

# OCC Home Devotional

For Family, Group, or Individual Reflection

By Rev. Rob Fredrickson | Sunday, August 18, 2019

## Two Steps Forward; How Many Back?

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. — Galatians 3:28 (NRSV)*

The issue of race is an uncomfortable topic for many. Racism, specifically manifested in slavery, has been called “America’s original sin.” The memories of Jackie Robinson, Brown vs. the Board of Education, Rosa Parks, and Dr. King are probably still vivid for some of us. I myself grew up with Archie Bunker and George Jefferson on my TV screen every week. Indeed, race is widely regarded as one of the defining issues of our culture—a thread (to say the least) that can be traced throughout more than five hundred years of North American history. From at least Columbus forward, the issue has always been there, whether in the foreground or the background.

I’m saddened by the reality that it’s still here. We haven’t yet risen to the challenge, put racial discrimination behind us once and for all, fully embraced the ideal of equality, and fully devoted ourselves to the realization of King’s dream for his children: “a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” Alas, more than a half-century since King was assassinated, we’re still not there yet.

Not so long ago, I was mighty optimistic. President George W. Bush appointed our nation’s first black Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and second black National Security Advisor, Condoleza Rice. (Can you name the first? It was Colin Powell, appointed by President Reagan). The traditional “country club sports” saw Tiger Woods take the PGA by storm, and Venus and Serena Williams blaze trails in women’s tennis as Arthur Ashe had on the men’s tour a few decades earlier. And then, in 2008, the nation elected its first African American president, Barack Obama. It felt, at least to me, like more than just a milestone. It felt like a turning point.

**Over...**

But a lot has happened in recent years—too much to recount here. While the horrific weekend in Charlottesville, Virginia two years ago this month may be the most obvious example, there are numerous others. Many of the things being said and done in the public square today are things that I thought we had relegated to the dustbin of history. I was wrong. Racism—overt, unabashed, unapologetic racism—is very much alive right here in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Just the other day, I ran across a headline that absolutely flabbergasted me. Atop an August 9 article by Wheaton College professor Esau McCaulley in *Christianity Today* appeared these words:

Preaching Against Racism Is Not  
a Distraction from the Gospel

I applaud the author for penning this piece. But why, in the 21st century, should such a piece even be needed? Why does a professor need to write such words of encouragement to pastors? Why does anyone think racism is anything other than abhorrent to God? Why do any preachers think that condemning racism is “a distraction from the Gospel”? Why is it anything less than universally self-evident that racism is a form of sin? And why are people of faith—from pulpits and podiums and pews of all sorts—failing to speak as one, boldly proclaiming that we are all God’s children?

I feel the need to be abundantly clear. I believe that many of us, myself included, have within ourselves on some level a degree of racial bias. Personally, I’m ashamed to admit that about myself, but I believe it to be true. And yes, I believe that this degree of bias is a form of sin—something from which to repent, something to earnestly resist, something to strive against day by day.

But the acknowledgement of widespread latent racial bias does not in any way lead me to look upon acts of overt racism with ambivalence, acceptance, or resignation. In the case of Charlottesville, for example, I have never for even a single split-second believed that there were plenty of good people on both sides. If even that grim episode is considered to be ethically and morally foggy, then we are indeed adrift without a compass. I pray that it is not so.