



40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



How Racism Affects Racialized Peoples

DAY 15

Adam Kilner



Learning

Black liberation theologian James Cone identified the figurative masks that many Indigenous and racialized people have to wear in a culture that normalizes Whiteness while diminishing non-Whiteness. He stated, “As a child, I learned to wear a mask whenever I went to town—careful always not to show my real self, for fear of offending White people.”

In his essay “The Violence of Our Knowledge: Toward a Spirituality of Higher Education” educator Parker Palmer identifies that “to do violence to each other we need not drop a bomb or hit someone with a stick. We do violence in much more subtle ways.”

People from non-White racial and ethno-cultural backgrounds feeling threatened simply by living

out their own culture is violence. 2SLGBTQ+ people feeling like they need to forever remain closeted for fear of being ostracized from their families, friends, schools, or workplaces is also violence. It is violence that people, in order to protect their own integrity, feel like they must remain figuratively masked.

Creating communal space for people experiencing similar oppression and marginalization is a form of resistance and liberation. The Black blues club offered sanctuary and community-building similar to that of the contemporary 2SLGBTQ+nightclub today, creating an opportunity for people to “let down their hair”—or in other words, a place to feel safe, comfortable, and nurtured.

The mask that Cone felt he had to wear was one that hid his differences—hairstyles, the African-American vernacular English dialect, and clothing styles rooted in African and Caribbean styles.

In our celebration of diversity, we are tasked to create spaces of hospitality that allow everyone feel safe, comfortable, and nurtured. Nobody will take off their figurative mask without having space that is intentionally stewarded in this way.



Faith Reflection

O You whose love is reigning over us,
I commit to building up humanity
through the lenses of hospitality and justice.

As a person seeking to be hospitable I will create open space
where real conversations can take place.

When uncomfortable topics come forward
I will seek to understand
I will ask “I wonder questions”
so that I can become more informed;
I will do my best to avoid making things about me
so that I can grow in a relationship of mutuality with others.

As a person who seeks justice I will seek to acknowledge the voices
of marginalized people.

In these two commitments I admit that I may change and grow,
and Jesus receives my transformation and growth as good.

For “anti-racist work is not transactional. It’s relational.”

Let me, Jesus, commit my life to relational ways of interacting with others.
Amen.



Children’s Activity

James Cone talked about having to “wear a mask” as a young person. The mask wasn’t a physical mask, but a symbolic one. A symbol is something that represents another thing—like a cross represents Jesus or the church, or a heart represents love. Can you think of any other symbols?

James’ mask was a symbol. He was really talking about having to hide his identity so that he wouldn’t draw attention to himself.

James, a Black man, was very worried about sharing an opinion that a White person might not agree with. He was worried that when he went to university he wouldn’t be able to share true feelings about the most important issues of his day.

One day James decided to take the risk and just be himself. He took off his symbolic mask and expressed who he is. James then became known all over the world as an amazing scholar and writer.

Here are some questions to talk about:

- I wonder how it feels to wear a symbolic mask.
- I wonder how James felt when he wore that symbolic mask.
- I wonder if James ever wished he could put his mask back on.
- Have you ever felt like wearing a mask so that others wouldn't know something about you? Why?



Group Commitment

Sometimes, we might be tempted to call ourselves “allies,” or people who are safe for others to confide in, or people who offer warm welcome and hospitality to others. But how might we test our assumptions about ourselves? Can we really decide that we are allies? Can we declare ourselves to be safe for other

people? Rather than claiming ourselves to be an ally, perhaps we could explore some questions that might move us closer to allyship:

- Do I know people from other social identities (for example, other racial, gender, sexual identities) who have shared their honest struggles with me about their identities?
- If people don't share their struggles with me is it possible that I may not be viewed as safe?
- Have I been called a safe person by others? Safe to whom? If yes, what must I do to remain 'safe'?



Advocacy

Develop policies in your church/organization that welcome and encourage feedback without repercussion from Indigenous and racialized people.

Work to ensure that historically excluded opinions are a part of any decision making that happens within your church (especially board meetings). Seek feedback and support on how to improve your church meetings so that every opinion is valued in decision-making processes.

Ask at the end of a meeting what opinions and voices were missing. Consider using the United Church's [intercultural lens tool](#) to continue to deepen the exploration of equity at the meeting.



Adam Kilner is a United Church of Canada minister and community activist. The focus of his work has been on developing just and healthy relationships, especially in regard to race, gender, orientation, and interreligious dialogue. Adam received the In-School Mentor of the Year Award from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lacombe, Alberta in 2011 and a Distinguished Alumni Award from St. Paul's University College at the University of Waterloo in 2015 for his commitment to youth and social justice.

