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The 24th Sunday after Pentecost
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This past Wednesday, Michele and I went to the National Cathedral to listen to a panel discussion on the Confederate windows. Some of you know the history behind this discussion. Last year, when a young man who revered the Confederate flag and the racist mentality that can go along with it, massacred nine people at Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, many institutions were forced to face the question of how Confederate symbols are displayed and if it still makes sense to do so. The controversy was immediately felt in places like Columbia, South Carolina, where the Confederate flag had been on display since 1962. North Carolina activist, Bree Newsome, climbed the flag pole and took it down¹. Later, the legislature voted to officially remove it.

The National Cathedral has two windows that portray Confederate heroes, Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee. Both windows also contained the Confederate flag. The governing body of the Cathedral decided to remove the flags (they have been replaced by colored glass) but has not decided what to do with the two men. The inscription below Lee's window reads, "a Christian soldier without fear and without reproach." Under Jackson's window we learn that "he walked humbly before his Creator whose word was his guide."²

On the panel were John Coski, a historian at the American Civil War Museum; Rex Ellis, associate director of curatorial affairs at the National Museum of African American History and Culture; and Kelly Brown Douglas, canon theologian at the Cathedral and professor at Goucher

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/29/why-bree-newsome-took-down-the-confederate-flag-in-s-c-i-refuse-to-be-ruled-by-fear/>

² <http://religionnews.com/2016/10/27/national-cathedral-faces-calls-to-remove-windows-with-confederate-generals/>

college. All of the panelists dove deep in to the history and its implications. They were not just talking about the history of the Civil War, but also the period of history spanning the end of Reconstruction to the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement when strangely enough it was the losing side of a war, the south, that managed to control the narrative and filtered history through the rosy prism of "The Lost Cause". Films such as *Gone With the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation* helped soften the South's image to a nation eager to move on from bloody struggle to one United States. We were one country, but at a price. African American voices were left out of this new narrative.

Stained glass windows are not just stained glass windows reminded Dr. Douglas. In their earliest iterations, they taught the illiterate about the Bible. Stained glass windows are how the poor learned the stories of Abraham, Moses, Mary, Jesus, and Paul. They are still how we tell our story; they are still how we communicate what it is to be a saint, what, to us, is holy.

After the panel discussion there was a time for questions from the audience. The mood was tense. Some were passionately against the windows (confederate flags or not). "This is insulting" shouted one man as John Coski attempted to explain the iconic nature of Lee and Jackson. Others were equally passionate that the windows should stay. We can't just throw out history, even if it's ugly painful history, argued some. If we get rid of this symbol, what's next?

Kelly Brown Douglas spoke of "the pit that divides us—a racial pit." If people just jump over it, by either removing or keeping the windows without talking and listening to one another, it's "cheap grace." Only through getting dirty and grappling with these issues in their complexity, she says, can lead to "just reconciliation."³

³ http://dcist.com/2016/10/national_cathedral_1.php

About a month ago, we read a gospel story about a pit, a chasm that might separate us, one from another.⁴ In the context in which Jesus told this story, the pit separated a rich man and the poor beggar, Lazarus. In life, the rich man had ignored the pit; in death it became permanent. Worrisomely, it did not seem like anything could bridge it. The weekend we read that story was the same weekend that the new Museum of African American History and Culture opened. It was also after a week when two more prominent cases of black men killed by police officers were reminding us of the racial pit that divides us.⁵

In the story we heard a month ago, Jesus was not very encouraging. The chasm or pit was there and it wasn't going anywhere. But whether you have noticed it or not, we have been moving through a particular section of the Gospel of Luke where Jesus has a lot to say about the rich and powerful and what they can do to turn their lives around. And this final story before the dark final turn to Jerusalem is actually pretty hopeful.

First of all, it helps to know that, as usual, we've been given a shorter version of the story. In the earlier story, just before Jesus enters Jericho (where Zacchaeus lives) Jesus heals a blind beggar who is shouting over the crowd to get his attention. Even though everyone is trying to shush this loud beggar, Jesus "stands still", listens, and has the man brought to him. The beggar asks for healing and Jesus cures his blindness. The no longer blind beggar rejoices and follows Jesus into the city.⁶

Now, to where our story begins. Zacchaeus lives in Jericho. He is the chief tax collector. In Michele's sermon last week, she talked about tax collectors. These were not your friendly IRS

⁴ Luke 16: 19-31

⁵ Terence Crutcher, killed in Tulsa, Oklahoma, September 16, 2016; Keith Lamont Scott, killed in Charlotte, North Carolina, September 20, 2016

⁶ Luke 18:35-43

agents. These were traitors; collaborators. They were Jews who worked for Rome and enriched themselves off of the populace. Really bad guys, in other words. When Luke says that Zacchaeus is a tax collector, he's not just telling us an interesting factoid about this particular gospel character. Tax collectors are not just tax collectors; they are symbols of everything that had gone wrong for Israel, the oppression of the Roman Empire and the rot at the heart of Israel.

The action in this story happens incredibly rapidly. Zacchaeus, this hated tax collector (the chief tax collector, so doubly hated), is curious about Jesus. He can't see him, so he goes to the top of a tall tree and looks down at the crowd. Jesus calls him down and insists on being invited to dinner.

Jesus demands hospitality and Zacchaeus agrees. This is amazing, especially since hospitality doesn't just mean hanging out with Jesus but the odd assortment of people that go along with him.

The crowd grumbles. And here something interesting happens. Our text says that "Zacchaeus stood there", but what the Greek says is that Zacchaeus "stood still".⁷ He stood still, the exact phrase used to describe Jesus when he hears the cries of the blind beggar. He stood still. He took a moment to listen to the resentment and the anger. Because remember that Zacchaeus has been causing real harm.

Zacchaeus realizes that more than hospitality, more than an eagerness to encounter Jesus will be required. Unlike all the various powerful and rich people who have gone before in Luke's gospel so far, Zacchaeus changes his ways. He makes restitution.

⁷ *Statheis*, Luke 18:40 & Luke 19:8

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, there was a great chasm, a pit. In this story, once again, a rich man, Zacchaeus is juxtaposed with a poor one, the blind beggar. But this time, Zacchaeus goes down into the pit. He leaves his perch and goes down into the messiness and grime of the crowd and faces the consequences. Crossing through the pit will require that he give up something, giving up a lot. But he gets connection with something that has been beyond his grasp.

We, the Episcopal Church, are faced with a pit, deep and broad. For the sake of white unity, we were silent for too long about racial injustice. We let our National Cathedral be a place where lies are told and truth is silenced. You might think that this issue of windows has nothing to do with you or that it's just about windows; let's do something practically helpful about our racial divide. But these windows, these symbols tell the truth about our hearts, which are what need the changing and healing. Did you know that when South Carolina took down its flag, it did so with the promise to fund \$3.6 million in new renovations to the museum where it would be displayed?⁸ Flags are not just flags.

Symbols are important, because symbols participate in the things to which they point to. We know this from experience: bread is not just bread; wine is not just wine; water is not just water. When these things are used symbolically they become new life; forgiveness; and love.

The story of Zacchaeus is not just a story; it is an action plan for transformation. Stand still; listen to those who have been drowned out. "I'm trying hard to be objective," said Rex Ellis of the National Museum of African American History and Culture to John Coski of the Museum

⁸ <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article51252490.html>

of the Confederacy who was describing the meaning of Confederate symbols to whites. “But I remember so much pain. When you talk about pride, I remember violence. When you talk about liberty and justice, I remember all of this.” The whole conversation is really good and I commend it to you – it’s on Youtube⁹. There will also be more to come.

Come down, stand still, listen, and get down in the pit. There is no way over the chasm; we can only go through it.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ynm279U9b-A>