**Pastoral Reflection – On Listening**

**Co-Pastor Susanne Guenther Loewen – June 9, 2020**

In the past couple of months, I’ve started listening to podcasts. There’s something comforting and personal about listening to someone’s voice or to a conversation rather than simply reading words on a page, like I usually do. One of the podcasts I’m listening to right now is social work researcher Brené Brown’s series called “Unlocking Us.” The latest episode featured her conversation with professor Ibram X. Kendi, who wrote *How to Be an Anti-Racist*.[[1]](#footnote-1) In the midst of the Black Lives Matter[[2]](#footnote-2) protests going on across the world right now, sparked by the wrongful deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police, his words as an African American man and an expert in anti-racism are timely. He said, “By not running from the books that pain us, we can allow them to transform us. I ran from antiracist books most of my life. But now I can’t stop running after them – scrutinizing myself and my society, and in the process changing both.”

In calling us to seek out “books that pain us,” professor Kendi is asking for something difficult – that those of us who are privileged, who, consciously or not, have benefitted from the unjust systems that the U.S. and Canada were built upon – listen to the painful stories of racism from our own context(s). This is not an easy task – hence the running that he talks about. It’s hard to hear stories of pain and violence; it’s disillusioning to find out our society isn’t as inclusive as we thought it was; and change is hard. And yet, I know for myself as a white person of European descent, I have been grateful to professor Kendi and others who have given us a place to start in our common efforts to dismantle racism. That starting place is to listen – to listen to the voices and experiences of our friends, neighbours, and family members of colour, to read books by Black, Indigenous, and other authors of colour, to open our hearts and minds to their histories and experiences, including the painful ones and the ones of resilience and hope.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus often ends his teachings with the words, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” (ex: Luke 14:35). This week, I invite us to pay attention and listen. To whose voices we are lending our ears? Are we truly listening, even when people of colour ask tough questions or may make those of us who are white uncomfortable? To whom are we holding ourselves accountable – just other people who look like us or are of the same income bracket and background? Brené Brown’s advice for any tough conversation is to approach it with curiosity – to be open and vulnerable instead of assuming that we understand everything before having truly made space to listen. “Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!” Jesus said, because it is in pausing and listening that we can finally hear God’s still small voice calling us to justice and peace.

*What voices have you been listening to this week?*

*Are you reading or have your read any books about anti-racism that you’d recommend?*

**Anti-Racism Books (from my conversations and correspondence this week):**

Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist* OR Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds, Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You (for teens and adults)

Drew G.I. Hart, *Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* (Herald Press, 2016).

Desmond Cole, *The Skin We’re In: A Year of Black Resistance and Power* (Canadian context, also a CBC doc: <https://www.cbc.ca/firsthand/episodes/the-skin-were-in>)

Lawrence Hill, *The Book of Negroes* (a historical novel)

Layla  F. Saad, *Me and White Supremacy: Combat Racism, Change the World and Be a Good Ancestor*

Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian*

Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (also a movie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVQbeG5yW78>)

1. You can find Brene Brown’s podcast here: <https://brenebrown.com/unlockingus/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more background on this phrase, see <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/11/12136140/black-all-lives-matter> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)