

TITLE: When Fake News Produces Strange Fruit
SCRIPTURE TEXT: Genesis 9:18-27

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND APPRECIATION TO CHAPEL HILL UCC HOST

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- And for the 50 plus sisters and brothers present at Saturday's retreat as I unveiled a segment of a new curriculum Sacred Conversations to End Racism.

GREETINGS FROM THE UCC NATIONAL OFFICE

- President and General Minister John Dorhauer
- Executive Minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries Rev. Traci Blackmon
- Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries and Global Ministries

The floodwaters recede and Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth are the first to leave the boat. Ham's descendants become the nation of Canaan. Noah being a man of the soil plants a vineyard. After the harvest he drank some of the wine and became drunk. In his drunken state he takes off his clothes and lay naked in his tent. Ham goes in to check on his father and sees him lying uncovered. He then proceeds to tell his brothers, Shem and Japheth that Noah was drunk and naked. Shem and Japheth go into to the tent to cover Noah's naked body by placing a garment over him but never looking at their father's nakedness. When Noah finds out Ham has seen him drunk and naked, he proceeds to curse his third son. He then uses the Lord's name to curse Ham and his descendants as subservient to Shem and Japheth.

W.E.B. Du Bois, American sociologist, historian, and civil rights activists accurately named the racial crisis of the twentieth century, "*the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.*" Du Bois engages the questions of race, racial domination and racial exploitation in his 1903 classic book, The Souls of Black Folks. Du Bois identified racism as a national problem, but also recognized that categorizing humans based on race was a global bio-social construction and category. Du Bois named the crisis correctly. Our nation is facing an even more urgent crisis in the twenty-first century.

Reclaiming God's Love and Justice

Scripture teaches us that God's love for humanity remains foundational to the mission vision and purpose of reconciliation with God and neighbor. The greatest commandment in the Scripture is: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.* [Mt 22:37]. Jesus continues teaching the command with, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" [Mt 22:38] The Scripture is an ancient reminder to us in the twenty-first century that love is a priority within the Christian community when we believe in and follow Jesus.

PRAYER

I don't know about you, but the last year has been emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausting. Emotional, physical, and spiritual because I, and many of my friends, family, and colleagues did not want to see the Obamas leave the White House ever!! That was unrealistic so we moved on to pray for the country to

- Elect someone who would bring an open heart, and intellectual capacity to deal with complex national and global issues,
- We were hopeful for someone with foreign relations experience that could navigate critical and thoughtful diplomacy, fair and just policies, and a humble but tough spirit that could restore peace and not war, a strong economy and employment for its citizens, and a willingness to hear the voices of poor people, the exploited and marginalized

We listened to speeches and debates expecting to hear strategies of inclusion for creating policies that would stop the killing of black and brown Americans who are under constant surveillance. We hoped for a candidate who would

demand policy changes ending the slaughter of black and brown children, fathers, sons, daughters and mothers by police officers who shot first and never assume the innocence or humanity of black life.

Oh yes, we had high expectations that DACA would remain fully funded and in place for decades to come; the undocumented would not be deported, threatened, and torn away from their families by ICE; and the legality of gay marriage would be protected, and the LGBTQ community would not be targeted, but would be able to live freely in the sexual identity of their choosing.

However, after the November 2016 election results I knew the doors of white nationalism, patriotism, confederacy, supremacy, and the strong desire to return to a long dead nostalgia for the good old days was going to expose the racist heart of America – Again.

2017 was a rough year. The roots of racism and xenophobia continue to run deep in the veins of those who want to make America the bastion of white supremacy. Racism is a disease. It is a chronic destructive force that overtakes the heart, mind, and souls of humans. People who intend on being agents of racism never stop plotting and planning. I wish Americans would stop being in awe and shock; because as long as they – we, live in denial, it will live on.

Today's text has lessons for us to ponder and revisit over and over again as people of faith who claim to love God with all of our mind, soul, and strength. The first lesson leads us to an understanding of how the Bible was used to plant the seeds that resulted in millions of lives lost because of deep and abiding lies and myths created to justify excessive greed. The men and women suffering from 'god' complexes (little g) serve, worship and idolize money and wealth accumulation, they thrive on the theft of other people's land, supported genocide, and the heinous brutality of chattel slavery.

Who is my neighbor? And why should we love our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps it's a matter of knowing what love is. We've been gripped by fear and silence for so long that our hearts no longer beat with resistance, courage, and that strong abiding radical love of God.

Jesus provides the standards and theological ethic that makes Love possible AGAIN.

I tend to ask more questions and dig for some answers when it comes to why humans prefer comfort in lies, myths, and profit over people. Like...

1. What makes racism so hard for whites, and others who protect whiteness, to see?
 - a. How has race shaped your life? This is a hard question for whites to answer. It may be hard for other cultures to answer if one is afraid of being accused of being a racist. For other cultures, including people of African descent, fear of being seen as a noncompliant American or harbored feelings of guilt for not protecting "white space".
 - b. It's personal because no one wants to feel guilty and ashamed of what was done to create the conditions that names and puts a face on oppression and race hatred. It's guilt by association that gives birth to progressive liberalism in whites, because they champion the virtues of working towards anti-racism, but continue to hold space within the "privilege lane", unwilling to give up power and relinquish the ideas and language that keeps them "dominant" and others "minorities".
 - c. It's even more troubling when you ask Christians this question, "Do you love Jesus?", "Do you love all of your neighbors?" The answers will certainly be, "Yes, I am a Christian. I love Jesus!". Great answer, but loving Jesus means whiteness gets deconstructed and decentralized as a normative way of life.
 - d. If you claim to be a progressive liberal then critical thinking is required. Why? Because this means you will challenge others when you see or hear that race has dehumanized and caused people of color to suffer at the expense of white comfort. You will not negate internalized racist tendencies, but embrace them and work through them in dialogue with someone who will help you process what you're feeling. This also means, you will not seek out people of color to do the heavy lifting of making you feel better about yourself because you want to be seen as less racist externally. TAKE responsibility for reading, thinking, and being in spaces as a learner-listener.

e. What happens when white defense systems are triggered? Do you retreat, deny, defend and vow to remain silent? Or do you dig in and do the hard work of uncovering your biases, prejudices, and feelings of superiority when it's convenient in private, all-white spaces?

f. Individualism is a great word, but it only works for those who see themselves as a construction of a false narrative; "the dominant group."

Community means I am invested in the wellbeing of every person I encounter regardless of who they are. My 'I' becomes "we", "us", and "our" community.

Racism will not disappear, because those who hold power due to their wealth—local, national, and globally, control natural and material resources, (including occupying and possessing the land of others) and who control militarism and weapons, are not about to give those up for the good of humanity.

GENESIS 9:18-27 NTRANSITION

When Noah finds out Ham has seen him drunk and naked, he proceeds to curse his third son. He then uses the Lord's name to curse Ham and his descendants as subservient to Shem and Japheth.

As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

FAKE NEWS PRODUCES STRANGE FRUIT

Christian religious hierarchy during the Reformation posed two questions:

1. Do Blacks and Indians have souls?
2. Are Blacks and Indians human?

The Catholic Church said, "Yes, they have souls and they are human. Enslave them but don't kill them without reason."

Protestant Church said, "No, they are not human and they don't have souls. They can be captured, owned, and killed at will. They exist for the purpose of labor like a horse or cow."

Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop***

The song originated in response to a dark episode in Indiana history.

"Strange Fruit" was written by American Communist Party activist and Bronx school teacher Abel Meeropol after viewing a sickening photograph of a notorious 1930 double lynching of teenagers Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith that occurred in Marion, Indiana. Meeropol was said to have been haunted by the image for days and composed the work as condemnation of American racism.

**FINAL TRANSITION AND CLOSING
FAKE NEWS DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD
LOVE HAS THE LAST WORD**

"Racism is a philosophy based on contempt for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the center of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission." (MLK, Jr.)

The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Other violations against our neighbors include segregation tactics, military-style violence by law enforcement in people of color communities, and complicit silence when people of color are denied justice in the courts. Our neighbors are violated when people who claim faith in a loving God act against the love of God when innocent women, men, and children are assaulted, violated, murdered, and then abandoned, ignored, and told to get over their pain and loss.

Our complicit silence and inaction separates us further from communion with God when hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters leave our neighbors without food, power, and a means to secure their bodies, as they try to survive tragedy and the deaths of loved ones. The church and those who profess faith in Christ keep violating the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And perhaps therein lies the problem, we don't know what love is and therefore violate our own souls with false spirituality, false piety, and slanderous worship practices.

For Jesus, love of neighbor is an essential aspect of his own theology. Love for neighbor is not optional. Numerous scriptures provide Jesus' theological understanding that love for others is most clear and illuminates one's love for God.

When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

On Saturday, August 12, 2017 over 300 clergy from around the country traveled to Charlottesville, VA in support of local pastors prepared to resist racism and hate. A Unite the Right rally, which included ALT-Right supporters and white nationalists came to Charlottesville angered at the State's decision to remove a confederate statue of Robert E. Lee. They also came with the intent to recruit, disrupt, and use violence against people in opposition to their messages of hate and racism.

Brittany Caine-Conley, a UCC minister in discernment, and Rev. Seth Wispelway, a United Church of Christ (UCC) pastor, mobilized more than 80 local clergy and sent out a national call for 1,000 clergy to join in solidarity, receive anti-violence training, and march together against the Unite the Right supporters. Prior to August 12, their group [Congregate Charlottesville](#), helped local clergy and community organizers participate in civil disobedience and nonviolence training.

Rev. Traci Blackmon, UCC Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries led the Saturday morning prayer service. UCC pastors and clergy from other denominational and faith traditions departed the church building linked arm to arm wearing their vestments, praying and singing hymns. Direct action is a model of the UCC and its congregations are encouraged to engage and resist messages and actions of hatred, intolerance, and violence.

THIS IS LOVE! A CALL TO ACTION, FAITH SHOWS UP TO STAND DOWN AND STARE INTO FACES WHO DO NOT KNOW LOVE FOR ALL HUMANKIND. CHAPEL HILL.

Chapel Hill UCC Mission

You claim to be a community of faith and fellowship

*bound together in the love of God,
guided by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ,
united in worship.*

You say you covenant with God and one with another

*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
being vulnerable to the Spirit's transforming presence in our life*

to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

*nurturing and supporting one another
forgiving and living as forgiven
respecting all the traditions from which we come
accepting the gifts that each brings
being a community of caring as well as justice*

to equip ourselves for God's service

*being faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us
praying for the Spirit's guidance
studying scripture and tradition
acting upon God's new calling of us*

to be the body of Christ, a disciple, God's servant in our world

*helping those who suffer
treating all God's creation with respect
bridging that which separates God's family
challenging oppression and injustice
living courageously as one of God's own*

to act upon Christ's resurrection

*being a community of hope
knowing that no love is lost and trusting that the future is God's.*

**CHAPEL HILL BE THE CHURCH AFTER CHURCH
RESIST FAKE NEWS, DO NOT LET YOUR SILENCE BE THE RESULT OF MORE STRANGE FRUIT.
CHAPEL HILL UCC YOU CAN DISMANTLE RACISM. GOD IS WATCHING AND STILL SPEAKING
... WONT YOU ANSWER THE CALL?**

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being a community of caring as well as justice*

to equip ourselves for God's service

*being faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us
praying for the Spirit's guidance
studying scripture and tradition
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to be the body of Christ, a disciple, God's servant in our world

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**CHAPEL HILL BE THE CHURCH AFTER CHURCH
RESIST FAKE NEWS, DO NOT LET YOUR SILENCE BE THE RESULT OF MORE STRANGE FRUIT.
CHAPEL HILL UCC YOU CAN DISMANTLE RACISM. GOD IS WATCHING AND STILL SPEAKING
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- President and General Minister John Dorhauer
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The floodwaters recede and Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth are the first to leave the boat. Ham's descendants become the nation of Canaan. Noah being a man of the soil plants a vineyard. After the harvest he drank some of the wine and became drunk. In his drunken state he takes off his clothes and lay naked in his tent. Ham goes in to check on his father and sees him lying uncovered. He then proceeds to tell his brothers, Shem and Japheth that Noah was drunk and naked. Shem and Japheth go into to the tent to cover Noah's naked body by placing a garment over him but never looking at their father's nakedness. When Noah finds out Ham has seen him drunk and naked, he proceeds to curse his third son. He then uses the Lord's name to curse Ham and his descendants as subservient to Shem and Japheth.

W.E.B. Du Bois, American sociologist, historian, and civil rights activists accurately named the racial crisis of the twentieth century, "*the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.*" Du Bois engages the questions of race, racial domination and racial exploitation in his 1903 classic book, The Souls of Black Folks. Du Bois identified racism as a national problem, but also recognized that categorizing humans based on race was a global bio-social construction and category. Du Bois named the crisis correctly. Our nation is facing an even more urgent crisis in the twenty-first century.

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Scripture teaches us that God's love for humanity remains foundational to the mission vision and purpose of reconciliation with God and neighbor. The greatest commandment in the Scripture is: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.* [Mt 22:37]. Jesus continues teaching the command with, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" [Mt 22:38] The Scripture is an ancient reminder to us in the twenty-first century that love is a priority within the Christian community when we believe in and follow Jesus.

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I don't know about you, but the last year has been emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausting. Emotional, physical, and spiritual because I, and many of my friends, family, and colleagues did not want to see the Obamas leave the White House ever!! That was unrealistic so we moved on to pray for the country to

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2017 was a rough year. The roots of racism and xenophobia continue to run deep in the veins of those who want to make America the bastion of white supremacy. Racism is a disease. It is a chronic destructive force that overtakes the heart, mind, and souls of humans. People who intend on being agents of racism never stop plotting and planning. I wish Americans would stop being in awe and shock; because as long as they – we, live in denial, it will live on.

Today's text has lessons for us to ponder and revisit over and over again as people of faith who claim to love God with all of our mind, soul, and strength. The first lesson leads us to an understanding of how the Bible was used to plant the seeds that resulted in millions of lives lost because of deep and abiding lies and myths created to justify excessive greed. The men and women suffering from 'god' complexes (little g) serve, worship and idolize money and wealth accumulation, they thrive on the theft of other people's land, supported genocide, and the heinous brutality of chattel slavery.

Who is my neighbor? And why should we love our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps it's a matter of knowing what love is. We've been gripped by fear and silence for so long that our hearts no longer beat with resistance, courage, and that strong abiding radical love of God.

Jesus provides the standards and theological ethic that makes Love possible AGAIN.

I tend to ask more questions and dig for some answers when it comes to why humans prefer comfort in lies, myths, and profit over people. Like...

1. What makes racism so hard for whites, and others who protect whiteness, to see?
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As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

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Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

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***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
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Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

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When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

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THIS IS LOVE! A CALL TO ACTION, FAITH SHOWS UP TO STAND DOWN AND STARE INTO FACES WHO DO NOT KNOW LOVE FOR ALL HUMANKIND. CHAPEL HILL.

Chapel Hill UCC Mission

You claim to be a community of faith and fellowship

*bound together in the love of God,
guided by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ,
united in worship.*

You say you covenant with God and one with another

*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
being vulnerable to the Spirit's transforming presence in our life*

to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

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Scripture teaches us that God's love for humanity remains foundational to the mission vision and purpose of reconciliation with God and neighbor. The greatest commandment in the Scripture is: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.* [Mt 22:37]. Jesus continues teaching the command with, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" [Mt 22:38] The Scripture is an ancient reminder to us in the twenty-first century that love is a priority within the Christian community when we believe in and follow Jesus.

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Today's text has lessons for us to ponder and revisit over and over again as people of faith who claim to love God with all of our mind, soul, and strength. The first lesson leads us to an understanding of how the Bible was used to plant the seeds that resulted in millions of lives lost because of deep and abiding lies and myths created to justify excessive greed. The men and women suffering from 'god' complexes (little g) serve, worship and idolize money and wealth accumulation, they thrive on the theft of other people's land, supported genocide, and the heinous brutality of chattel slavery.

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1. What makes racism so hard for whites, and others who protect whiteness, to see?
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However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

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The Catholic Church said, “Yes, they have souls and they are human. Enslave them but don't kill them without reason.”

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Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

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"Strange Fruit" was written by American Communist Party activist and Bronx school teacher Abel Meeropol after viewing a sickening photograph of a notorious 1930 double lynching of teenagers Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith that occurred in Marion, Indiana. Meeropol was said to have been haunted by the image for days and composed the work as condemnation of American racism.

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The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

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Our complicit silence and inaction separates us further from communion with God when hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters leave our neighbors without food, power, and a means to secure their bodies, as they try to survive tragedy and the deaths of loved ones. The church and those who profess faith in Christ keep violating the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And perhaps therein lies the problem, we don't know what love is and therefore violate our own souls with false spirituality, false piety, and slanderous worship practices.

For Jesus, love of neighbor is an essential aspect of his own theology. Love for neighbor is not optional. Numerous scriptures provide Jesus' theological understanding that love for others is most clear and illuminates one's love for God.

When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

On Saturday, August 12, 2017 over 300 clergy from around the country traveled to Charlottesville, VA in support of local pastors prepared to resist racism and hate. A Unite the Right rally, which included ALT-Right supporters and white nationalists came to Charlottesville angered at the State's decision to remove a confederate statue of Robert E. Lee. They also came with the intent to recruit, disrupt, and use violence against people in opposition to their messages of hate and racism.

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As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

FAKE NEWS PRODUCES STRANGE FRUIT

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Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

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Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

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The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Other violations against our neighbors include segregation tactics, military-style violence by law enforcement in people of color communities, and complicit silence when people of color are denied justice in the courts. Our neighbors are violated when people who claim faith in a loving God act against the love of God when innocent women, men, and children are assaulted, violated, murdered, and then abandoned, ignored, and told to get over their pain and loss.

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Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

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*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
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to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

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to equip ourselves for God's service

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 - c. It's even more troubling when you ask Christians this question, "Do you love Jesus?", "Do you love all of your neighbors?" The answers will certainly be, "Yes, I am a Christian. I love Jesus!". Great answer, but loving Jesus means whiteness gets deconstructed and decentralized as a normative way of life.
 - d. If you claim to be a progressive liberal then critical thinking is required. Why? Because this means you will challenge others when you see or hear that race has dehumanized and caused people of color to suffer at the expense of white comfort. You will not negate internalized racist tendencies, but embrace them and work through them in dialogue with someone who will help you process what you're feeling. This also means, you will not seek out people of color to do the heavy lifting of making you feel better about yourself because you want to be seen as less racist externally. TAKE responsibility for reading, thinking, and being in spaces as a learner-listener.

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However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

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Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop***

The song originated in response to a dark episode in Indiana history.

"Strange Fruit" was written by American Communist Party activist and Bronx school teacher Abel Meeropol after viewing a sickening photograph of a notorious 1930 double lynching of teenagers Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith that occurred in Marion, Indiana. Meeropol was said to have been haunted by the image for days and composed the work as condemnation of American racism.

**FINAL TRANSITION AND CLOSING
FAKE NEWS DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD
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STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop***

The song originated in response to a dark episode in Indiana history.

"Strange Fruit" was written by American Communist Party activist and Bronx school teacher Abel Meeropol after viewing a sickening photograph of a notorious 1930 double lynching of teenagers Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith that occurred in Marion, Indiana. Meeropol was said to have been haunted by the image for days and composed the work as condemnation of American racism.

**FINAL TRANSITION AND CLOSING
FAKE NEWS DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD
LOVE HAS THE LAST WORD**

"Racism is a philosophy based on contempt for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the center of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission." (MLK, Jr.)

The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Other violations against our neighbors include segregation tactics, military-style violence by law enforcement in people of color communities, and complicit silence when people of color are denied justice in the courts. Our neighbors are violated when people who claim faith in a loving God act against the love of God when innocent women, men, and children are assaulted, violated, murdered, and then abandoned, ignored, and told to get over their pain and loss.

Our complicit silence and inaction separates us further from communion with God when hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters leave our neighbors without food, power, and a means to secure their bodies, as they try to survive tragedy and the deaths of loved ones. The church and those who profess faith in Christ keep violating the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And perhaps therein lies the problem, we don't know what love is and therefore violate our own souls with false spirituality, false piety, and slanderous worship practices.

For Jesus, love of neighbor is an essential aspect of his own theology. Love for neighbor is not optional. Numerous scriptures provide Jesus' theological understanding that love for others is most clear and illuminates one's love for God.

When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

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You claim to be a community of faith and fellowship

*bound together in the love of God,
guided by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ,
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You say you covenant with God and one with another

*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
being vulnerable to the Spirit's transforming presence in our life*

to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

*nurturing and supporting one another
forgiving and living as forgiven
respecting all the traditions from which we come
accepting the gifts that each brings
being a community of caring as well as justice*

to equip ourselves for God's service

*being faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us
praying for the Spirit's guidance
studying scripture and tradition
acting upon God's new calling of us*

to be the body of Christ, a disciple, God's servant in our world

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treating all God's creation with respect
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challenging oppression and injustice
living courageously as one of God's own*

to act upon Christ's resurrection

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knowing that no love is lost and trusting that the future is God's.*

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Scripture teaches us that God's love for humanity remains foundational to the mission vision and purpose of reconciliation with God and neighbor. The greatest commandment in the Scripture is: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.* [Mt 22:37]. Jesus continues teaching the command with, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" [Mt 22:38] The Scripture is an ancient reminder to us in the twenty-first century that love is a priority within the Christian community when we believe in and follow Jesus.

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Who is my neighbor? And why should we love our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps it's a matter of knowing what love is. We've been gripped by fear and silence for so long that our hearts no longer beat with resistance, courage, and that strong abiding radical love of God.

Jesus provides the standards and theological ethic that makes Love possible AGAIN.

I tend to ask more questions and dig for some answers when it comes to why humans prefer comfort in lies, myths, and profit over people. Like...

1. What makes racism so hard for whites, and others who protect whiteness, to see?
 - a. How has race shaped your life? This is a hard question for whites to answer. It may be hard for other cultures to answer if one is afraid of being accused of being a racist. For other cultures, including people of African descent, fear of being seen as a noncompliant American or harbored feelings of guilt for not protecting "white space".
 - b. It's personal because no one wants to feel guilty and ashamed of what was done to create the conditions that names and puts a face on oppression and race hatred. It's guilt by association that gives birth to progressive liberalism in whites, because they champion the virtues of working towards anti-racism, but continue to hold space within the "privilege lane", unwilling to give up power and relinquish the ideas and language that keeps them "dominant" and others "minorities".
 - c. It's even more troubling when you ask Christians this question, "Do you love Jesus?", "Do you love all of your neighbors?" The answers will certainly be, "Yes, I am a Christian. I love Jesus!". Great answer, but loving Jesus means whiteness gets deconstructed and decentralized as a normative way of life.
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GENESIS 9:18-27 NTRANSITION

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As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

FAKE NEWS PRODUCES STRANGE FRUIT

Christian religious hierarchy during the Reformation posed two questions:

1. Do Blacks and Indians have souls?
2. Are Blacks and Indians human?

The Catholic Church said, "Yes, they have souls and they are human. Enslave them but don't kill them without reason."

Protestant Church said, "No, they are not human and they don't have souls. They can be captured, owned, and killed at will. They exist for the purpose of labor like a horse or cow."

Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

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Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop***

The song originated in response to a dark episode in Indiana history.

"Strange Fruit" was written by American Communist Party activist and Bronx school teacher Abel Meeropol after viewing a sickening photograph of a notorious 1930 double lynching of teenagers Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith that occurred in Marion, Indiana. Meeropol was said to have been haunted by the image for days and composed the work as condemnation of American racism.

**FINAL TRANSITION AND CLOSING
FAKE NEWS DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD
LOVE HAS THE LAST WORD**

"Racism is a philosophy based on contempt for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the center of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission." (MLK, Jr.)

The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Other violations against our neighbors include segregation tactics, military-style violence by law enforcement in people of color communities, and complicit silence when people of color are denied justice in the courts. Our neighbors are violated when people who claim faith in a loving God act against the love of God when innocent women, men, and children are assaulted, violated, murdered, and then abandoned, ignored, and told to get over their pain and loss.

Our complicit silence and inaction separates us further from communion with God when hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters leave our neighbors without food, power, and a means to secure their bodies, as they try to survive tragedy and the deaths of loved ones. The church and those who profess faith in Christ keep violating the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And perhaps therein lies the problem, we don't know what love is and therefore violate our own souls with false spirituality, false piety, and slanderous worship practices.

For Jesus, love of neighbor is an essential aspect of his own theology. Love for neighbor is not optional. Numerous scriptures provide Jesus' theological understanding that love for others is most clear and illuminates one's love for God.

When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

On Saturday, August 12, 2017 over 300 clergy from around the country traveled to Charlottesville, VA in support of local pastors prepared to resist racism and hate. A Unite the Right rally, which included ALT-Right supporters and white nationalists came to Charlottesville angered at the State's decision to remove a confederate statue of Robert E. Lee. They also came with the intent to recruit, disrupt, and use violence against people in opposition to their messages of hate and racism.

Brittany Caine-Conley, a UCC minister in discernment, and Rev. Seth Wispelway, a United Church of Christ (UCC) pastor, mobilized more than 80 local clergy and sent out a national call for 1,000 clergy to join in solidarity, receive anti-violence training, and march together against the Unite the Right supporters. Prior to August 12, their group [Congregate Charlottesville](#), helped local clergy and community organizers participate in civil disobedience and nonviolence training.

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You claim to be a community of faith and fellowship

*bound together in the love of God,
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united in worship.*

You say you covenant with God and one with another

*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
being vulnerable to the Spirit's transforming presence in our life*

to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

*nurturing and supporting one another
forgiving and living as forgiven
respecting all the traditions from which we come
accepting the gifts that each brings
being a community of caring as well as justice*

to equip ourselves for God's service

*being faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us
praying for the Spirit's guidance
studying scripture and tradition
acting upon God's new calling of us*

to be the body of Christ, a disciple, God's servant in our world

*helping those who suffer
treating all God's creation with respect
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challenging oppression and injustice
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to act upon Christ's resurrection

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Scripture teaches us that God's love for humanity remains foundational to the mission vision and purpose of reconciliation with God and neighbor. The greatest commandment in the Scripture is: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.* [Mt 22:37]. Jesus continues teaching the command with, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" [Mt 22:38] The Scripture is an ancient reminder to us in the twenty-first century that love is a priority within the Christian community when we believe in and follow Jesus.

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2017 was a rough year. The roots of racism and xenophobia continue to run deep in the veins of those who want to make America the bastion of white supremacy. Racism is a disease. It is a chronic destructive force that overtakes the heart, mind, and souls of humans. People who intend on being agents of racism never stop plotting and planning. I wish Americans would stop being in awe and shock; because as long as they – we, live in denial, it will live on.

Today's text has lessons for us to ponder and revisit over and over again as people of faith who claim to love God with all of our mind, soul, and strength. The first lesson leads us to an understanding of how the Bible was used to plant the seeds that resulted in millions of lives lost because of deep and abiding lies and myths created to justify excessive greed. The men and women suffering from 'god' complexes (little g) serve, worship and idolize money and wealth accumulation, they thrive on the theft of other people's land, supported genocide, and the heinous brutality of chattel slavery.

Who is my neighbor? And why should we love our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps it's a matter of knowing what love is. We've been gripped by fear and silence for so long that our hearts no longer beat with resistance, courage, and that strong abiding radical love of God.

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e. What happens when white defense systems are triggered? Do you retreat, deny, defend and vow to remain silent? Or do you dig in and do the hard work of uncovering your biases, prejudices, and feelings of superiority when it's convenient in private, all-white spaces?

f. Individualism is a great word, but it only works for those who see themselves as a construction of a false narrative; "the dominant group."

Community means I am invested in the wellbeing of every person I encounter regardless of who they are. My 'I' becomes "we", "us", and "our" community.

Racism will not disappear, because those who hold power due to their wealth—local, national, and globally, control natural and material resources, (including occupying and possessing the land of others) and who control militarism and weapons, are not about to give those up for the good of humanity.

GENESIS 9:18-27 NTRANSITION

When Noah finds out Ham has seen him drunk and naked, he proceeds to curse his third son. He then uses the Lord's name to curse Ham and his descendants as subservient to Shem and Japheth.

As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

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Racism will not disappear, because those who hold power due to their wealth—local, national, and globally, control natural and material resources, (including occupying and possessing the land of others) and who control militarism and weapons, are not about to give those up for the good of humanity.

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When Noah finds out Ham has seen him drunk and naked, he proceeds to curse his third son. He then uses the Lord's name to curse Ham and his descendants as subservient to Shem and Japheth.

As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

FAKE NEWS PRODUCES STRANGE FRUIT

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The Catholic Church said, "Yes, they have souls and they are human. Enslave them but don't kill them without reason."

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Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

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***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
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 FAKE NEWS DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD
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The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

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Our complicit silence and inaction separates us further from communion with God when hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters leave our neighbors without food, power, and a means to secure their bodies, as they try to survive tragedy and the deaths of loved ones. The church and those who profess faith in Christ keep violating the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And perhaps therein lies the problem, we don't know what love is and therefore violate our own souls with false spirituality, false piety, and slanderous worship practices.

For Jesus, love of neighbor is an essential aspect of his own theology. Love for neighbor is not optional. Numerous scriptures provide Jesus' theological understanding that love for others is most clear and illuminates one's love for God.

When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

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*bound together in the love of God,
guided by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ,
united in worship.*

You say you covenant with God and one with another

*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
being vulnerable to the Spirit's transforming presence in our life*

to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

*nurturing and supporting one another
forgiving and living as forgiven
respecting all the traditions from which we come
accepting the gifts that each brings
being a community of caring as well as justice*

to equip ourselves for God's service

*being faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us
praying for the Spirit's guidance
studying scripture and tradition
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to be the body of Christ, a disciple, God's servant in our world

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Scripture teaches us that God's love for humanity remains foundational to the mission vision and purpose of reconciliation with God and neighbor. The greatest commandment in the Scripture is: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.* [Mt 22:37]. Jesus continues teaching the command with, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" [Mt 22:38] The Scripture is an ancient reminder to us in the twenty-first century that love is a priority within the Christian community when we believe in and follow Jesus.

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 - c. It's even more troubling when you ask Christians this question, "Do you love Jesus?", "Do you love all of your neighbors?" The answers will certainly be, "Yes, I am a Christian. I love Jesus!". Great answer, but loving Jesus means whiteness gets deconstructed and decentralized as a normative way of life.
 - d. If you claim to be a progressive liberal then critical thinking is required. Why? Because this means you will challenge others when you see or hear that race has dehumanized and caused people of color to suffer at the expense of white comfort. You will not negate internalized racist tendencies, but embrace them and work through them in dialogue with someone who will help you process what you're feeling. This also means, you will not seek out people of color to do the heavy lifting of making you feel better about yourself because you want to be seen as less racist externally. TAKE responsibility for reading, thinking, and being in spaces as a learner-listener.

e. What happens when white defense systems are triggered? Do you retreat, deny, defend and vow to remain silent? Or do you dig in and do the hard work of uncovering your biases, prejudices, and feelings of superiority when it's convenient in private, all-white spaces?

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 - c. It's even more troubling when you ask Christians this question, "Do you love Jesus?", "Do you love all of your neighbors?" The answers will certainly be, "Yes, I am a Christian. I love Jesus!". Great answer, but loving Jesus means whiteness gets deconstructed and decentralized as a normative way of life.
 - d. If you claim to be a progressive liberal then critical thinking is required. Why? Because this means you will challenge others when you see or hear that race has dehumanized and caused people of color to suffer at the expense of white comfort. You will not negate internalized racist tendencies, but embrace them and work through them in dialogue with someone who will help you process what you're feeling. This also means, you will not seek out people of color to do the heavy lifting of making you feel better about yourself because you want to be seen as less racist externally. TAKE responsibility for reading, thinking, and being in spaces as a learner-listener.

e. What happens when white defense systems are triggered? Do you retreat, deny, defend and vow to remain silent? Or do you dig in and do the hard work of uncovering your biases, prejudices, and feelings of superiority when it's convenient in private, all-white spaces?

f. Individualism is a great word, but it only works for those who see themselves as a construction of a false narrative; "the dominant group."

Community means I am invested in the wellbeing of every person I encounter regardless of who they are. My 'I' becomes "we", "us", and "our" community.

Racism will not disappear, because those who hold power due to their wealth—local, national, and globally, control natural and material resources, (including occupying and possessing the land of others) and who control militarism and weapons, are not about to give those up for the good of humanity.

GENESIS 9:18-27 NTRANSITION

When Noah finds out Ham has seen him drunk and naked, he proceeds to curse his third son. He then uses the Lord's name to curse Ham and his descendants as subservient to Shem and Japheth.

As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

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Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

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***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
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Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
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The song originated in response to a dark episode in Indiana history.

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FAKE NEWS DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD
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The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

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Our complicit silence and inaction separates us further from communion with God when hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters leave our neighbors without food, power, and a means to secure their bodies, as they try to survive tragedy and the deaths of loved ones. The church and those who profess faith in Christ keep violating the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And perhaps therein lies the problem, we don't know what love is and therefore violate our own souls with false spirituality, false piety, and slanderous worship practices.

For Jesus, love of neighbor is an essential aspect of his own theology. Love for neighbor is not optional. Numerous scriptures provide Jesus' theological understanding that love for others is most clear and illuminates one's love for God.

When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

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*bound together in the love of God,
guided by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ,
united in worship.*

You say you covenant with God and one with another

*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
being vulnerable to the Spirit's transforming presence in our life*

to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

*nurturing and supporting one another
forgiving and living as forgiven
respecting all the traditions from which we come
accepting the gifts that each brings
being a community of caring as well as justice*

to equip ourselves for God's service

*being faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us
praying for the Spirit's guidance
studying scripture and tradition
acting upon God's new calling of us*

to be the body of Christ, a disciple, God's servant in our world

*helping those who suffer
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challenging oppression and injustice
living courageously as one of God's own*

to act upon Christ's resurrection

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knowing that no love is lost and trusting that the future is God's.*

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Scripture teaches us that God's love for humanity remains foundational to the mission vision and purpose of reconciliation with God and neighbor. The greatest commandment in the Scripture is: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.* [Mt 22:37]. Jesus continues teaching the command with, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" [Mt 22:38] The Scripture is an ancient reminder to us in the twenty-first century that love is a priority within the Christian community when we believe in and follow Jesus.

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2017 was a rough year. The roots of racism and xenophobia continue to run deep in the veins of those who want to make America the bastion of white supremacy. Racism is a disease. It is a chronic destructive force that overtakes the heart, mind, and souls of humans. People who intend on being agents of racism never stop plotting and planning. I wish Americans would stop being in awe and shock; because as long as they – we, live in denial, it will live on.

Today's text has lessons for us to ponder and revisit over and over again as people of faith who claim to love God with all of our mind, soul, and strength. The first lesson leads us to an understanding of how the Bible was used to plant the seeds that resulted in millions of lives lost because of deep and abiding lies and myths created to justify excessive greed. The men and women suffering from 'god' complexes (little g) serve, worship and idolize money and wealth accumulation, they thrive on the theft of other people's land, supported genocide, and the heinous brutality of chattel slavery.

Who is my neighbor? And why should we love our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps it's a matter of knowing what love is. We've been gripped by fear and silence for so long that our hearts no longer beat with resistance, courage, and that strong abiding radical love of God.

Jesus provides the standards and theological ethic that makes Love possible AGAIN.

I tend to ask more questions and dig for some answers when it comes to why humans prefer comfort in lies, myths, and profit over people. Like...

1. What makes racism so hard for whites, and others who protect whiteness, to see?
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Today's text has lessons for us to ponder and revisit over and over again as people of faith who claim to love God with all of our mind, soul, and strength. The first lesson leads us to an understanding of how the Bible was used to plant the seeds that resulted in millions of lives lost because of deep and abiding lies and myths created to justify excessive greed. The men and women suffering from 'god' complexes (little g) serve, worship and idolize money and wealth accumulation, they thrive on the theft of other people's land, supported genocide, and the heinous brutality of chattel slavery.

Who is my neighbor? And why should we love our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps it's a matter of knowing what love is. We've been gripped by fear and silence for so long that our hearts no longer beat with resistance, courage, and that strong abiding radical love of God.

Jesus provides the standards and theological ethic that makes Love possible AGAIN.

I tend to ask more questions and dig for some answers when it comes to why humans prefer comfort in lies, myths, and profit over people. Like...

1. What makes racism so hard for whites, and others who protect whiteness, to see?
 - a. How has race shaped your life? This is a hard question for whites to answer. It may be hard for other cultures to answer if one is afraid of being accused of being a racist. For other cultures, including people of African descent, fear of being seen as a noncompliant American or harbored feelings of guilt for not protecting "white space".
 - b. It's personal because no one wants to feel guilty and ashamed of what was done to create the conditions that names and puts a face on oppression and race hatred. It's guilt by association that gives birth to progressive liberalism in whites, because they champion the virtues of working towards anti-racism, but continue to hold space within the "privilege lane", unwilling to give up power and relinquish the ideas and language that keeps them "dominant" and others "minorities".
 - c. It's even more troubling when you ask Christians this question, "Do you love Jesus?", "Do you love all of your neighbors?" The answers will certainly be, "Yes, I am a Christian. I love Jesus!". Great answer, but loving Jesus means whiteness gets deconstructed and decentralized as a normative way of life.
 - d. If you claim to be a progressive liberal then critical thinking is required. Why? Because this means you will challenge others when you see or hear that race has dehumanized and caused people of color to suffer at the expense of white comfort. You will not negate internalized racist tendencies, but embrace them and work through them in dialogue with someone who will help you process what you're feeling. This also means, you will not seek out people of color to do the heavy lifting of making you feel better about yourself because you want to be seen as less racist externally. TAKE responsibility for reading, thinking, and being in spaces as a learner-listener.

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f. Individualism is a great word, but it only works for those who see themselves as a construction of a false narrative; “the dominant group.”

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As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

FAKE NEWS PRODUCES STRANGE FRUIT

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The Catholic Church said, “Yes, they have souls and they are human. Enslave them but don't kill them without reason.”

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Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

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***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
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The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

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Our complicit silence and inaction separates us further from communion with God when hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters leave our neighbors without food, power, and a means to secure their bodies, as they try to survive tragedy and the deaths of loved ones. The church and those who profess faith in Christ keep violating the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And perhaps therein lies the problem, we don't know what love is and therefore violate our own souls with false spirituality, false piety, and slanderous worship practices.

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When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

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*bound together in the love of God,
guided by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ,
united in worship.*

You say you covenant with God and one with another

*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
being vulnerable to the Spirit's transforming presence in our life*

to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

*nurturing and supporting one another
forgiving and living as forgiven
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accepting the gifts that each brings
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*being faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us
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I don't know about you, but the last year has been emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausting. Emotional, physical, and spiritual because I, and many of my friends, family, and colleagues did not want to see the Obamas leave the White House ever!! That was unrealistic so we moved on to pray for the country to

- Elect someone who would bring an open heart, and intellectual capacity to deal with complex national and global issues,
- We were hopeful for someone with foreign relations experience that could navigate critical and thoughtful diplomacy, fair and just policies, and a humble but tough spirit that could restore peace and not war, a strong economy and employment for its citizens, and a willingness to hear the voices of poor people, the exploited and marginalized

We listened to speeches and debates expecting to hear strategies of inclusion for creating policies that would stop the killing of black and brown Americans who are under constant surveillance. We hoped for a candidate who would

demand policy changes ending the slaughter of black and brown children, fathers, sons, daughters and mothers by police officers who shot first and never assume the innocence or humanity of black life.

Oh yes, we had high expectations that DACA would remain fully funded and in place for decades to come; the undocumented would not be deported, threatened, and torn away from their families by ICE; and the legality of gay marriage would be protected, and the LGBTQ community would not be targeted, but would be able to live freely in the sexual identity of their choosing.

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PRAYER

I don't know about you, but the last year has been emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausting. Emotional, physical, and spiritual because I, and many of my friends, family, and colleagues did not want to see the Obamas leave the White House ever!! That was unrealistic so we moved on to pray for the country to

- Elect someone who would bring an open heart, and intellectual capacity to deal with complex national and global issues,
- We were hopeful for someone with foreign relations experience that could navigate critical and thoughtful diplomacy, fair and just policies, and a humble but tough spirit that could restore peace and not war, a strong economy and employment for its citizens, and a willingness to hear the voices of poor people, the exploited and marginalized

We listened to speeches and debates expecting to hear strategies of inclusion for creating policies that would stop the killing of black and brown Americans who are under constant surveillance. We hoped for a candidate who would

demand policy changes ending the slaughter of black and brown children, fathers, sons, daughters and mothers by police officers who shot first and never assume the innocence or humanity of black life.

Oh yes, we had high expectations that DACA would remain fully funded and in place for decades to come; the undocumented would not be deported, threatened, and torn away from their families by ICE; and the legality of gay marriage would be protected, and the LGBTQ community would not be targeted, but would be able to live freely in the sexual identity of their choosing.

However, after the November 2016 election results I knew the doors of white nationalism, patriotism, confederacy, supremacy, and the strong desire to return to a long dead nostalgia for the good old days was going to expose the racist heart of America – Again.

2017 was a rough year. The roots of racism and xenophobia continue to run deep in the veins of those who want to make America the bastion of white supremacy. Racism is a disease. It is a chronic destructive force that overtakes the heart, mind, and souls of humans. People who intend on being agents of racism never stop plotting and planning. I wish Americans would stop being in awe and shock; because as long as they – we, live in denial, it will live on.

Today's text has lessons for us to ponder and revisit over and over again as people of faith who claim to love God with all of our mind, soul, and strength. The first lesson leads us to an understanding of how the Bible was used to plant the seeds that resulted in millions of lives lost because of deep and abiding lies and myths created to justify excessive greed. The men and women suffering from 'god' complexes (little g) serve, worship and idolize money and wealth accumulation, they thrive on the theft of other people's land, supported genocide, and the heinous brutality of chattel slavery.

Who is my neighbor? And why should we love our neighbor as ourselves. Perhaps it's a matter of knowing what love is. We've been gripped by fear and silence for so long that our hearts no longer beat with resistance, courage, and that strong abiding radical love of God.

Jesus provides the standards and theological ethic that makes Love possible AGAIN.

I tend to ask more questions and dig for some answers when it comes to why humans prefer comfort in lies, myths, and profit over people. Like...

1. What makes racism so hard for whites, and others who protect whiteness, to see?
 - a. How has race shaped your life? This is a hard question for whites to answer. It may be hard for other cultures to answer if one is afraid of being accused of being a racist. For other cultures, including people of African descent, fear of being seen as a noncompliant American or harbored feelings of guilt for not protecting "white space".
 - b. It's personal because no one wants to feel guilty and ashamed of what was done to create the conditions that names and puts a face on oppression and race hatred. It's guilt by association that gives birth to progressive liberalism in whites, because they champion the virtues of working towards anti-racism, but continue to hold space within the "privilege lane", unwilling to give up power and relinquish the ideas and language that keeps them "dominant" and others "minorities".
 - c. It's even more troubling when you ask Christians this question, "Do you love Jesus?", "Do you love all of your neighbors?" The answers will certainly be, "Yes, I am a Christian. I love Jesus!". Great answer, but loving Jesus means whiteness gets deconstructed and decentralized as a normative way of life.
 - d. If you claim to be a progressive liberal then critical thinking is required. Why? Because this means you will challenge others when you see or hear that race has dehumanized and caused people of color to suffer at the expense of white comfort. You will not negate internalized racist tendencies, but embrace them and work through them in dialogue with someone who will help you process what you're feeling. This also means, you will not seek out people of color to do the heavy lifting of making you feel better about yourself because you want to be seen as less racist externally. TAKE responsibility for reading, thinking, and being in spaces as a learner-listener.

e. What happens when white defense systems are triggered? Do you retreat, deny, defend and vow to remain silent? Or do you dig in and do the hard work of uncovering your biases, prejudices, and feelings of superiority when it's convenient in private, all-white spaces?

f. Individualism is a great word, but it only works for those who see themselves as a construction of a false narrative; "the dominant group."

Community means I am invested in the wellbeing of every person I encounter regardless of who they are. My 'I' becomes "we", "us", and "our" community.

Racism will not disappear, because those who hold power due to their wealth—local, national, and globally, control natural and material resources, (including occupying and possessing the land of others) and who control militarism and weapons, are not about to give those up for the good of humanity.

GENESIS 9:18-27 NTRANSITION

When Noah finds out Ham has seen him drunk and naked, he proceeds to curse his third son. He then uses the Lord's name to curse Ham and his descendants as subservient to Shem and Japheth.

As a woman of African descent born in the era of the civil rights movement, my faith seeks understanding. When encountering challenging texts, there is a concern given the history of unpunished, unchecked, and greenlighted violence towards black people in particular.

However, I invite you to a more attentive and thorough reading of Genesis 9:18–27. The text does not implicate God speaking a curse over Ham, the father of Canaan. What have we been taught? And what do we worship without critical study and inquiry? Without asking the texts more questions and digging deeper, we perpetrate fake news which produces strange fruit.

Our second lesson teaches us...

FAKE NEWS PRODUCES STRANGE FRUIT

Christian religious hierarchy during the Reformation posed two questions:

1. Do Blacks and Indians have souls?
2. Are Blacks and Indians human?

The Catholic Church said, "Yes, they have souls and they are human. Enslave them but don't kill them without reason."

Protestant Church said, "No, they are not human and they don't have souls. They can be captured, owned, and killed at will. They exist for the purpose of labor like a horse or cow."

Black and indigenous bodies became strange fruit for the wealth of nations who named themselves white - supreme and dominant over all human beings outside Germanic and Anglo Saxon descendance. Every continent where indigenous peoples have lived for centuries has been touched by the fake news.

This justification was then preached and taught as truth and the ideology has taken root for centuries. These lies become practices, and these practices breed hate. Hate is then embodied in mobs, and mobs of men, women, and children leaving their places of business, homes, and Church pews with ropes in hand; becoming judge and jury; and the result of their hatred bred by an interpretation from Genesis 9:18-27 results in strange fruit.

STRANGE FRUIT

Southern trees bear strange fruit

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root

Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

***Pastoral scene of the gallant south
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop***

The song originated in response to a dark episode in Indiana history.

"Strange Fruit" was written by American Communist Party activist and Bronx school teacher Abel Meeropol after viewing a sickening photograph of a notorious 1930 double lynching of teenagers Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith that occurred in Marion, Indiana. Meeropol was said to have been haunted by the image for days and composed the work as condemnation of American racism.

**FINAL TRANSITION AND CLOSING
FAKE NEWS DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD
LOVE HAS THE LAST WORD**

"Racism is a philosophy based on contempt for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the center of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission." (MLK, Jr.)

The prime directive and core message that I urge you to leave with today is to have a deep abiding concern for the heart of God. What is the heart of the the Gospel? Loving your neighbor. Conversely, a lack of love leads to a lack of justice and peace. Do the right thing in relationships and there will be right relationships in society.

Holiness is predicated upon just relationships between individuals. Justice unravels when injustices are perpetrated on the bodies, minds, spirits, and livelihoods of our neighbors.

Enacting trauma on our neighbors has a social cost. Violating our neighbors with hate messages, racism, and white supremacy, and domestic terrorism by white nationalist, the Alt-Right and the Klu Klux Klan, are violations against God. Individuals who believe in and support an anti-people of color, anti-immigrant agenda, desire to build walls along the U.S. border, deface Muslim mosques, desecrate Jewish Temples, and target, attack and harass men, women and children in traditional Arab and Muslim dress, cannot claim Christianity as their faith and Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Other violations against our neighbors include segregation tactics, military-style violence by law enforcement in people of color communities, and complicit silence when people of color are denied justice in the courts. Our neighbors are violated when people who claim faith in a loving God act against the love of God when innocent women, men, and children are assaulted, violated, murdered, and then abandoned, ignored, and told to get over their pain and loss.

Our complicit silence and inaction separates us further from communion with God when hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and other natural disasters leave our neighbors without food, power, and a means to secure their bodies, as they try to survive tragedy and the deaths of loved ones. The church and those who profess faith in Christ keep violating the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And perhaps therein lies the problem, we don't know what love is and therefore violate our own souls with false spirituality, false piety, and slanderous worship practices.

For Jesus, love of neighbor is an essential aspect of his own theology. Love for neighbor is not optional. Numerous scriptures provide Jesus' theological understanding that love for others is most clear and illuminates one's love for God.

When we violate love for our neighbors, we send a clear message to God that we do not love the Creator, we pay lip service to Jesus and the commandment to love, and we ignore the teachings of the Holy Spirit's Pentecost message to be the Church.

Grace allows us to try again each day to live into a Leviticus ethic of love:

Do not mistreat strangers and foreigners. "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him/her (them). The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" 19:33, 34

On Saturday, August 12, 2017 over 300 clergy from around the country traveled to Charlottesville, VA in support of local pastors prepared to resist racism and hate. A Unite the Right rally, which included ALT-Right supporters and white nationalists came to Charlottesville angered at the State's decision to remove a confederate statue of Robert E. Lee. They also came with the intent to recruit, disrupt, and use violence against people in opposition to their messages of hate and racism.

Brittany Caine-Conley, a UCC minister in discernment, and Rev. Seth Wispelway, a United Church of Christ (UCC) pastor, mobilized more than 80 local clergy and sent out a national call for 1,000 clergy to join in solidarity, receive anti-violence training, and march together against the Unite the Right supporters. Prior to August 12, their group [Congregate Charlottesville](#), helped local clergy and community organizers participate in civil disobedience and nonviolence training.

Rev. Traci Blackmon, UCC Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries led the Saturday morning prayer service. UCC pastors and clergy from other denominational and faith traditions departed the church building linked arm to arm wearing their vestments, praying and singing hymns. Direct action is a model of the UCC and its congregations are encouraged to engage and resist messages and actions of hatred, intolerance, and violence.

THIS IS LOVE! A CALL TO ACTION, FAITH SHOWS UP TO STAND DOWN AND STARE INTO FACES WHO DO NOT KNOW LOVE FOR ALL HUMANKIND. CHAPEL HILL.

Chapel Hill UCC Mission

You claim to be a community of faith and fellowship

*bound together in the love of God,
guided by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ,
united in worship.*

You say you covenant with God and one with another

*to further the ministry of Jesus Christ
proclaiming and teaching the reign of God*

to deepen our love and understanding of God

*sustaining our journey in joyful praise, prayer, and song
seeking and developing a relationship with Jesus Christ
being vulnerable to the Spirit's transforming presence in our life*

to invite others into this life and ministry

*welcoming the stranger and sojourner
offering the entrance of baptism
making room at the table for all God's family*

to be a light to the world by living as one people

*nurturing and supporting one another
forgiving and living as forgiven
respecting all the traditions from which we come
accepting the gifts that each brings
being a community of caring as well as justice*

to equip ourselves for God's service

*being faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us
praying for the Spirit's guidance
studying scripture and tradition
acting upon God's new calling of us*

to be the body of Christ, a disciple, God's servant in our world

*helping those who suffer
treating all God's creation with respect
bridging that which separates God's family
challenging oppression and injustice
living courageously as one of God's own*

to act upon Christ's resurrection

*being a community of hope
knowing that no love is lost and trusting that the future is God's.*

**CHAPEL HILL BE THE CHURCH AFTER CHURCH
RESIST FAKE NEWS, DO NOT LET YOUR SILENCE BE THE RESULT OF MORE STRANGE FRUIT.
CHAPEL HILL UCC YOU CAN DISMANTLE RACISM. GOD IS WATCHING AND STILL SPEAKING
... WONT YOU ANSWER THE CALL?**