

Day 3 Devotional

Lent is a time for self-reflection and repentance and the seeking of a more faithful way personally and as a church. It is a time to look for the hidden assumptions that shape our lives.

During the antebellum period, Savannah Presbytery had a remarkable group of white Presbyterians/Congregationalists who sought to do what was right in regard to slavery. They were known throughout the nation for their efforts not only for the “religious instruction of slaves” but also for their attempt to make slavery a more humane institution by insisting that slave owners provide their enslaved with good food, adequate clothing, adequate housing for families, time off on the weekends, etc. And they were paternalistic advocates for keeping slave families together. Charles Jones is the best known of these advocates, but many others joined him including Thomas and Eliza Clay.

Yet their good intentions went badly astray as they never challenged the fundamental oppression and violence of slavery. They ended up--by trying to make slavery more humane—supporting a deeply oppressive system that provided them with the comforts of life drawn from the sorrows and labors and very bodies of the enslaved. They were, I believe and have written elsewhere, seduced by the familiar, by their everyday life where whites had one place and blacks another. The familiar pattern of being served by the enslaved, of having the enslaved labor for them in rice and cotton fields, of having the enslaved do their every bidding, was deeply seductive and blinded them to the harsh realities of slavery. So when the Civil War came, they threw themselves body and soul into the fight for the Confederacy and the maintenance of slavery and its violence.

Our Lenten reflections could well focus on the familiar in our lives, the hidden assumptions and patterns of life that mark our day to day living. Self-reflection in Lent calls us to ask what is hidden in my life—and the life of the church—that needs to be identified and acknowledged as unworthy of the high calling of Christian discipleship, as unworthy of those who in gratitude look to Jesus as the light that shines in the darkness, even the darkness of our lives, and discover that the darkness does not overcome his light. Repentance means, among other things, turning around, going in a new direction, and it is the gift of Lent that we are invited to explore the darkness in our lives and move toward the light that breaks into our familiar ways.

Erskine C. Clarke, Professor Emeritus, Columbia Theological Seminary

*Forgive our sins, O God!
And lead us to turn ourselves around and go in a new direction
As we seek the reconciliation and unity you have given us in Christ! Amen.*

Resource: Erskine C. Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005)