

Day 35 Devotion

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

...³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
...⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

...¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Psalm 51:1-12 (NRSV)

To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba

Lent invites me to consider again the realities of being a messy human trying to follow Jesus and stay in community with others who are also trying to follow in their own messiness. Telling the truth is holy work done by people like me who are not holy. As I consider the moment – the world writ large, my nation, my city, and my church – I am forced to recognize my limitations and partiality (both incomplete knowing and side taking). I'm not alone.

I sit here in Louisville, KY, writing this a few days before the one-year anniversary of Breonna Taylor's murder, in a community bracing for public vigils, protests and still waiting for justice. I live in a nation making a way after an unprecedented insurrection, where white nationalists stormed the US Capitol and sought to enact violence on those elected to serve while damaging the properties of the people. These same folks are slowly and surely being arrested all over the country after their unimpeded returns home, many surprised by consequences for their actions of January 6.

Here I sit in March 2021, as Tulsa (my hometown) prepares to mark 100 years since white mobs murdered at least 300 Black citizens, destroying homes and businesses in a late May massacre. These attacks destroyed the envied and successful Black Wall Street (Greenwood District) followed by the ransacking further with institutional/state violence through enacting new zoning laws, property injunctions, and other means to prevent survivors from rebuilding. Ashes everywhere. Brokenness everywhere. I am singing this old song, made new again, "Have mercy on me, ...according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy... cleanse me from my sin." The violence of these sins lies within me, today.

Psalm 51 asks readers to consider its occasion being the prophet Nathan's visit to King David after the Bathsheba incidents (in the wake of raping her, murdering her husband, marrying her and eventually the birth of their first living son, Solomon). David is a mess, as am I though our circumstances differ. David's legendary righteousness is not his cleanliness but is demonstrated in his turning to God and confessing, repenting, and receiving the Holy One's grace and mercy. I can hear a word for me stumbling in my brokenness and seeking a line to hold onto, a truth told, a reminder of the promise from my Creator who loves me. Holding onto the

promise of God's steadfast love and abundant mercy (even for me), in the aftermath of ever more failures. Tell the truth and change my heart and my actions.

I am reading Rachel Ricketts' new book *Do Better: Spiritual Activism for Fighting and Healing from White Supremacy* (New York: Atria Books, 2021). In plain speech, she offers a mirror to see the lie that works within us all. The longer I work toward grasping the sin of racism inside myself and in my church and everyone in it, the concept of original sin helps me. Born guilty, socialized into the violence of whiteness, inheritor of a narrative that twists and contorts my mind and heart to fit a story I entered, generations into, within systems and institutions built upon its lies keeping relationships broken, forming me to not see/hear intact hierarchies that harm everyone, though not equally so. I am a member of a presbytery and a congregation that claim an identity in [Matthew 25 initiative](#), with tasks of dismantling white supremacy and that work joins my ruminations and considerations.

How do I wake up to the steadfast love and mercy available to even me? Rachel Ricketts offers a vital piece – the inner work necessary to see myself more accurately (in relation to persons I am taught to see as Other), see the harm caused to me (and all), claim and work at the “soulcare” necessary to follow the Divine. Truth telling is required within and without. No amount of reading and understanding the ideas in my head will get me there without my action and heart work.

This Lent I extend to you an invitation to join me in the heart work of spiritual exercises to contest white supremacy within – let us be open to God's creating “clean hearts” and welcoming “new and right spirits” within us. The world needs us to do so. We need each other to do so. God creates each of us and extends mercy and love to us to make it possible. My messiness is no excuse. Ashy as I am and as we are, God can and does wash us clean (continuously). Follow at your peril but get yourself right. As I reach for the hand sanitizer (and the hand lotion) for the umpteenth time today, I appreciate the new [habits](#) that bring these lessons closer.

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Brother Jesus, we pray with the Psalmist, “create in me a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.”
Extend to us your ashy siblings, the love of our Divine Parent.

Prompt: What keeps you from exploring your ideas and actions that align with racial hierarchies and create harm in your relationships across difference? Breathe, be still and check in to how your body is giving you cues through your reactions. Connecting to your body, notice how it indicates when you are thinking or acting out of dominance and subordination. How does it feel? Remember this and notice when it happens.

RESOURCES:

Rachel Ricketts. *Do Better: Spiritual Activism for Fighting and Healing from White Supremacy* (New York: Atria Books, 2021)

Implicit Bias Training Module Series from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/implicit-bias-training/>

PCUSA Matthew 25 Initiative <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/>

