

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

November 10.2019

Racial Reconciliation

Latasha Morrison

I am Tasha Morrison. I am the founder of Be the Bridge. This story started when I was in 11th grade. I always ran for leadership and so when you ran for leadership you had to take a class and when we were going around giving ideas, I said I want to do a black history week celebration. They looked like that was the stupidest idea ever. Like why would you celebrate black history? And I remember thinking I didn't have the words then. I didn't know how to articulate what I felt and I think that was a seed, a spark to really want to know all of me and all of my story and all of the story of those that have gone before me. I was on staff at a church and I was having a conversation with the lady. She was older than me. She started talking about her experiences through desegregation and some of the students that she encountered and some of the fear that she had. And I remember her saying, and what Lincoln did to the South because people loved their slaves. And I remember thinking, how could you put that in a sentence together? And at that point there was just anger in me. But then there was this sorrow also in me. And then there was this pity in me, the fact that she thought that and that she would say that to me, an African American. The only thing I could muster to say at that time to her was, when you love something, you set it free. They didn't have freedom, their God given freedom they did not have. People do not give you dignity. God gives you dignity and their dignity was stripped from them they didn't have choice. That's not loving someone.

And so this romanticized view of our history has been a lie. We don't truly know each other. There's not going to be any restoration. There's not going to be any reconciliation. And so I wanted to see what can I do? How could I bring people together specifically in the church to have this conversation and really tell the story, the true story of the African American experience? And then how do I extend that beyond being an African American, but tell the other stories of other marginalized groups. I can't tell their stories, but I can invite them to the table also to tell their stories. Today we have over 600 groups online community over 16,000 and lives are being changed. People are being reconciled to one another and understand the true history of America and truth is what makes us free. What we need is a collective conviction as a country, and that's what I want Be the Bridge to be for people a way, for us to move forward with collective conviction towards racial reconciliation. I am a leader. I am a bridge builder.

**Pastor Mark:** Well, welcome to National Community Church, all seven campuses. This weekend we continue our series 'Peacemakers'. It's a good thing I'm not preaching because of my voice, I barely have it. It is a joy this weekend to welcome Latasha Morrison. She is the founder of Be the Bridge, a nonprofit committed to helping people become ministers and ambassadors of racial reconciliation. Author of the book by the same title, and I love the subtitle, "Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation".

In Revelation seven we get a sneak peek into eternity. It says a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language was standing before the throne. And then in Galatians three it says, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male

nor female. Here's the bottom line, the church ought to be the most diverse place on the planet. Can I get an amen right there? We can't just be color blind. We've gotta be color brave and we've come a long ways as a church, but we have a long ways to go. Listen, this message is going to push the envelope and it might even push a few buttons. Here's what I've learned in my experience. That's how and when and where I grow. And so may God give us ears to hear in a heart to receive. Would you give a warm welcome this weekend to Latasha Morrison.

**Latasha:** How you guys doing today? It's exciting to be here in DC. Just so you know, I know when some of us, we hear this talk on race, a lot of us kind of start clenching our fists and you know, like what is she going to say? What is she going to say? Well, I'm just going to let you know, I'm going to let you make you feel a little uncomfortable, but I'm going to do it in the spirit of love. And so we are all brothers and sisters in here and we're gonna tackle this together. We're not in this alone. We are in this together. And I think it's just interesting that just being here on Veterans weekend, you know I am the daughter of a army veteran, 82nd airborne. My father, my grandfather was 82nd airborne. He served in the Vietnam War and also the Korean War. So I am from a town called Fayetteville, North Carolina, which is the home of Fort Bragg. And so just to be here is great on this Veterans Day.

And so I'm reminded just a few days ago, my team and myself, we went to the African American museum. And I remember this was my second visit there. And I remember my first time going into that building and looking at just the history, the history, I didn't know about my story and the story of my ancestors. And so one of the things I was looking, I was surprised to see the the names of the countries that had imported slaves and the names of the ships. I had no idea they still knew the names of the ship, but it was connected to economics. So therefore records were kept. And so you had the name of the ship, you had the name of the country, and then you had the number of slaves that were put on that ship and then the surviving. And I just remember looking at that and looking at they were showing in like a pathway of where it started, where the ship started and if you were here and if you went into North Carolina or Jamestown or North or if you went into the Gulf, like there was certain ports here in the United States. And I remember tracing that path and looking at, this is my story. I can trace my history back to Benin and Togo and to Cameroon. And I was like; somebody survived that for me to be here today. That was significant to me. My life had purpose, my life has purpose.

And this year, 2019 marks, the 400 year anniversary of the first 20 something and odd that's what the documents say. People who look like me that were brought into Jamestown in 1619 and I find that significant even in tracing that story where it connected with me like what I come from, like I come from survival. I come from brilliance. I come from hope. Somebody prayed that I would be standing before you today being able to say the things that I'm saying now. That's significant to me.

And I've heard Maya Angelou say that I am the hope of the slave. And I say that I am the hope of my ancestors. And today I stand before you in boldness and strength and that of lament, that this is a part of our history, but it's not the end of our history. And so if you can journey with me tonight and today that we're going to just navigate and understand that there's hope, there's hope and truth and truth transforms.

So let me just pray. Father, we thank you for being with us. Lord, disrupt us, tear down ideologies, tear down belief systems that don't point to you. Do a work in our heart so that we can see you clear and the name of Jesus. Amen

And one of the things when we talk about this history that we're all a part of, and that what's significant when I look through this history of slavery and I look through this history of segregation and racial terror in our country, it's a part of the story. It's a part of the story that we don't like to talk about, but it's significant in the sense where it's a part of our story and it was legal, you know? And so it helps me come to realize that the things that are just are not always legal and the things that are legal are not always just. And I want to remind us of that today when we look through our history and the institution of lynching and segregation. That the kingdom of God is not a part of the world system that we're set apart. And what has happened is we've allowed culture to come into the kingdom of God and dictate how we see each other. And so we have to really do some deconstructing and understand where we should stand in the midst of the chaos because God's kingdom is not divided racially. God's kingdom is set apart. And if we are to be ambassadors of that, we have to understand that.

And I know that you guys are in a series of Peacemaking and one of the things that we have to understand about peacemaking is that the foundation for peacemaking is that of truth. And we have to be truth-tellers in this. We can't deny truth, we don't have to stay in the past, but we understand it to move forward. We have to recognize the past and how it shapes us today. I always like to say that history keeps receipts. It keeps an account and I think that's important.

This summer we took a group of Be the Bridge one of our goals is racial reconciliation. That's so hard. You know, I've done work in human trafficking and now and racial reconciliation. I'm like, Lord, why can't I just talk about joy? You know, like give me something easy. Why get all the hard stuff, you know? And so as we talk about reconciliation, I wanted us to go to a country that is doing the process of reconciliation and what it takes. And we got to talk to government officials; we got to meet with people. We had an opportunity to visit the reconciliation village there. And in that process we noticed that the process of reconciliation in Rwanda has been difficult. It's been hard.

And if you understand anything about the genocide of Rwanda, what happened was during the colonialism in Rwanda, they were a nation about 93% Christian. And during that period, the Hutus and the Tutsis, which were two different tribes where basically it's about, divide and conquer and so they were divided. And so Rwanda calls it the genocide of the Tutsis. And so about 800,000 people were murdered during this genocide. They murdered each other, but it was the Hutus that murdered the Tutsis. And so in this process, in order to rebuild their country and to rebuild their government, they had to go through a transition period. They had to shift. They couldn't do things the way they've always done it if they wanted a different result. So they got rid of tribal recognitions and tribal names and they became Rwandans. The other thing that they did is they created a new vision for reconciliation. Reconciliation is hard. It doesn't feel good. It's disruptive. It's not easy. A lot of times in our mind when we think about reconciliation, we're thinking about now we have faith and forgiveness and then there's reconciliation. But in the midst of reconciliation, there has to be confession. There has to be repentance, there has to be a making a wrong, right.

And so in their government, they've set up systems to make the wrong, right? They even have new language on one word they use as "ubumuntu". And this word means humanity, goodness, generosity, kindness, those who don't stand in complicity in the face of injustice, for those who risk their lives to rescue or help those who are persecuted. They don't want people to stand in silence while injustice is going on. They want them to do the work of "ubumuntu". And that's important in the process of reconciliation.

You see, peacemaking is active. It is not passive. You see in this is the truth that really transforms us. If we want transformation, if we want reconciliation, we have to begin with truth. And as scripture, Ephesians six and 14 says, "*Stand therefore having fastened on the belt of truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness*". And we quote this a lot when we're talking about the armor of God, but when we think about truth, the belt of truth without the belt the armor falls off, it holds it in place. It's imperative for the full armor to put on that, to put on the belt of truth, not the belt of lies, not the belt of denial, not the belt of shame, but the belt of truth.

And in John 17:17 this is just really one of the foundational scriptures of what we do in Be the Bridge. And this is Jesus praying. And Jesus says, as he's about to go to the cross, and this is like the night before, <sup>17</sup> "*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*"

And I don't know about you, but if I was about to give my life on the cross, I don't know if I'll be praying for other people, I'll be praying for myself, you know? But Jesus is praying for this prior to death, Christ had been made was the word incarnate, the utterance of God to men and to women. We are to recognize God's will through this work and this sanctified them through the marvelous revelation of God and his love for us drew men and women to him through this process of sanctification.

And he says, set them apart and make them more like you, Father. You see our belief systems and our worlds systems should be developed by the word of God, not by the world. We mustn't have conflicted two if we are to be shaped by the truth of God's word or if we're going to be shaped by bad interpretation, driven by self-centeredness. This is where the Pharisees and the religious leaders ended up with bad interpretation, with no heart or concern for the other. You see, truth unvarnished and unfiltered is essential to the work of Jesus, of transformation, freedom and reconciliation. You see, this is the truth that transforms us.

And in John 14:6 it says, I am the way, the truth, and the what? Life. No one comes to the father except through me. You see, Jesus embodies all truth. Biblical truth helps us understand why historical truth is imperative to the reconciliation process. When it comes to historical truth we're often okay with a partial truth. If we're not starting from the same common memory, this creates a barrier. And one of the things that I said in the video, this memory of the period of slavery, we're not starting from the common memory. We don't know our history. We don't know each other. We don't see each other. And if we're going to reach our community, we need to understand our community. If we're going to love our neighbor, we need to love our neighbor. And in that scripture, they didn't give any prerequisites for loving the neighbor of someone that looks like you, talks like you, seems like you, worships like you. But you see, we think the things that are just like us are right, and the things that are different, we other them and think that they're wrong.

And so we have to understand that there's great diversity in the kingdom of God. You see these lies that we've believed about our history and the narratives that have been created, the stereotypes that have been created, these lies are intended to mislead as generationally and misrepresent history. You see, this is the truth that transforms us. You see, the truth is I want you to listen to this and understand this. The truth is ethnicity reflects a unique aspect of God's image, and if we truly believe that we are image bearers, we must see the image bearer not just in our neighbors, not just in America, but we have to understand that in Brazil they've been created in the image of God in Afghanistan, in Palestine, in Israel, in Iraq. The global church has been created in the image of God, but you see, we've been sold a lie of indifference and sameness. Not one tribe or ethnicity can reflect the totality of who God is. It takes every tribe and every nation and every tongue to reflect who God is. Not one ethnicity expresses who God is. You don't determine that, but it's all of us, the global church, not just Western culture church, but Eastern culture church that reflects the aspect of who God is. You see, God is at work in every culture and in every people group. When we began to think of ourselves as better than another group or culture, we placed ourselves as gods and idols. You see, but only God is Supreme. And see, that's why in the kingdom of God, nationalism doesn't work. In the kingdom of God we have to see each other as brothers and sisters image bearers. I'm not better than you because I live in America. So we have to approach it like that.

See, God is the only one that is Supreme and any supremacy outside of God's supremacy is sinful. And that's something that we have to repent of. You see, many Christians approach this conversation about race from varying truths. The first truth, we must understand that God didn't create race. Race is a social and political construct. So people say, well, why are you always gotta get political? If we're talking about race, it's going to be political. It doesn't have to be partisan, but it is political because politics are about people. You see, it doesn't mean that we take a colorblind approach and I heard Pastor Mark say that we need to be color brave color caring, colorful. We need to see each other because to say that you're color blind, that means you don't see me, and I know you see me in all of this beautiful chocolate with this bright shirt unless you have a medical condition, right? So we want to see each other. We don't want to look past one another because when we look past that, we're not seeing the systemic issues that are impacting groups of people. We need to see each other. You see, race was only created as the purpose of asserting power and maintaining hierarchy. To pursue truth that leads us toward reconciliation we must identify and agree together on facts that God cannot heal what we conceal.

You see, I want to break this down a little bit further. Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people says Zachariah and verse two and 11 the word nations in this text comes from the Hebrew word 'goy' meaning foreigners, people who are ethnically different from the Israelites. And in Acts 13 through 47 through 52 we see;

<sup>47</sup> *For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."*

<sup>48</sup> *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*

<sup>49</sup> *And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the world and region."*

You see, the Greek word use here for Gentiles is 'ethnikos' also meaning foreign non-Jewish people group. This is where we get the word ethnicity and ethnic; Isaiah 49 and six. You see as Christians of different ethnicities we should share a common heritage and memory. You see, this is the truth that transforms us. You see, we are reminded of who we are and whose we are through our salvation history. You see, Christ's sacrifice on Calvary connects us as the family of God. It connects us eternally to one another. Our Christian faith is embodied by various communal acts. You see, we have a common prayer, we have communion, baptism. We are reminded that all of our stories are wrapped and intertwined with God's story. Not only do we share foundational memories and practices in our faith, but we share and understand personal ethnic histories. To participate in the family of Christ alongside nonwhite people the majority cultural must acknowledge the prospectus of people of color and we must understand the truth of historical narratives. We must partner through listening, not telling people what to say and how to say it. Without the truth of racial justice, which calls us to confession and repentance without it, there will be continued dissonance in our relationships.

You see, Jesus came to make beauty from ashes, but first we must recognize and acknowledge the ashes. We must see each other. We must understand and educate and teach the generation about our shared past. You see beginning with the common memory of the atrocities committed against people of color in this country if we are to be reconciled family, we must begin with the full truth and recognize all the parts of the story, all of the parts of this story.

You see, some of you are sitting here and you're saying like 'well, Tasha I understand, but I wasn't a slaveholder and you weren't a slave and this has nothing to do with me that happened a long time ago. You see, but in the body of Christ, we're a collective group. The Bible is collective. We are connected to one another, so we inherited a mess. It's not our fault. We didn't create it, but it is all of our responsibility to be a part of the solution. We all have a place and a part to play. We can't be on the sidelines in this. If we are to be the church, a representation of the kingdom of God, then we must become leaders in this work of racial reconciliation. It should burden us. It should break our hearts. It should cause us to lose sleep, to be in discord with our brothers and sisters, to see the injustices that are happening to image bearers. And if it's not breaking your heart, I pray that you would lift your hands before the King of Kings, and tell the Lord to break my heart, allow me, give me the eyes to see and the heart to care. Don't let me become apathetic. We must lead with empathy in this.

You see, racism is bad for the oppressed and the oppressor. And I like this story, and I mentioned this in the book about Ezra, and when you think about Ezra and Nehemiah, the counterpart, when we read about Nehemiah, Nehemiah was broken and concerned about a country, a nation that he had never seen. And he used his privilege, his platform to bring about change. And when we think about Ezra, as soon as he heard about this, he tore his garment and his cloak about the sins of his people. He didn't commit it. It wasn't his doing, Nehemiah was born into exile. So he wasn't responsible for what happened to Israel, but his heart was broken even the more because he understood that his nation was supposed to point to God for the glory of God, and so that's why our hearts should be broken. You see, this is the truth that transforms.

And then in this scripture in John 8 and three it says, *"And we will know the truth and the truth will set you"*, what? The truth of God is freeing, it changes us. It liberates us, it transforms us, it moves us, it redeems us, it restores us and it can reconcile us. And that's what we need to long for.

So, why don't we start with truth? Because Jesus shines the light on the undervalued, the unseen we must shine a light on our painful history in effort for us to move forward. We have to make sure that we don't conceal what God can heal. And see in some of the things that we have to acknowledge and repent about is our history. And I'm just going to take us through a quick little walk through history and acknowledge the systemic policies that have demeaned some and uplifted others, that has removed dignity from some. See, because we are connected and we have to approach this with deep sorrow.

In Valdosta, Georgia, there was a lady named Mary Turner and our country has a lynching history. And every time I look at a story I think about my grandmother, my grandmother would have been seven years old when this happened. And she was protesting that her husband was lynched because something happened in their community and so all the men of color, all the black men were lynched. And this lady was eight months pregnant and she was lynched and her baby was murdered. This is history that we should know and understand that has shaped not just the South but our country. But we hide it and we don't talk about it. Remember God cannot heal what we conceal.

- The slave trade was the prevention of slaves being imported to the U S.
- The Indian removal act this was instituted by President Andrew Jackson.
- The Dred Scott case - and some of these you can write down and look up.
- The compromise of 1877 which removed the troops after the Civil War that removed the troops from the South. And this is where you see the rain of racial terror and the KKK come up. And this is when the rights that were restored to some of the black men were taken away in their roles.
- The 13th amendment evolved into slavery by another name through mass incarceration.
- The 14th amendment granted all citizenship an equal protection under the law,
- Plessy versus Ferguson. And this was a Supreme court case that upheld that it was okay to have separate and equal.

And you say where was the church in all of this? Was the church on the sideline saying this is wrong? This is not how we treat image bearers. The church was not only complicit, but the church helped create the infrastructure. We had denominations that divided. And some of you may say, well, there had to be some people that were saying this was wrong. Of course, there are always outliers. You could read it throughout history. Some of your parents, your grandparents, your ancestors may have been the outliers that were saying this was wrong.

But a lot of times that's the remnant and what I'm asking you today, will you be a part of the remnant? Will you be a part of the remnant of reconcilers that's gonna lock arms together and cry out for justice and for mercy? You see, the work of reconciliation begins with truth, its painful truth. Truth requires us to listen, to unlearn damage and stereotypes and lean into hard and difficult dialogue. This may cause a lot of us to be fragile or angry, but this work calls us to

listen, to learn, to lament, to leverage, and to love. It calls us to conviction. It calls us to repentance. It calls us to forgiveness. It calls us to justice. It calls us to restoration and it calls us to make things right to repair that which is broken. It beckons us into conversations and relationships with people who look different from us. It's not about diversity, but it's about the transforming work of reconciliation. It requires a surrendered heart. It requires humility; it requires listening and lifting up the voices of the marginalized. You see, this is the truth that transforms and in Matthew six and 10 it says, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*"

I don't know about you, but I want a little bit of heaven on earth and I think some of us, we have this misconception that we think when we make it into eternity that we're going to stand before the throne like you see in Revelation seven and nine and we're going to be in separate churches like we are now. Heaven is not going to look like our churches. If we have a problem with someone else speaking another language, now we will have a problem because guess what? Jesus didn't even speak English. And I have another secret. He wasn't white. So some of us are going to be really uncomfortable if we really believed this thing that we say that we do every day, if we are really walking in faith, if we really have a relationship with the Father, some of us are going to be disappointed and uncomfortable in eternity with the Father. We got to get it right. We have to get it right. And you see the Lord loves us so much that his grace in his mercy is being extended to us and he's begging us to be a part of his system and not the world's system.

Pray with me. Father, we know this is tough, this is hard, and it's so uncomfortable to talk about just our history, just our past. But Father we are broken and we need you. We need you to show us our missteps, to transform our hearts so that we can be made more into the image of you. In Jesus name. Amen.