



2022
LENT SERIES

AUTHENTIC
DIVERSITY &
JUSTICE
WORKING
GROUP

STRUGGLING WITH WHITE PRIVILEGE AND FOLLOWING JESUS

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"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19

After Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in his hometown synagogue the initial reaction is quite favorable; the friends and neighbors who watched him grow up are amazed and proud of the man standing before them. Just a few verses later, however, that amazement turns to fury when Jesus dares to suggest that his ministry is not exclusively for them; they are not the center or focus of it.

Those of us who carry great privilege through the color of our skin, our gender, orientation, and/or our economic status must learn to ask, "Whose voice is being centered here?" Or, said another way, whose experience is believed? Whose viewpoint is understood to be the norm? Whose feelings and reactions are prioritized?

It is an important milestone when we recognize that the world is bigger and more complex than our individual experiences. We must learn that our preferences are not the best or the only way to solve problems. We must find that just because something didn't happen to us personally doesn't mean it isn't true or valid. When we learn that not everything is for us or about us, we become better neighbors. When one is conditioned to being in the center, though, having the focus shift to someone else can feel disorienting and uncomfortable. We may respond with defensiveness - "Not all white people..." "Not all men..." - or try to scramble and push our way back into the spotlight - "But what about..." or "But don't ALL lives matter?"

Some of the hard but necessary work for those of us who carry loads of privilege is to stop and interrogate these reactions. Pay attention to how our bodies and our thoughts respond when we are moved out of the center. Jesus challenges us to listen to and believe the experiences of others whose voices have often been pushed to the margins and ignored

It can be tempting to lament that "things were a lot simpler before we had to worry about offending people all of the time," but doing this aligns us with the folks who ran Jesus out of town. We must shift our focus to allow others' voices and experiences to hold the same weight and significance as our own. The good news of Jesus Christ is specifically and particularly good news for people who are vulnerable, hurting, and most in need. Because we are joined to one another in the waters of baptism, good news for our siblings who are hurting is good news for us all.

Let us pray: God of grace, may the good news of your enlivening and liberating presence be made known to those who need it most. Open our eyes and ears to the experiences of others and grant us humility and patience as we de-center ourselves. Lead us in your way as we look to the cross. Amen.