

What a week it's been! I started out by looking at this topic, "**Is God Racist?**" And I my first reaction was to write this 1st draft of today's talk:

"Good morning! Boy that was some talk that Mark gave on homosexuality last week wasn't it? Well today we're asking, 'Is God racist/?' The answer is 'no.' Now for the next 34 minutes I'll be glad to take questions..."

Very soon after that, the concern that I and others close to me started to sense, was that in a church of **predominantly white people**---that we would **gloss over** this topic of racism and collectively think that it's not a very big deal anymore...

there's equal opportunity now and even an African American president elect...

Even now, my hunch is some people here are thinking,
"Can't we just move on and quit bringing up this racism thing?"

And yes, we do want to move on and not live in the past, and I don't mean to **drag us through the mud** here.

But to go accurately into the future, we need to have a clear understanding of **where we've been** and **where we are today**.

And this lines up with one of the threads through the Old Testament. Along the way, God would say, "Build a stone alter---and remember what happened here. Tell your children what happened here."

And in more recent years Spanish philosopher [George Santayana](#) mirrored that Old Testament theme when he said this familiar quote:

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

-George Santayana 1863-1952

So I want to go three places today with racism: Where we've been. Where we are. Where God wants us to be.

Let's go back in time.

Starting in the **1600s**, white people began **OWNING** black people in this country. When we trace back family trees in America, some of our ancestors owned or were owned by others' ancestors.

And by **1860** (based on U.S. census) in the 15 states that allowed slavery, there were aprox 12 million people of which, 4 million were enslaved black people. 1 in 4 people were owned.

Then from **1861-1865** there was the U.S. Civil War---the war to **end** Slavery.

And after the war ended, in 1865 in Pulaski Tennessee a group of **ex-confederate soldiers formed a club**.

They based the club's name on the Greek word "kukloi" (2 Ks) which means "circle." And since most of the group had a Scottish-Irish descent, they thought to add the word "Klan" with a K. And that was the start of the Ku Klux Klan.

It's purpose was simple & **heinous**: To intimidate blacks & people who supported rights of newly freed slaves.

Let's skip forward to the 1920s in Kokomo Indiana: (Thank [Howard County Historical Society](#) and the writings of Kokomo professor, **Allen Safianow**, and local author, **Ned Booher**.)

In **1923** there was an advertisement in a national publication for a July 4th celebration in Kokomo IN in the general area that is now **Camp Tycony** (Then called Malfalfa Park.).

The ad offered:

Family fun and a **star-spangled red, white and blue celebration** with well-known figures who would give speeches with titles like, "**Back to the Constitution.**"

It boasted the **biggest parade** Kokomo has ever seen and a huge fireworks display. And it said, "**Bring your friends and bring your robes.**"

Your **Klan** robes.

And so **July 4, 1923**, Kokomo saw the largest KKK rally ever assembled in the U.S.

At that time, Kokomo's population was 30,000 people. And the old documents I've read through suggest **100,000** to 175,000 people attended.

As people poured in from neighboring states it in essence became a national rally. *And just to be clear—at that time the Klan was also **anti Catholic, anti-Jew, and anti-foreigner.***

I have some disturbing pictures I'd like to walk us through---these aren't from the rally but from that same time period in Kokomo. (clear pic of what KKK looked like...)

[\(all pictures can be seen here.\)](#)

pic

This a funeral in 1923 at **Memorial Park Cemetery** (North St. just behind Menards on the NE side of Kokomo.) The tent is where the casket was.

pic

Same picture but **zoomed** in so we can see more detail. In the lower right we see some (post WWI) soldiers. And **around the flag...we see robed, hooded Klansmen.** →

And notice---everyone around the Klansmen is very natural. No police. No need to control the crowd because the Klan's presence was very normal in Kokomo at this time.

pic

This is the same funeral. We see the Klansman marching with the flag.

pic

Here the Klan is marching in Kokomo to celebrate **Armistice Day** which is the end of WWI (1918)

They are carrying signs that say:

1) "We were here yesterday—we are here today—and are here forever."

2) "Duty without fear and without reproach."

3) "We believe in the tenets (misspelled "tenents") of the Christian religion."

Notice their patriotism with the flags. Notice their Christian cross in the back.

- Taken by professional photographer ("special occasion")

- No police

Keep in mind that this picture is taken within 1-2 generations of people in this room. Some of your parents or grandparents would have been of the age to see, know about or hear about these activities.

pic

This is an **initiation** at midnight in **September 1922** in Kokomo. The sign in the back says "**Kokomo Klan**." And the fire in between the two flags is a **burning cross**.

The burning cross was meant to threaten & intimidate the group's enemies (mostly blacks), and symbolized (if you can believe it) "Christ lighting the way."

Heavy themes that helped people to accept the KKK were **Christianity and patriotism**.

pic

This an initiation the **next month**, October 1922. Notice there are HUNDREDS of people there. And again, the hideous burning crosses.

(last old KKK pic)

Local stats:

In the 1920s in Kokomo, aprox. **1 in 4 adult males** was in the Klan.

In 1925 **Kokomo mayor Silcott Spurgeon** was endorsed by the KKK and most seats on the **city council** were occupied by Klan sympathizers—as were the police and fire departments.

In 1924 a **minister** gave a **sermon** to the Kokomo High School graduating class entitled, "**White Supremacy**" and urged the class to join the KKK.

The Klan met at **Kokomo High School** and had separate meetings for men, women and boys ages 12-18.

Public **cross burnings** occurred in **Foster Park**.

In 1925 there was a **pro-Klan movie** released nationally called "Birth of a Nation" that ran downtown at the Isis Theater and was attended by men in white robes.

At that same time Indiana's governor, Ed Jackson, who was from Howard County (son of a mill worker) was a member of the KKK.

Most protestant ministers in Kokomo supported the KKK.

At that time there were two Kokomo newspapers. Neither one officially supported the KKK, but neither would speak against it. They reported Klan activity with neutral or favorable coverage.

The Klan in Kokomo at that time was made up of: **laborers, church members, church leaders, business men and politicians**. All walks of life.

It was **not** some **radical** group on the **fringe** of society. It was **mainstream**, out in the open and to a lot of white people, was viewed along the same lines as an **Elks or Moose lodge**.

Indiana boasted as much or **more** Klan support than any other State in the Union. And Howard County was in the **top 7 counties** in Indiana for Klan participation.

And just to be clear. Professor Safianow asserts that nationally in the history of the KKK, that thousands of racial lynchings took place.

Allen Safianow offered some suggestions why the KKK was so strong in Kokomo:

* Many of the people who came to work in Indiana in the steel and automobile factories were Southerners who came north for jobs. Being from the South they were naturally racist and anti-black.

* The Klan appeared to be “good”—outwardly they were **against corruption, against boot-legging, very Christian, very patriotic**.

* The **auto industry** in Kokomo was having **hard times** during the ‘20s. The Haynes & Apperson automobile plants closed. People were stressed. **Jobs were scarce**—and an organization like the Klan seemed like it was about **preventing** people like blacks, Catholics and foreigners from taking a job that maybe YOU needed.

* Here’s a scary thought: Hitler rose to power in a similar way after WWI. During bad economic times, he was beating the drum of patriotism, and a white race. And in tough times people promising a better life—tend to get people’s attention.

The “good” news on the Klan in Kokomo (and Indiana in general) is that it became riddled with **corruption** and its leaders were **indicted for murder** among other charges.

And by the 30s, the **outward political muscle** of the Klan had significantly dropped off. The bad news was, the racial prejudice that the Klan promoted, didn’t go away.

And in fact over the years the Klan in Kokomo has tried **to raise its ugly head** from time to time. I want to show you some pictures from a KKK march that was held **downtown on the square on April 26, 1980**.

pic

Here are local law enforcement officers ready for the trouble that a Klan march brings.

pic

Here’s the Klan marching down Main Street. The police were forced to guard them from **justifiably angry protestors**.

pic

Here’s a closer look at some of the Klansmen—holding a sign “It’s nice to be white.”

pic

And here are police facing off with demonstrators—both groups wearing helmets and carrying clubs.

(break)

So that’s where we’ve been.

We need to **remember** that's where we've been. Not to dwell on it **for no good reason**.

But to **remember it**, so that we can **empathize** with people who's **parents, grand parents** or **great grandparents** lived in a city of white hooded figures and burning crosses.

And to **remember it**, so that **racial ignorance, bigotry**, and hatred the likes of that---never happens again.

"Remember. And tell your children what happened here."

(break)

To tell you what's happening now, let me tell you what happened this week:

It's **Tuesday morning**. As I wake up I have this strong sense that I'm supposed to talk with an **African American person** today.

Who? I don't know. When? Where? I don't know.

Part of what I'm feeling is **personal**: me—a **white guy**---who has **no** close African American friends—preparing a talk on **racism** for **800 predominantly white people**. And I feel there's something not right about that.

Two questions are burning in me:

How do **I** have the perspective to speak to this?

Who are **we** as white people, to think we **understand** this?

There is a prompting of God that has me **out of sorts** this Tuesday morning.

I sit down at my computer to start writing this talk and I'm **too restless**. I'm **unable** to get an **idea going**. I can't write the first word.

I have this stubborn holy sense that I'm supposed to **talk with someone today**... And so I get in my car with my notebook and I go out.

I go to a **prominent** predominantly **black church**, but the reverend is not in. No leaders are in.

As I'm talking with this African American women who is older than I, it occurs to me that **she** may be whom I'm supposed to talk with.

So I said, "Could I talk with **you**?"

She **backs up**, looks at me uncomfortably and says **skeptically**, "**About what?**"

Me. Standing there in a **black neighborhood** in a **black church** in all my "Brady Bunch" **whiteness** say to her, "**Racism.**"

She shoots back, "**Nuh uh! Nope!**"

She looks at the **other** African American woman in the office who does **not wait** to be asked before she starts shaking her head **no** as if I was going to ask her if she'd like some **bamboo shoots** shoved **under her nails**. ;-)

The first woman **does** talk to me **a little**. She says there's only **one race**, the **human race** and if people would just **get that**, then everything would be different.

I nodded, smiled and threw in an “amen,” when I could squeeze one in.////

I left there discouraged (did NOT go well!!)... Wondering what in the world I was doing.

But I still **sensed** that I was **supposed** to be in this neighborhood, **stumbling** into some kind of conversation.

I said aloud as I drove away from the church, “**God, what am I doing??**”

I started **driving slowly** through this **African American neighborhood** saying again as if God **wasn't** listening the first time,

“God—what in the heck am I doing??”

I realize I'm looking for a **black person to talk with**, in the same way people on the **Discovery channel** search for iguanas. “**God, what am I doing?**”

And right there I realized that by living my **white life**---not having more than African American **acquaintances**, I'm in a **subtle** way, **part of the problem**.

As I turned down a **little street**, I saw a **little church** with **one car** next to it. I wondered if it was the pastor's. “Is this it, God?” No answer. I take my notebook and go in.

The well dressed reverend motioned me into his office as he's finishing a cell phone call.

My opening comment?, “**I'm not selling anything,**”

I was odd---and it was too late---I was **face to face** with an African American pastor **whom I'd never met** and going to try to talk with him about **racism**.

I continue babbling on:

“And please excuse **my appearance**—I'd planned to be working on a sermon **at my house** today. But, I felt this leading to get out and find someone to talk with.”

He was still looking at me oddly.

“I'm a pastor at Oakbrook Church and I'm talking to our **99.9% white church** about **racism** and...(struggling for words) I feel like I **need** to talk about it with someone who's **not white...**”

(big pause)

And he was...**wonderful and gracious**.

And I had one of the **best conversations** with this wonderful man whom I'd **never met** before.

I'd like to share my conversation with you. And this is about **where we are now** with racism.

And I'd like to uphold his privacy and simply refer to him respectfully, as the **Reverend**.

He told me right away that in 1962 he enlisted in the armed service and was stationed in **Biloxi Mississippi**. He went down to the **beach** and saw something he'd **never** seen before:

There was barbed wire down the middle of this beautiful public American beach.

And on one side there was **snow white sand** and on the other side there were **cans**. **Trash** and sand that **wasn't** snow white. The **barbed wire** separated the **white people beach** from the **black people beach**.

It's one thing to hear a fact like that. It's another thing to look someone in the face as they tell you that.

Early in our conversation he **threw me a bone**, and **related** with me by telling me he pastors a church that's 99.9% black. And he reminded me that the most **segregated time and day of the week** in America is **11am on Sunday mornings**.

After we settled into the conversation a bit I said, "**Racism. Is it a deal? Is it...?**"

He said calmly but surely,
"It's forever. It's as current today but it's just more subtle."

He used that line **several times**. He **didn't** say it **angrily** or trying to **convince** me, but in the same way you or I would say, "**It's raining outside...**"

He said he's talked with **other pastors** of **predominantly African American churches in Kokomo** and they **unanimously agree** racism is here—it's just more subtle. (repeat & reinforce)

And just as I had no great solution to it. Neither did he. But I agreed and believe like he—that **it is a problem**.

As we tried to navigate **examples** of racism, he had **no doubt** that skin color **is** a determining factor in who gets **hired** and who gets **housing**.

I asked, "**Do you think people are prejudiced, but so subtly, they don't even know it?**"

He answered quickly, "**Yes. Both sides—black and white.**"

He graciously shared about coming to terms with his **own racism**. He told me that someone in his family had a child with a white woman. He said he'd decided to love the **baby** but **not the mother**. And he said that God started talking to him about it.

(paraphrase)He said, "**I will love that cute little baby.**"

God said, "**What about its mother?**"

He said, "**No. Not her.**"

God said, "**Oh, so it's like that, is it?!**"

He said, "**God really used that to show me my own prejudice—God called me out on it—and I've wrestled with it and I've gotten through it.**"

And I wondered how many white **and** African American families have struggled with that same issue in this city.

I asked him,
"After all these years, why is Kokomo so segregated in terms of housing?"

He said, "Great question. I don't really know. I've never lived on the other side of Washington Street. I could, but I don't. I may move later in life;

I guess people just like to be around people their comfortable with. I do think there are **misconceptions** about the northeast side of Kokomo. I don't think crime is any worse. I sit out on my porch a lot. It's safe. It's a good neighborhood. I like it."

He grew up in Kokomo coming of age in the 1950s. I asked if it was segregated then.

He said,
"**It was very segregated.** It wasn't in writing, **but you knew.**"

My parents taught us the places we **shouldn't** go because they were for whites.

(for instance) There was a restaurant that we didn't go to. It's not that they wouldn't serve you, but you knew if you were black, they would mess with your food. It would be salted beyond edible for instance."

And I wondered later how many whites grew up in the fabulous fifties not knowing that kind of reality existed...

I wished I'd had a **tape recorder** to better document our conversation—we talked for a long time.

I tried to take notes and **capture his words** accurately but I was caught up in the conversation much too much to **look away from his face.**

I **respected** him too much for letting me come in **unannounced** and talk candidly about such a touchy subject to focus on my notebook and miss the **integrity** and **emotion of his face.**

So I'm sorry I didn't take better notes or represent him with better detail.

But I am thankful God gave me the opportunity to **look the Reverend in the eyes** and for him to share a little of his **soul** and **life experience** with me---this awkward white guy he'd never met before.

As I thanked him for his time and what I thought might have been a **divine leading**, he suggested that God may have indeed been in it---since he's **never** at his church during that time on Tuesdays.

Before I left, I asked if and how I could pray for him and his church. He said yes, and that I could pray for God to keep blessing his assembly. They have a lot of **people losing jobs** right now. Please join me in praying for them. (God knows who it is... ;-)

(break)

So where are we now?

I want to **push us** to accept the perspective of African American church leaders in our community. That **racism is here, but subtle.** Even though I don't have the time today to make a clear exemplified case for it...

But I would suggest--- that if you want to know how **professional baseball players** are **treated**, you don't just ask the fans or just the owners, you ask the players.

If you want to know if people in a church feel connected, growing and part of God's plan, you don't just ask the pastors, you ask the people.

And so in the same way, if you want to know where racism is in Kokomo, you don't just ask the white people.

I'm not asking us to understand it all today... I'm asking us to be open to the fact that we don't know what its like to walk in someone else's shoes. And so we shouldn't **assume that we do**.

Let us not be people who dismiss allegations of racism simply because we don't see it, or because we're too busy to entertain the possibility that there's still a racial divide.

Let us be people who **seek to understand, listen with love, empathize with love, & learn out of love**---about racial issues most of us know little about.

(break)

Here's one of my take-aways this week: **The Bible is full of racism.**

We can't even get out of Genesis before there's an issue between a **Jew and an Egyptian** in ch. 21:8-10.

Read through the Word of God and you'll find person after person getting hung up because of skin color or nationality. (*Read a history book of the world and you'll find the same thing.*)

Racism is in the Bible in the same way that **polygamy, slavery and sexual promiscuity** are in it. They are part of the culture—the context of the story—the backdrop of the story--- but they are **not** part of God's preferred plan.

God has revealed His **story** and His **glory** IN SPITE OF racism--
To show us that our **greatness** is **not** in our **ethnicity** but only in our **great God!**

God laid it out clear in James 2:1,8

"My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ **if you favor some people over others?**...Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: '**Love your neighbor as yourself.**'"

James 2:1,8

And just so we know---our neighbors are next door, in the northeast side of town, and all around.

I don't have an ending to this talk. There's no ending because we're just getting started on understanding this issue...

Prayout.