letters to the government, and so on. The action I am proposing for today is an inward action to help us move from theory to practice. It is to clarify where we see ourselves in the picture and what steps we are prepared to take.

Write your own Anti-Racism Personal Commitment Statement.

- ✓ Why are you committing to anti-racism?
- ✓ How are you going to build your anti-racist identity and way of showing up in the world?
- ✓ What will you be doing to support this commitment in times when it becomes harder or

difficult to sustain? How far are you willing to go? What would be the scope of your reflection and action at this time?

Note: Our personal purpose will change over the time; hopefully it deepens with time and experience.



Alcris Limongi came to Canada from Venezuela in 1996. Her experiences in different settings as a racial "other", along with academic opportunities, guided her in learning about racism and anti-racism. She joined The United Church of Canada around 1997, and has served in different roles as General Council staff, as a volunteer, and as a minister. She is part of the Anti-Racism Common Table and a facilitator of Racial Justice training.

