



40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 33

Become an Ally



Learning

Adam Kilner

I met Jean Graetz in Montgomery, Alabama in 2018, at the oldest African Methodist Episcopal Church in the area. It was a hot, hot day and that building, to my memory, had no air conditioning. I didn't know anything about Jean or her (now-late) husband Bob, who was a key ally to Martin Luther King Jr.

The Graetzes are US northerners who made their way to the Deep South to serve in ministry. Bob was of German ethnic background and was the White pastor of a Black congregation in Montgomery at the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. The Graetzes supported the boycott and, in response, were ostracized by White colleagues. Their car tires were slashed, and their family home was the target of multiple attempted bombings.

If this is what was being done to White allies of Black people in the Deep South, just imagine what was happening to Black people.

It was not only one factor that inspired the bus boycott. Another catalyst that led towards this action was the death of Emmett Till. In Mississippi, just months before the start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (December 5, 1955–December 20, 1956) a 14-year-old Black boy named Emmett Till was lynched for allegedly whistling at a White woman in a grocery store. Till was abducted, beaten and mutilated, and shot in the head. His body was found in the Tallahatchie River three days later.

The Till case was closed in 2007 by the US Justice Department, but then reopened after the White woman tending the store all those decades ago, Carolyn Bryant Donham, was quoted in a 2017 book saying that she had lied about her testimony. Then 21 years old, she had stated that he had grabbed her, whistled at her, and made sexual advances toward her. The book caused the Justice Department to reopen the Till case.

The examples of the Graetzes and Donham couldn't be more markedly different. In the case of Jean and Bob Graetz, one meets anti-racism allies willing to support racialized people in their struggle for equality. They didn't intend to become the face of the movement, yet they were and are critical allies for the nurturing of God's vision for humankind.

Allyship is being willing to take on the struggle as your own. It is choosing to clearly be connected to the movement even when you're scared. It is acknowledging that even though one might feel uncomfortable in the conversation, the conversation isn't about you. It is de-centering yourself and centering the marginalized and oppressed. It is taking charge of your own education.



Faith Reflection

Adam Kilner

Jesus, you built your movement on allyship.

Release to captives

Freedom for the oppressed,

And this moment right now as God's time to act!

You know us in our current estate.

You hear our heartbeats.

You know our longings for freedom and justice.

You advocate for us because you love us.

Perhaps today is a day for courage

To be hatched within our spirits

And we can honour each other

By listening deeply to one another

And preparing for a radically new day

Of mutual support and care.

Today is a day for allyship.

Amen.



Children's Activity

Maya Douglas

Story: Genesis 21:1-21

Materials: New Revised Standard Bible or Inclusive Bible, crayons, paper, 3D object

Objective:

- To reflect on an origin story.
- To reflect on influence and point of view.
- To demonstrate the power of diversity of opinions.

Instructions:

1. Put all devices, such as phones or tablets, in a separate room.
2. Ask for a set of agreements on how to be together. For example: “We will take turns to speak...”, or “We will listen with our hearts and minds...”
3. Sit together and place the object in the centre of the group.

4. From wherever you sit, draw what you see without changing your position.
5. Have someone volunteer to read the Bible story.
6. Have everyone respond in turn to the story. Allow time at the end for those who did not share to respond if they want.
7. After reading and reflecting on the story, swap positions and draw the object again. Compare the two images.

Reflection Questions:

- What is one new thing you learned in this activity?
- How did Sarah feel and act, in your opinion? What about Abraham?
- How did Hagar feel and act, in your opinion?

- How may this story change your point of view?
- How was racism expressed in this story? What was God’s response?
- In this biblical story, people encounter God intimately and have survived. How may this story about enslavement change your point of view? How does God respond in this story?
- What positions of privilege do you hold? How may God be responding to this?

Love’s Words:

Share genuine words of acceptance and encouragement, such as, “I like your picture because...”



Group Commitment

Adam Kilner

In considering allyship with Indigenous and racialized people, begin by asking yourself these questions from your own perspectives and own racial identities:

- Have I listened to Indigenous and racialized people? You’ll likely know that you have listened if you have ever felt uncomfortable, because navigating the experiences of others can often challenge our own worldviews. What did you hear when you listened?
- Have I boosted the voices of Black, Asian, or Indigenous voices in person or on social media?
- Have I educated myself?
- Have I acknowledged my privilege? Have I understood that it is a privilege to not have people make assumptions about me simply because of the complexion of my skin?
- Have I challenged racism? Have I heard Indigenous and racialized voices call something racist and attempted to dismiss the claim?
- If I am a White person, do I talk with my White friends about racism? Is the conversation ongoing?



Advocacy

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Take the free [Indigenous Canada course](#) from the University of Alberta.

Search for a local Black Lives Matter group in your community, and consider ways of engaging with the group individually or with your community of faith.

With a recent event in London, Ontario leading to the deaths of a Muslim family it is also vitally important to advocate for the public concerns of Muslim communities, who are often racialized. The [National Council of Canadian Muslims](#) has ideas for action and advocacy.

Be prepared to hear diverse stories and grow in empathy.



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.



Maya Douglas is the minister at St. James United Church of Etobicoke (Toronto). Her ministry is welcoming to families and children/youth. As a mother of four and an elementary teacher of 22 years, her anti-racism work spans all ages.

