



2022
LENT SERIES

AUTHENTIC
DIVERSITY &
JUSTICE
WORKING
GROUP

STRUGGLING WITH WHITE PRIVILEGE AND FOLLOWING JESUS

Pastor Ryan Pusch, Hebron and St. Paul's Highfield Lutheran Churches, Leechburg and Vandergrift

"The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." 1 Corinthians 12:21-23, 26

When I was working for the University of MN as a community organizer, I remember doing a visual exercise that dealt with various types of privilege. With each privilege listed, you'd take a step forward if it applied to you, or a step back if it didn't: male privilege, heterosexual privilege, white privilege, economic privilege, educational privilege, able-body privilege, Christian privilege, and so on. By the end of the exercise, I was at the front of our entire cohort. Out of all the people I worked with, the world we shared gave me the most opportunities, the best access to resources, and the most support. Even then, around the age of 24, it didn't really sink in. I felt that I was struggling enough with my own path forward. What space in my life was there for thinking about the struggles that other folks faced from day to day?

The breakthrough for me came with both discovering mindfulness meditation, which helped me to become aware of the blessings I was continuously being given and to feel a deep sense of gratitude for them, and realizing that the struggle for racial equity was about building a world where everyone has the chance to feel blessed- where every person feels inherently valuable, and where no one feels that their life, or the lives of members of their community is dispensable. The way that white privilege really hurts us is to both give resources, opportunities, and greater stability to people with lighter skin, but then also to convince us that there will never truly be enough for everyone, so we can't even think about letting go of what we have or redistributing wealth and resources more equitably. It turns us against ourselves, and against the people that are saying "let's make this right, we can do better, will you join us?"

No matter where we find ourselves on the path of justice, we can ask ourselves this: what has been given to me, and how can I use it not only for myself? How can I be part of Jesus' work to build a community that treasures each of its members, and where those with the greatest privileges are always ready to give them up for the sake of God's commonwealth.

Let us pray: God of infinite compassion, break our hearts of stone to help us recognize our privileges, that our hearts might be filled with your mercy, and you might form us into your beloved community. Amen.