



Crossing Together: a theological approach to conversations about race

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I think we are all walking towards a future that God has envisioned for creation—one of harmony and mutual flourishing. Even so, most of us realize that there are different starting points on this journey. Streets, if you will, where experiencing privilege based on race, gender, class—or the lack thereof—characterize neighborhoods and residents. More significant than our differing individual starting points, though, is where God is calling us to go together. God is calling us to a journey that leads to God and each other. While some of us have been on that journey a long time and others have only started, it is now more apparent that most of us have stopped at a crossroads—an intersection where we must walk through the tensions of race, faith, and personal and national identity.

The intersection we must cross is busy with traffic moving in all directions at dangerous speeds. There doesn't appear to be a traffic light to control the flow of movement. Even when the road seems clear, inexplicably, a long line of vehicles carrying thoughts and emotions speed through threatening, guaranteeing that as I cross, they will hit me if I stay in the way. I imagine others feel the same way.

How can we cross this busy, dangerous intersection so we may walk together? Is it even possible? I hope that we all will see that the answer is yes. Crossing through the intersection becomes less harrowing as we have continuous internal and external dialogues with ourselves and those who are different from us. Truthful, honest, painful conversations is a place where we start putting one foot in front of the other. These conversations will culminate in just action in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ. Action that makes it possible to engage faith, race, and other cultural identities critically, without fear of fatality. Only then will we be able to cross the intersection and into God's bright future for all.

There are those among us that do not think faith has anything to do with race or American or other cultural identities. That faith and personhood do not mutually inform each other. The truth is we practice our faith in our bodies that have a social location in the world. None of us have the luxury of not thinking critically about how we live out our faith in the world. That has never been the case, and it is probably easier to see that more now than before.

How does one begin examining faith, race, and cultural identities in ways faithful to God and empower us to start the work of crossing into the future together?

1. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christ Church will be planning Bible Studies and conversations around this subject. In the meantime, perhaps give yourself the gift of slowly reading the Gospel according to Matthew, paying close attention to how Jesus interacts with those who misunderstand him. What do you learn about God? What do you learn about yourself? What do you learn about other people, especially ones you don't understand? And what may God be calling you to do?

2. Read some pivotal writing to continue dialogue with yourself and with others. There is a myriad of books you can read at various reading levels: a list that Christ Church will also make sure you can access. For now, consider reading: Jim Wallis' book *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*; Michael Eric Dyson's book, *The Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*; and Kelly Brown Douglass' book, *What's Faith Got to Do with It: Black Bodies/Christian Souls*.

I note that this list may not be immediately readable and accessible. I also note the book suggestions have adult readers in mind. Please stay on the lookout for a more comprehensive reading list. Additionally, Bishop Perry and Sister Vee, Curate of The Cathedral Church of St Paul, have a YouTube video series discussing Wallis' book [here](#). Furthermore, in full disclosure, I have only just started Dyson's book myself.

3. Discuss your learnings with others and particularly those who are different from you. The necessary action I'm recommending here is *to listen*. Active listening. Listen to your body and your emotions. What are they communicating to you about you? The kind of active listening I'm describing has understanding as its goal, not the formulation of a rebuttal. The purpose of the discussion is to understand, not to persuade others that your point-of-view is correct. The most important thing to consider, especially if one is a white person (but also applies to all), is to realize that there are hard truths to confront, particularly about race. Be prepared to hear the pain in the other's story, and in solidarity with that person, bear the pain with them. Rash responses to what is being said or attempts to rationalize before genuinely hearing the other is a temptation. By giving in to that temptation, you risk taking over and controlling the conversation-the very thing you're trying not to do. It shuts dialogue down completely. Seek to understand more than to be understood and to console more than to be consoled (and this is critical advice for those who are in the privileged class).

4. You can call or email me. We can chat online and see each other via FaceTime, Facebook Messenger, Zoom, or Skype. You may think you don't have a dialogue partner, but you do. I am committed to this work for myself. I hope you commit to it. Give yourself the gift of reflecting on your faith and its practice among your families and at work and in your community. Hold up your thoughts about race, faith, and identity to a loving God. Be surprised by grace, accept loving correction, tie the shoes of your spiritual feet, and prepare to cross the road. Cross to walk further with your brothers and sisters in Christ.