

We've Come A Long Way But the Journey Isn't Over – A Call for Resistance

Isaiah 64:1-4, 8-9 ; James 4:1-10

Last month we took on a passage in Revelations, this month a portion of James that is more about sin and judgement than we tend to do, but this month I want to invite us to lean into the text with some different eyes and approaches and to wrestle with some things in relationship with the text and the interpretation of the text within the Black prophetic tradition.

Cannot go on without acknowledging the challenges of this week.

The 2023 Black History Month theme is Black Resistance.

- Reimagining as Resistance (Creative practice and dreaming)
- Religion as Resistance (Short exploration of AME history and justice tradition)
- Relationship as Resistance (Sharing our humanity as a rejection of white supremacy)
- Rest as Resistance (Sabbath practice as rejection of exploitation and capitalism)

Exegesis

- We will unpack these texts of over the coming weeks but I want to lay out the bigger picture narratives to pay attention to in the coming weeks.
- The Bible is the story of a small group of people, constantly surrounded by larger and more powerful enemies who dare to believe that they are the children of God and that they have a destiny and purpose! This is also true of the New Testament church – the rag tag band of folks who believe that God is not just speaking new things to the people, but that God was willing to show up, in-person to give a new revelation.
- The books of James and Isaiah are both about people who believe God is calling them to be world transforming even though they are in the overwhelming minority. Both the passages we have are saying clearly – God wants to do a new thing, God is creating something new – and if you don't get down with the plan you are out of order
- This is the radical resistance to the status quo that we are called do first through the act of reimagining

What is Reimagining as Resistance?

1. Rejection of the notion that the system we have is the best we can do and an embrace of the radical possibilities of God.

It is not just a good thing but a part of our Christian duty to reject the idea that we have to settle for the status quo and to speak loudly and clearly that God not only desires but demands that we do better. This challenge is not just to external people but to each of us personally, to every congregation and to the church universal. If we look the same as the status quo, then we are in sin! (James makes this clear)

2. Invitation to dream and cultivate alternative narratives and visions of what could be We must call out what is wrong but we must also give a vision of what could be. That means we have to be able to see the radical possibilities and give voice to them so that others can imagine also. We have all been shaped by the system as it is, so this requires a renewing of our minds.

3. Mandate to experiment and live those possibilities into existence in the here and now!

This congregation was established to be about that reimagining. We are not here to create another congregation that has a slightly different flavor from the one down the road. We are not called to be the fiefdom of one charismatic pastor. We are called to reimagining as a form of resistance – resistance to a country rooted in white supremacy, resistance to a church and theological tradition that has been complicit in multiple forms of oppression and particularly around gender, sexuality and sexual orientation, resistance to traditionalism which chokes the move of the Holy Spirit. As we celebrate Black History Month and as we go into our retreat weekend, I implore all of you to be clear about who we are called to be as a congregation committed to reimagining. It is my hope that you have come to this community at this time because you believe that we can do better and you are committed to dreaming of and living into the radical possibilities of what church – a place where believers gather – can be.

1. How are you rejecting the status quo in your daily life? What concrete steps are you taking or do you feel called to take to make it clear to yourself and others that God wants better for us all?
2. What inspires you to dream and cultivate alternative narratives – what songs, scriptures, poems, visual images, practices, etc. open your heart to radical dreaming? Make a list of those items and make a plan to interact daily with at least one and/or to share with others.
3. Share one way that we are currently or could in the future experiment with new possibilities at New Roots. Make an outline or write a paragraph to capture your gratitude for what we are doing and/or your vision for what we could do so that you can share it with others first in your small group and then at the retreat.