

Race and Racism in the U.S.

Conrad L. Kanagy

Session 4: Whether you see the world from the middle or the margins makes all the difference

I always tell my students that those who see the world from the margins have the advantage of seeing the world more clearly than those in the middle who are influenced by wealth, status, position and power. Those on the margins, because of race and ethnicity, sex, gender orientation, religion, age and more, must always know two narratives--theirs and that of the middle. In fact, survival sometimes depends upon knowing the story of the middle. The Apostle Paul argues that Christ came to reconcile margin and middle and to destroy the dividing wall of hostility that divides them. For those in the middle, whether Jew in the first century or a white American in the 21st, this means caring for and learning about the stories of those on the margins and being part of the dismantling of the dividing wall or the color line.

Scripture: Acts 15

Questions for Discussion

1. How does one's position, whether in the middle or the margins, impact how one sees the world? What is the advantage of being on the margins?
2. What information did Conrad share that was new about evangelical efforts to abolish slavery to you and what difference might knowing this have upon how you think about issues of race and racism going forward?
3. How did the Jerusalem church work at the differences between Jew and Gentile and the expectations they would place upon Gentiles? Why was resolving this difference so critical to God's mission to the world?
4. Can you think of heroes in the Bible who stood for justice for those who were on the margins and how their efforts were understood by others?
5. Why do social movements of those on the margins of our society so threaten those of us in the "middle" of society?
6. Why is the story of the Jewish exodus such an important one to the African American Church?
7. Given what we learned today, how might we talk differently about the Black Lives Matter movement going forward? And how might we be more sensitive to Black folks around us when we talk about this movement?
8. What questions remain for you regarding what you've heard or that we've discussed today?