June 16, 2020 Bible Study Group, John Knox Presbyterian Church

Questions to consider:

1. Who is Denise writing to?

2. Who is Caroline writing to?

3.What surprised you or was new to you?

4. What do you agree with?

5. What do you disagree with?

6. What are you grateful to know now?

7. Which article was easier to read? Why?

**For white (and white-adjacent) folks who fairly recently came into the work of anti-racism, a few things to keep in mind:**

by the Rev. Denise Anderson, Coordinator for Racial and Intercultural Justice, PCUSA Facebook, June 10, 2020

“\* Because you're late (and even if you're not), expect a lukewarm welcome from the community you now seek to walk alongside. Why? Because we're tired. At this point, you're the kid we got assigned with for a group project, but because you never showed up for sessions, we had to try to pull your weight. You are Paul Crewe in The Longest Yard when he sat out most of the second half, then rejoined the game and tried to make nice with the O-line AFTER the team had taken a beating. While you sat, we got sacked. We are battered, so expect us not to have energy or interest in making it "easy" and "accessible" for you.

\* Because we are battered, it would be best for you to seek out folks who have energy to do the hand-holding you may need right now. Preferably, that person would be another white person whom you've observed doing the work. Ask them about the books and articles to read. Perhaps they can coach you through some faithful next steps. Many PoC may be willing to do that right now, as well. But don't presume we can make that space. Remember, we're hurting, and we often find that when we're in pain is precisely the time white folks want to engage with us. There is a better way.

\* If you truly are committed to the work, also commit to being uncomfortable. Because it will be uncomfortable. Navigating white supremacy sure isn't easy for us, so expect it not to be easy for you when you find yourself on its bad side. Slaying dragons takes work, and these systems won't magically disappear because you're here now. But again, the people with the \*least\* amount of responsibility for making you feel good in the midst of this is us.

\* All messes take longer to clean than they do to make. This mess is hundreds of years old and will take an unknown number of years to make right. If you are not settling in for generational change, if you're not learning so you can teach, if you're not working for a world that you may not live long enough to enjoy, you will do more damage than good. Will your descendants look back on your life and say you were on the right side of history? Will they be able to say you were brave enough to shape the future even if it cost you your present? That's the question you must ask yourself. Can you work to save the world without being the hero?”

Denise, June 11, 2020

“I guess not surprisingly, I was accused of "shaming" newcomers to the fight for racial justice in a previous post.

What I did was give context for the moment. If newcomers find that this is not the civil rights postcard they may have imagined where we're all holding hands and singing "We Shall Overcome" (though you shouldn't do that in the midst of a pandemic anyway), there is a reason for that. You're not coming into this work in a vacuum. There is a whole history that paralleled your previous timidity/ignorance/apathy/antagonism and precedes your activism. Your first job might be to understand and appreciate that history and learn to exercise the self-differentiation that will be needed to sustain you in the work.

Also, I may add that centering and prioritizing the feelings of white folks is itself indicative of white supremacy. I'd like for that to be obvious at this point, but clearly it's not. People shouldn't have to "sell" anyone on justice.

Anyhoo, pick up Ijeoma Oluo's So You Want to Talk About Race and Robin DiAngelo's White Fragility. It'll bless you.”

**Caroline’s story** Caroline Crocket Block, Facebook, May 30, 2020,

“I am a 45 year old white woman living in the south, and today was the first time I spoke frankly about racism with a black man.

When Ernest Skelton, my appliance repairman, came to the front door, I welcomed him in. As this was his second visit and we’d established a friendly rapport, I asked him how he was feeling in the current national climate. Naturally, he assumed I was talking about the coronavirus, because what white person actually addresses racism head on, in person, in their own home?

When Ernest realized I wanted to know about his experience with racism, he began answering my questions.

What’s it like for you on a day-to-day basis as a black man? Do cops ever give you any trouble?

The answers were illuminating.

Ernest, a middle-aged, friendly, successful business owner, gets pulled over in Myrtle Beach at least 6 times a year. He doesn’t get pulled over for traffic violations, but on the suspicion of him being a suspect in one crime or another. Mind you, he is in uniform, driving in a work van clearly marked with his business on the side. They ask him about the boxes in his car--parts and pieces of appliances. They ask to see his invoices and ask him why there is money and checks in his invoice clipboard. They ask if he’s selling drugs. These cops get angry if he asks for a badge number or pushes back in any way. Everytime he is the one who has to explain himself, although they have no real cause to question him.

Ernest used to help folks out after dark with emergencies. Not anymore. He does not work past dinnertime, not because he doesn’t need the business, but because it isn’t safe for him to be out after dark. He says “There’s nothing out there in the world for me past dark”.

Let me say that again. Ernest, a middle aged black man in uniform cannot work past dark in Myrtle Beach in 2020 because it’s not safe for him. He did not say this with any kind of agenda. It was a quiet, matter of fact truth.

A truth that needs to be heard.

When I asked Ernest what ethnic terms he gets offended at, he said that the most offensive term people use is ‘boy’. Ernest has a bachelors in electronics and an associates in HVAC. He is not a ‘boy’, and the term ‘boy’ in the south implies inferiority in station and status. He came to Myrtle Beach and got a job at Hobart. The supervisor repeatedly used the term ‘boy’. Ernest complained. After several complaints Ernest was fired.

Ernest says most white people are a little scared of him, and he’s often put in a position where he has to prove himself, as though he’s not qualified to repair appliances.

After getting a job for 2 years at Sears appliance, Ernest started his own company, one he’s been running for several years. He is the best repairman we’ve had, and has taught me about washer dryers and how to maintain them myself, even helping me with another washer/dryer set and a dishwasher without charging me. I highly recommend his company, Grand Strand Appliance.

I asked Ernest what he thought of “black bike week” in Myrtle Beach, where thousands of black people come with bullet bikes and trash our town. He says it hurts black people in our city, and he disagrees with the NAACP coming in to sue businesses that close on black bike week. He hates working that week.

Ernest doesn’t have hope that racism will change, no matter who the president is. His dad taught him “It’s a white man’s world”, and he’s done his best to live within it.

When I asked him what I could do, he said, “everyone needs to pray and realize we’re all just one country and one people”.

I am a 45 year old white woman living in the south. I can begin healing our country by talking frankly with African Americans in my world---by LISTENING to their lived experience and speaking up. I can help by actively promoting black owned businesses. That’s what I can do today. Let’s start by listening and lifting up. It’s that simple.

Edit: I asked Ernest if I could take his picture and post our conversation on facebook. He thought it was a great idea. As he left my house an hour later, he looked me in the eye and said, "If you ever march, or have a meeting on this topic, or want to change things in Myrtle Beach, I'll stand with you." What a great idea. Let's begin standing together.  
 Edit: 1pm EST on 6/1. Ernest just called me and we had one of the sweetest moments, both laughing and crying about the response to this post. He started the conversation by saying, "Caroline, I don't know if I should kill you or kiss you--my phone is ringing off the hook!"  
 He doesn't have a FB profile, so he's coming over later so I can help him set one up. He's been absolutely overwhelmed, as have I, with the response. We're going to be sitting down together to read your comments. They mean so much. In addition, the Myrtle Beach city manager has contacted me and I'm getting all of us together to be sure this doesn't happen in our city any longer. THANK YOU WORLD.

Edit 6/2 9am. Just got off the phone with Ernest and the local news. They will be interviewing us today, and it will be on the local news in Myrtle beach tonight. I'll post it on my page later.

Edit 6/7.  Ernest and I ended up marching together at a peaceful protest in Myrtle Beach! It was a lovely day and we went out to lunch with our spouses afterwards. What a whirlwind of events! Check out my FB live of the protest!

Edit 6/8: Ernest and I met today with a web designer to make sure his facebook and business pages are linked, so he's good to go there! I spoke with an investigator at the MB police department who was top notch. More to follow. This is how we change our country. Normal folks. One town at a time.”    
<https://www.wmbfnews.com/2020/06/02/myrtle-beach-homeowner-appliance-technician-share-eye-opening-discussion-about-racism/>