“Race, Discipleship, and the White Church”: A Conversation with David Swanson (part 2)

[Please note that the first few minutes of the session were not recorded due to technical difficulties. The opening question of this half: “Why talk about race in terms of discipleship?”]

David Swanson: … And so both in terms of of our own vocations as being disciples, but then being called to invite others into discipleship as well, and so it felt like a relatively easy way to frame a difficult conversation and one in which many of us have sort of thought in terms of of politics or sociology, all which intersect with this. But we've not necessarily thought biblically. And so I wanted to try to provide a framework that would allow for, again, regardless of the the demographics of a person's church or neighborhood in to what seems so important to me. And then I am really convinced that there is this other discipleship that work on us, the racial discipleship that we've not accounted for. And so it made a lot of sense then after articulating that to say so what what would counteract that? What would lead us in a in a different direction?

And I don't have anything novel about that. That's what the church has always done, right? The church has always said that following Jesus involves following Jesus away from some things into an alternative way of being individually, but then also corporately as a people. And I just wanted to try to apply that to dynamics related to race.

Amanda Rosengren: Yeah, I think that's helpful. I appreciated your tie in with Jamie Smith's work on habits. I wonder if you could just share a little bit with us, those of us who might not be as familiar with that, about how his work has influenced your approach to discipleship.

David Swanson: Yeah. So Jamie Smith, James K. Smith teaches philosophy at Calvin and he's written a trilogy of books, and particularly the first couple of them really get into this idea of kind of secular liturgies. And he's the one who really gave me language related to loves and desires as being the kind of primary orientation of what it means to be a person that we don't move through the world navigated by one rational thought after another but that there's a kind of a deeper level in which we are imagining our way

through the world, that I in some sense do what I love. And and so the kind of Christian question is, what is it that shapes those deep desires and those loves in us?

And as Anglicans, you are very aware of these things already when you're sort of conversations about the liturgy that it's these practices, right. When the people come together and practice and we're formed not simply to have new thoughts, but to have new loves to have new desires to have new wants and new assumptions and imaginations. And and so I think that's the level that I'm hoping that we can actually get at here is the way that race operates in this country is generally not at the level of our, of our thoughts. It's deeper than that. It's at our fears. It's at our anxieties. It's at our wants. And so any Christian discipleship that is going to offer us a way into the reconciling kingdom of God has to get at that as well. And so questions about how our habits change and what are our habits pointing to become really, really important, I think, for any conversation about Christian discipleship. But again, just trying to apply it really specifically to race here.

Amanda Rosengren: Yeah, that's so helpful. It's one of the reasons I like your book so much, that when when I learned discipleship, it's about Bible studies or book studies, and that gets to the level of the mind. And those things are really important, Bible studies, but that the things that have the most power over us are our imaginations and our desires and our, and our habits.

And another reason I love the book for us at Redeemer is because we have these same liturgical practices and we talk about worship as something that forms our whole being and not just our thoughts. I felt like it went really hand-in-hand with who we are. What does Scripture have to say to us about what our goal ought to be in discipleship or re-discipleship or what God's purposes for us are in terms of race in our country?

David Swanson: Yeah, so I, I needed a relatively simple definition of discipleship just for myself working in this book. And so I kind of adapted some stuff in Dallas Willard to say that, that a disciple is someone who follows Jesus in order to become like Jesus, to do what Jesus does. And I think depending on our church traditions, we tend to emphasize one of those over the other two. And I think we need to hold all three of those together, that we follow Jesus. We give our lives to Jesus. We walk away from some things. We forsake the world in order to gain access to the treasure buried in the

field for the purpose of becoming like Jesus. Jesus raises dead people to life or transformed from the inside. Jesus is less concerned about cleaning up the outside of the cup than in washing us at the deepest possible level of identity with the idea that we then do what Jesus does in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. So when Jesus calls his disciples, he does so with the intention to then send them out to do what they've seen Jesus doing, to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, to cast out demons, to heal the sick, basically to alert their neighbors to the fact that the king has come and that the kingdom has come near.

And so I just don't see that that's any different when it comes to this conversation about race, when we honestly assess our own discipleship, are we are we doing that when it comes to the kind of racial status quo of our society? Are we calling people to follow Jesus away from the deforming norms and assumptions of our society? Are we expecting that people are becoming like Jesus in a way that causes them to stand out from that racial status quo?

Are people being sent into a world of hierarchies and injustice to proclaim a reconciling and righteous gospel? And I, I am underwhelmed when I assess most of our discipleship efforts in the white church. When it comes to that, I see us as being pretty tepid and pretty disengaged. And I so I don't think it's a matter of throwing everything away. I think it's a matter of asking what are the good gifts of God God that God has given to the church when it comes to our practices and our liturgies. And we just maybe haven't tapped into their latent potential. We just haven't seen that they are capable of forming us in these ways as well.

Amanda Rosengren: I love it. It's in some ways an integrated approach. It's about bringing some of these things into the realm of our discipleship. We've talked a bit about that as well.

David Swanson: I mean, I don't know about you, but like, I read a fair bit of ministry books and I'll get a third of the way through one and just feel like and I'm going to have to throw everything away if I'm going to do with this author wants me to do. And I just sort of feel so tired, you know, and sometimes we need to do that. We need to throw everything away. But I didn't want to write that book. I didn't want to make pastors or ministry leaders feel like I'm doing everything wrong. I have to start from scratch. But no,

it's a kind of a question of reimagining what we're already doing to pull out more and more of the potential.

Amanda Rosengren: The more I have this conversation and think about these things, the more I'm convinced that the church, the way it's meant to be, has all the tools for this conversation and no one else really does. That's part of what it means to follow Jesus and experience the reign of God. The subtitle of your book is "From Cheap Diversity to..." is it true or genuine solidarity? I have it right here somewhere. So why did you choose those two terms? What is that about? Tell us a little bit about that, that subtitle.

David Swanson: Yeah, well, the honest answer is probably Ethan and his team had more to do with the title and subtitle than I did. But they were right. I think I had a different one and it would not have been nearly as helpful and descriptive. But I do think it it reflects the ethos of the book when I'm thinking about cheap diversity. So, again, it's helpful to to say that I, most of my thinking over the past decade has been in multiracial spaces.

And so I've thought a whole lot about what does genuine reconciliation look like, because there's a lot of literature out there that shows that you can belong to a diverse community and yet still remain relatively segregated in your own personal life. You can belong to a diverse community and still leave a kind of unjust status quo undisturbed. And so that's sort of what I have in mind by cheap diversity. It's taking the existing status quo, whether it's in the society or in our churches and adding some diversity to it and feeling like, OK, we've arrived. We see diversity either as evidence that we've arrived or we see diversity as the kind of vehicle toward arriving. And in both cases, it's a kind of privileging of the white experience into a sense of white comfort over the lived reality of women and men of color.

I'm going to stress that a little bit differently. And this gets at some of the stuff we're talking about-- relationalism. When we add a little bit of racial diversity to a white, let's just talk about a church for a moment, that often makes the white people feel really good. "Look, our church is more diverse now and we can celebrate that." And yet that church never does anything to address the underlying causes of racial injustice and racism, which are disproportionately impacting those people of color who have joined

the majority white church. We've made it clear that our goal is kind of comforting the white people in our church rather than actually prioritising the lived experiences of the people of color in our church. There's a way of kind of prioritizing white comfort over the well-being and even survival of people of color, and that's a stark way of putting it. But that's what I mean by cheap diversity. And again, I, I say this very confessionally. The multiracial church in many ways, has experienced a lot of that and has exemplified a lot of that. So I'm not throwing stones at all. This is a really kind of self reflective statement that I'm making here. And so the question then is what's the alternative? And certainly there's work for multiracial churches to do. But I've come to believe that there's an alternative for all of us. And that's the language of solidarity for me and Paul's language in Romans about weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice.

That, as simple as that sounds, for me is the invitation into this, because we can all do that. We don't require a particular level of diversity in our suburb or in our in our church to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. The kind of question behind that is, do we know who's weeping and do we know who's rejoicing? And the nature of segregation in this country is is that kind of works to keep us from knowing. It keeps us from knowing who's weeping and who's rejoicing.

In the lead up to the last presidential election, I was talking with a Latina friend who goes to worship at a first generation immigrant congregation, and she was telling me how their church had been fasting and praying in the lead up to the election. Now, this is not a particularly partisan woman or partisan church, but they had experienced kind of so much vitriol in the lead up to that to that election, so much language that felt so disparaging and dehumanizing. And they felt that their only real Christian response was to be fasting and praying for God's will in the lead up to that election. And the thought that I had in this moment was how many of the majority white churches around this congregation even know that this is the experience of this congregation.

Now, this is a church in my own denomination, as I know for a fact, that there's a lot of churches within a five to 20 mile drive of this church who are utterly clueless about the kind of intense pressure and lament that that that particular church was feeling. And so they're not able to to stand in solidarity with their sisters and brothers because they simply don't know who's weeping in that moment. And so that's what I think we're after. We're after a kind of biblical solidarity that allows us, again, regardless of the

demographics, to say we know who's weeping and we weep with them. We stand with them. We advocate with them, we worship with them. We know who's rejoicing. And so we testify with them. We celebrate with them. That, I think, is the image of the church that we see in scriptures. It's one that I think we've simply kind of let go of of having any real chance of experiencing ourselves. And yet it's one that I think is absolutely for us today as well.

Amanda Rosengren: How do you define solidarity? I mean, you know, you gave you gave pictures of it. I kind of get it on a gut level. But sometimes I guess what I'm wondering is there's a way to kind of have empathy with someone and still disagree with them. I think there is. I'm just trying to wrestle with what does solidarity look like in terms of let's say, well... I'm trying to decide how how concrete to get here. OK, so we had a situation in Kenosha recently, right, which is just north of us, which is another situation where there's people on all sorts of sides. How does Christian solidarity come into play in a situation like that for a majority white church?

David Swanson: That's OK. So we'll get real practical. That's great. And appreciate the willingness to even ask the question. I think that Christian solidarity is always sacrificial. It always costs us something, particularly for those in the majority of those in the more of a privileged position. And I just don't know that we can think about solidarity away from the cross in which I mean, this is sort of God's profound act of solidarity with humanity, right. Becoming in flesh like us for us and for our salvation.

And so I do, I think that we want to acknowledge that solidarity is not, it's more than empathy. It's more than knowledge. There's a lived component to it that will require something of us, that will cost us something. So in the case of, in the case of what we see in Kenosha, I would be interested in what are the priorities? So you're Anglican. Are there Anglican churches in Kenosha, I don't know. Are there churches in the fellowship in the area? I'd be curious to know what what are those churches experiencing right now? I'd be curious. What are what are black churches in that city experiencing right now and what are their priorities, what's most important to them in this moment? One of the tendencies for those of us who are white, one of our own kind of cultural formations is to assume that we are objective, that we are kind of the neutral arbiters of different moments and we can determine what's most important, and that's simply wrong. And so in a moment like that one, what would it look like for us to come to a black congregation

in in Kenosha and say, we would like to know how to help? We'd like to know what you need. We'd like to know what your priorities are right now and how we can align ourselves with them.

It's helpful, obviously, if there's some relational networks in place already or if there's some relational capital in a situation like that. But I think there's creative ways to build that relatively quickly. There's a kind of humility and curiosity that would nurture a conversation like that. But that kind of solidarity is one in which we are not assuming to know best. We are not assuming to know the way forward. We are not assuming to know what people's realities are right now. It's one in which we kind of are willing to put aside our own partisan assumptions and simply say we we want to be present with our sisters and brothers. They know what's important for their community right now. They know what's important for their city right now. So how can we align our hearts or resources with theirs? That that, to me, would be an act of of of kind of biblical and sacrificial solidarity. It would lead in lots of interesting ways, right. Relationships would be built, there'd be friendships that would come out of that. There'd be opportunities for mission that would bubble out of that. But but coming from that, that posture of humility and curiosity and then willingness to jump in, even when it feels a little bit messy, could be really significant.

Amanda Rosengren: Thank you. That's really helpful. One of the things that jumped out to me in what you said, a number of things did, but I think for those of us who are white and reading the news, there's a lot of times that something comes up, and we feel like we have to figure it out and figure out what's right and what's wrong and have a sense of that before we get involved. And what I heard, the word that jumped out was the word presence and a commitment to be with instead of coming in as an expert, saying, this is my family and I'm going to going to be with my brothers and sisters in this city.

David Swanson: So if I can share a quick story about that, Amanda, when our church did a retreat right after the Charleston massacre in South Carolina and just happenstance and really kind of shook a lot of people in our in our community and we doing testimonies before we celebrated communion on the Sunday before we left. And a younger Asian-American man said, my heart is broken and I just don't know how how best I can support and comfort my black sisters and brothers in this church right now.

And our associate pastor and I tell the story in the book with her permission, so I'm comfortable sharing it here -- an African-American woman. She said again publicly, she said, I hear you and I appreciate that. But this is one of the lines of race that you can't know how to support me, that you can't know what my experience is like in this moment. The fact is, is that I'm heartbroken right now. I'm grieving right now and I'm angry right now. And, you know all of those feelings and emotions, too. And and you know how to stand with someone who's experienced all of that as well. But the lie of race is that somehow we are some distanced or so different from one another, that you have to figure some stuff out first or you have to put these things together first before you can draw close. Race is really, really complicated. But there's also ways that race over-complicates things in those kinds of moments where we could simply reach out to a church and say, what do you need? What what's happening right now? How can we be present with you right now without kind of figuring everything out first?

There's a way that I think the gospel humanizes us and our family in Christ so that we can more quickly draw closer together.

Amanda Rosengren: Thank you. That's really helpful. I have more questions, but I want to make sure we get to practices. So I'm going to, I'm going to move there. And if we have time later, I'll ask some other things. So we've been talking about a lot of stuff kind of up here, and what are the frameworks. But I want us to talk now about what are the practices, what are the habits. It's easy to get overwhelmed with the, 'this just all feels so hopeless.' What are some of the practices and habits that lead us toward solidarity on a corporate level. We have some folks here who pastors, so I think I want maybe talk about that briefly, because your book goes into a lot of detail on that, but also for us as individuals who maybe aren't in charge of churches but are members of churches -- what are some of the practices and habits that lead us toward solidarity, things we can do?

David Swanson: Yeah, well, how about this, Amanda? I'll kind of very briefly describe the ones I mentioned in the book, and then maybe you could kind of, if you want to direct a particular one, we can we can do that. And I'll try to keep in mind those two different groups. So the practices that I identify are not comprehensive. I really hope they're just starting points. I hope that they for people to think of other practices, they're ones that I thought that most congregations are already participating in in some way

and so would feel kind of within reach. The first one has to do with communion and how it is that we come to the table together, whether that's in your case, weekly or in other traditions monthly, that kind of however we're coming to the table, that there's potential there for for how we participate in communion to shape us. The second one I talk about is preaching. And this one, this one was a stretch because I think most of us who are white, again, we have this very individual experience of preaching. So like in the in the in my household, growing up when we were driving home from church, the question was, what did you think about the sermon? Right, so it's individual. It's head oriented. It's not a bad question. And when I was on my sabbatical a few years ago, when I was attending a friend's black church of God in Christ charismatic tradition, I was attending his church doing sabbatical. And oftentimes the statement after service on the way out was we sure had some church today. And so the the starting point is, is corporate. And the kind of reflection is experiential rather than solely intellectual. Again, one is not necessarily better than the other, but to start thinking about preaching as a as a practice that can change us, I think we need to to start understanding our community and communal-ality a little bit more, that we come to this moment together.

So again, to talk about my friend's church, for a majority black church, these are women and men who are kind of sent each week into a racialized society, a racialized society in which they are aware that they are on the bottom of the hierarchy. They are aware that they're going to face instances of racism, that they're going to be lied to in some ways about their identity overtly and more subtly. And so that this is a people who kind of come corporately together, hungry together to worship, to have an experience of God, to get there and to be reformed together through that preached word. And so the preaching moment in that church is pretty interactive. There's a lot of talking back. There's a lot of amens and yes Preacher, you know, this kind of thing. And that's the cultural dynamic. But it is also a reflection of a church that understands its corporate identity and the fact that they are participating together in the proclamation of the gospel rather than simply sitting back and receiving it into our individual minds. It's a very, very different starting point. So we don't need all of our white churches to become culturally black. However, for the preaching to kind of take on this formational power, I do think we have to come to this from a more corporate standpoint, which then means grappling with what it means to be white, that we are a culturally white people who are coming to this, who have also existed in a world that has lied to us all week long. It's a way to come hungry for the proclaimed word of God to put us back together is a lot more to say

about that. I talk about in the third chapter liturgies, the kind of Sunday liturgy and the ways in which the different elements of a service, each of them, whether they're very brief, the call, the worship or the dismissal, that all of these actually have formational power as a practice to start reorienting our habits.

David Swanson (cont): The fourth one is about children's ministry, which was maybe the one that felt most important to me to include in the book. There can be this assumption in a lot of white spaces, not only Christian spaces, that racism is going to go away over time and that our children are somehow more racially enlightened and they're going to get it more than we. I can't tell you how many times I've heard some version of that. It's a very unbiblical understanding of how sin operates. Sin does not just go away just generationally. Our children are in as much need of salvation and sanctification as are we. And so it was important that that I, I wanted to grapple with what it would look like for children to grow up in a congregation that was discipling them into the reconciled kingdom of God from the very, very beginning so that they wouldn't have to have a second moment of conversion. Later on in life, where they would realize, oh, my goodness, I never saw these connections, but now I see in Scripture how God actually cares about these things, I've had too many conversations with younger white Christians who really struggle with their faith because they they weren't told that the that their God cares about these things, that that the gospel actually speaks to these things. And some of these Christians have actually walked away from the faith because they've not been able they felt like they have to choose between Jesus and justice. And that's just it doesn't have to be that way. So that's the one on children's ministry.

Chapter eight is about place and about kind of a long term commitment to place. It's it's trying to kind of think about the church scattered throughout the week. And what does it look like for for the people to say that we are not simply a transient, that we are not going to be in a place until something more interesting presents itself, that we're not going to chase the American dream at the expense of the community that God is building in a particular place, that that the place itself, that God's creation itself still retains this this potential to form a community, to form a culture of people and then to more the one on evangelism. What does it look like to call people to faith such that it is a call to discipleship to Jesus away from the racial status quo? And then the last one is about relationships, because despite the way that relationships can be misused when it comes to reconciliation, we are the friends of God. And Jesus does call us friends. And

so I think any Christian approach to justice and reconciliation does need to assume that we are going to have new friends because of who Jesus is and that are relational lives are absolutely going to look differently, not as the means to justice, not as the evidence of racial justice, but as kind of an ecosystem from which we pursue the priorities of the kingdom.

I was super long, sorry.

Amanda Rosengren: No that's great, that's great. So now, if you haven't had a chance to read the book, you know a little bit of the framework for it, and I appreciate what you're saying about a starting point for us to reimagine. Your book would have been a lot longer, I think, if it was meant to be an exclusive list. I think the one I'd like to us to focus on in our next few minutes is about presence and place, because, again, not everyone of us on this call has influence, is a preacher or has influence even over our liturgies. But we all are in a place. Why do you see that as something that works towards solidarity and against these other malformations?

David Swanson: So to start with, it's important to say that my my theology is that God intended God's creation to be the kind of primary formation or reality of people and cultures that this was God's good gift and not for us to exploit, but for us to care for to steward, to tend to and then to be formed by race severs that. So so so the construction of race says that what's most and what's most important about you is not where you come from. It's not the land that you care for. It's not the people you belong to. It's not the kind of community that that has existed in a place for four generations. What's most important about you is this humanly invented category that is then overlaid on top of this is now what becomes the thing that's most important about your place on a hierarchy, about what you have access to, about what's possible for you. And so there is a there is this way that race is a threat to God's intentions and God's purposes. And it's been very effective. It's been very effective to detach people from place in a very tangible way, but then also in our imaginations as well. Most of us don't think about the place where we live as forming us. We we think about whether it has a good school for our kids or whether we could afford the house or how close it is to, in my case, being able to walk to Lake Michigan or whatever the thing might be.

David Swanson (cont): And then when other opportunities come up, many of us, whether it's for grad school or a better paying job, we're pretty quick to to move. There's people in my church who've moved because it's just too cold in Chicago in the wintertime, which I can understand it could kind of laugh about. But I'm really honest. I also feel like that's a very unchristian reason to to leave the place and its people. So what does it look like for families or individuals, for church communities to say that we want to be committed to this place? Well, I think it includes learning the history of that place. How did place come to be what it's like today, it didn't just happen, there's a history behind it. Who were the people before we were the people and why are they not here anymore? And oftentimes the reason that those people are not here anymore, we're not because of neutral reasons, but because of more malicious ones, because housing prices rose or because of legislation that was passed that only allowed certain people to live in this community and not and not other people. All of this information is pretty quickly available. A little bit of research can find out pretty quickly the history of redlining in a community or, you know, restrictive covenants that kept some people from purchasing homes. It can we can learn pretty quickly who the indigenous people were who are caring for the land before the first European settlers arrived.

I was teaching some pastors in Spokane a couple of summers ago, and after the first session, a couple of them came up to me and they said, this is interesting, but it's not really relevant to us because our city is mostly white. And so we have other concerns. And so that night I spent maybe 10 minutes, maybe 15 minutes on Google. And lo and behold, there are certain communities in Spokane which to this day have have houses whose deeds explicitly prohibit black people from buying those those houses. Now, most people in Spokane are completely unaware that those deeds, they were legal, they're no longer legal. So it wouldn't actually keep a black person from buying that home. But you realize that there's some history behind the fact that people perceive Spokane to be mostly white. There's some reasons behind that. And so for those of us who are coming to see our place as really important, we have to we have to know those stories. We have to kind of be the keepers of those memories. And one of the reasons for this is that we then will come to understand that our space might be mostly white.

But that's not a neutral fact. That's not something that we can just sit comfortably in. There's sometimes the force of federal policy behind that. And some areas there were there were racial cleansings that happened in town that pushed communities of color

out and so on and so forth. So that's one piece. Another piece is that we start to see who's been made invisible by the status quo for years. My wife and I lived in Glen Ellyn in the western suburbs and forever I just thought this is just a very, very white suburb. And then my wife got a job working with a social service agency, which was located in a very strategic corner of that community where most of the low income housing and all of a sudden I realized, oh, my goodness, there's entire communities of people in this in this suburb who are not white and who work service sector jobs for the most part and kind of exist a little bit in the shadows.

David Swanson (cont): And so I think as we have a commitment to place, we actually start to describe our place as a little bit more accurately. And we stop saying things like, well, this is just an all white town to saying, well, it's a mostly white town, but some of our neighbors are such and such. And the reasons that we don't see them are such and such.

And the reasons why our church is aware of this and cares about this is is because we actually understand we understand that these are our sisters and brothers. Last thing I'll say again, sorry for my long answer, is that I think as we as a people start to commit to a place in this way, as we start to see this creation is still God's and it's still it's still haunted with God's formational power, we begin to be reshaped by that by that place. And I think that this is a little bit theoretical. This is the next book. I want Ethan to say that I can write that the kind of power of race starts to diminish a little bit as the as the latent formational power of race starts to increase so that we start to sort ourselves less naturally by race and we start to see how God is actually nurturing cultures, diverse cultures of people who are committed to particular kinds of places. And I think this leads to kind of hospitality, a kind of openness, a kind of vulnerability to others who are not white, who also share the space with us. And so I think there's actually something really hopeful. It's a long hope, but I think there's something really hopeful as a people come to care so deeply about their place, to almost submit our lives to it and to what God has been doing in that place. And there's some interesting transformation that.

Amanda Rosengren: Yeah, I appreciate that. It's something I haven't thought very much about as someone who grew up in Southern California and now lives out here and in pandemic, it's interesting cause I think we're spending a lot more of our time online. And I think that kind of pushes us away from place too but at Redeemer, so we

have a building now that's in a place. And so my imagination is getting fired up about what does it look like for us to investigate this place? And again, I think, you know, I'm thinking a lot these days about social media and how a lot of the work or solidarity work seems to be happening in that space. And there's pluses to that, but there's minuses to that. So just thinking about how to bring it home and be formed more in this place for these people rather than just out in that space, I don't know if you want to respond to that at all...

David Swanson: No, I think that's absolutely, any ways that we can make this this very tangible. I think that's the Christian instinct. That's the instinct toward the incarnation that this is always going to be enfleshed and a kind of posture that we can smell and touch and see. I often wonder, what would it be like if in any given community the Christians were the people who were the keepers of memory? You know, because I do think this is one of the things that white culture does, is it it works to to make us forget to be white in this country is to forget where we came from, because none of my ancestors immigrated to this country as white people. They all came with their particularities of of culture, of history, of language. And these are the things that had to get left behind in order to become racially white, in order to access the kind of promises of the American dream that are extended to white people. And so forgetfulness is is one of the strongest attributes of racial whiteness. And so for a white congregation to say, we are going to remember, we are going to be the people in this community who don't forget, who refuse to forget, if anybody in our community wants to know what happened one hundred years ago, they know to go ask the Christians because they refuse to forget, they refused to be forced to forget in order to gain access to the privilege and power. They they're the ones who make themselves vulnerable to suffering, to pain, to what's happening in our community. By choosing to remember. I don't know. I think there's something really interesting.

Amanda Rosengren: I'm going to ask one more question and then we'll take questions from others. And I'm trying to think how to phrase it... The phrasing that comes to mind is what does solidarity change? It resonates on an emotional level, but what does it change? How does it work towards God's purposes in the world?

David Swanson: I think it does so much. So I'm trying to organize my thoughts, that's such a good question. No one has asked that question before, Amanda, so that's

awesome. Thank you. I think so. I think it changes something in me as a white Christian. When I find myself in solidarity, I, just my imagination changes. My memory changes. I've been having a lot of conversations with white pastors over the past few months who are feeling like we got to do something. We have to, you know, there's so much wrong around racism and we've got to do something. And what what I'm realizing is that those of us who are white are trying to do this work without any memory of how to do this. We have no biblical imagination for this, which is very different than my colleagues of color who have a very thick and deep and rich biblical and theological imagination for this. And so we're kind of building the plane as we fly. And so I think for for for the white Christian, the kind of lived solidarity, it gives us access to an imagination and even a memory that's not just ours. right, but of God's faithfulness, what God has done, how God has kept his people in the face of incredible oppression and injustice. And I can't help but be transformed by that. Like, I'm no longer limited to my own segregated experience. I now have to to this gift of access to the church in a way that is is a gift that's just hard to, hard to describe, hard to put words to.

David Swanson (cont): I think there's also an implication for those Christians who exist on the other side of the kind of racial hierarchy.These are women and men who have been trying to get white Christians to wake up for generations in this country. As you read the kind of sermons in the literature, particularly from the black church in this country, time and time again, these are are saints who are trying to say to the white church, please, would you not just believe us? We do not just believe what we are telling you is happening to us. Would you not just care more about us than your own access to power and time and time again, white churches and we say No, we won't.

And so I, I want to be careful in how I say this, because we are not we're not anybody's savior. But the more that we stand in solidarity with those sisters and brothers, the better their experience is going to be. And not because we fix anything, but just because we're there with them, just because because we become their friends, we become their co-conspirators and their allies rather than the people who are actually kind of standing in the way and resisting their their efforts to care for their children and to nurture their communities and so on.

And then I think the last thing that comes to mind as you ask that, is our witness in the world. I think that white Christians often have this view that somehow our society is

more racially enlightened than is the church. I don't know how many people actually think that, but I hear that regularly. I hear like, you know, our church is so retrograde compared to to our society at large, and I really don't think that's true. I think our society knows the language of racial justice and we know the language of colorblindness and so on. But at its actual lived experience, our society remains profoundly segregated and very comfortable with the status quo. That's why it takes something so dramatic, like we've seen this summer to catch people's attention. If the church were actually to live this way, we're actually to kind of experience this embodied in sacrificial solidarity. It would be a witness that could not be a kind of testimony that we had. People could still reject it. They could still say we don't want that. But I think they would actually have to reckon pretty seriously with what we say we believe to be true about Jesus, his lordship and his kingdom.

Amanda Rosengren: Thank you. That's helpful. I'm going to ask a couple of these questions that folks have sent in, and then I might actually open it up for anybody to ask stuff. We'll see. One of the questions I think that's coming up for people is how does this relate to systemic and policy change? So we're talking about solidarity, really placing ourselves as part of the family with our brothers and sisters of color alongside them and with them. But we know that it's not just about individuals, that that's about systemic stuff. How does this relate? What are what do you want to say about that for folks who are really caring about that right now?

David Swanson: Yeah, it's a complicated question. And I'm not an expert on policy. So this is kind of anecdotal. I do think that white Christians oftentimes have been formed to think about politics in a way that's not particularly helpful, that we look towards elections as what's going to make us a more Christian people, who's going to be sort of our our savior politically. Black Christians, again, I'm speaking sort of out of my experience in our neighborhood, have have historically had a very different perspective, which is who can who can be elected, who's going to do the least amount of damage to our particular communities? We don't actually anticipate that anybody is going to have our best interest in mind, that anybody really, truly cares for the flourishing of black families and their communities. So so who can we elect is going to do the least amount? I actually think that's a little bit more of a political perspective.

David Swanson: And it's a different, like if your assumption is that we're in the promised land and we're just trying to make it a little bit better or if we're in exile and we're going to be here until Lord Jesus intervenes in history. So that for me has been helpful. It's not an excuse to not engage politically. In fact, it is a call to be very engaged politically because we understand it has very real implications to elections and to policy. But we don't stake our identity on it. We don't we don't kind of stake our hope to any particular candidate or party. And because, again, we're pretty brutally honest about where their their interests actually are. I think as we get as we stand closer, closer solidarity with communities of color, we are going to understand with more clarity what policies really do make a difference. So let me give you an example.

Something that I rarely hear white Christians talk about is how public schools are funded. But public school funding in large part comes from local property taxes. And so depending on where a child was born or what was difficult to live in is going to determine sort of the quality of education that they have access to. This is a concern of justice. This thing actually has very real implications on children's lives. And so that would be a policy that I would think Christians would be interested in kind of getting our heads around and engaging with that again, most, most white Christians haven't necessarily thought about that. But once we are in solidarity with those who are really experiencing that, that might become a policy that we're actually interested in or a conversation that we're interested in. What would it look like to have a funding structure that would actually provide kind of equal access to public education for every single child in this country, regardless of where they were born? So I think it can at least open our eyes up to where are our media is great at telling us what the most important sort of where the spotlight is and oftentimes is just not true. Which isn't to say it's not it's not important. There's often stuff that's much closer, much more local, that has very real impact on our neighbors.

Amanda Rosengren: So in a sense, this is where solidarity and place really come together, where when we're in solidarity with those who are right here, we're focused on our place and some of those policy things that we actually can affect come forward. Ethan just asked a question in the chat about what does commitment to place look like for a church like ours that is across a wide geographic area. But our church is focused in. And I'm going to respond to that and David can respond too. But my thought is that each of us, our homes are in a community and our church is in a community. And both

of those places are important, I think, about folks living in Grayslake. Maybe there's things to learn in Grayslake. And it doesn't all have to happen through the church. We are on a mission where we're at. And that's good news because there's a role for us wherever, where you don't even have to wait for Redeemer to get on board for that, you can be involved in your own local community. Anything else you want to say about that David?

David Swanson: I think that's a tension for any church that is not really just a parish church where everybody lives within walking distance. And we, that's our experience, too. And what I have found to be the most helpful is just to constantly acknowledge that, to constantly acknowledge that tension, that where you live really matters. And the fact that this church is in a particular community also matters. I think then it's up to the congregation to to find avenues for people to to show their commitment to the church's place in a way that doesn't kind of take all of their time away from where they where they live or where they work. And again, just being real plain about about that tension. The church also can be the the place where people are being equipped to see the importance of where they live so that when they're sent, they're being sent, having been equipped to kind of look with new eyes at neighborhoods, at schools and workplaces and the potential that's there.

Amanda Rosengren: Thank you. I'm going to ask one one more question, I think and it's along the lines of how do we help bring others along who are resistant to the idea of race making a difference. Who, you know, throw out critical race theory and Marxism and all that. We have pastors on this call who are wrestling with that. And I think people wrestling with that with family members and things too... What does it look like up for us to be on a mission with Jesus moving folks along in this? And maybe what does it not look like?

David Swanson: Yeah, I don't think it looks like fighting on social media. I've tried and it doesn't... you don't have to try it yourselves. I think that a confessional posture is the best way forward. I do my best whenever I'm talking or writing about this, to use the language in US language. I never want to come across as pointing the finger at somebody else. Again, I'm thinking as a Christian, right. The gospel provides a platform that is strong enough for me to admit and confess my own brokenness when it comes to this, my own complicity in a system that has benefited me at the expense of somebody

else. And so I think those one on one conversations with family members and friends are that's where the good stuff happens. And that's where the needle actually starts to move a little bit. That's where someone will say, yeah, yeah, let me read that book with you or let me see that movie with you. What is so helpful if we come to that from a confessional place? There's a lot of self-righteous white Christians who think they're 'woke' out there and they're not helping anything. It feels really good. It feels good to sort of know the right language and to read the right books and to kind of check the boxes. I'm not sure makes any difference and actually kind of, you know, convincing anybody else.

David Swanson (cont): But if we can say actually right there with you, I can empathize with you, I know what this is like and I'm not arrived. I think that's a I think that's appealing to people. There's a lot of white people out there who are not who are afraid to to talk about this because they're afraid that they're going to say something wrong and they're afraid that they're going to say something taboo. They're going to use a word that they shouldn't have used. And they're afraid of being in that kind of language of our culture right now, being canceled. And so to provide a relational space where that person can say exactly what's on their mind can kind of wrestle with what they're experiencing. I was on a I read about these Sankofa trips in the book where we we do these bus rides through the civil rights monuments in the South. And I did one a couple of years ago and it started out in Kansas and there was a farmer and his wife from Kansas on the trip, a white couple probably in their late 50s, early 60s. Their whole lives had been spent in very, very rural Kansas. And so the first evening we come together and kind of introducing Randy and he says to the whole group. A very diverse group, because I just want you all to know that I have some prejudices and I'm working those things out and I'm going to say some things on this trip that are incorrect or that you're going to help me on, to correct me on. But I just want you all to know that at the front and it was the most amazing thing to hear. And everybody was like, we're so glad you're here. We're so glad that you're a part of this right now.

And he and his wife could then be fully present. And then they went back to rural Kansas, you know, having had this really significant experience having they had conversations they never would have had with people they never would have had the chance to meet otherwise. I think that's that's what we're wanting to provide for people, right, that kind of grace and that kind of openness to a conversation that I think only the

church can provide. I don't know that it can happen anywhere else. Which isn't to say that we're not we're going to shield people from hard truths, that we're not going to actually dig into difficult things.

But if our starting point can be that of hospitality, confession and grace, I think that is surprising culturally and also really, really welcome.

Amanda Rosengren: That's so helpful. Thank you. I thought that came to mind as, again, it's easy to forget that my job isn't to change people. My job is to invite people into conversation with Jesus and let him do the work. And to bring this, this is an area where Jesus has some work to do in all of us. And that's an incredibly freeing thing. And so I appreciate your perspective of a confessional posture. Thank you.

We are almost out of time. So here's what I'm going to do. I have a brief midday liturgy that we're going to do together, maybe five minutes, and then we'll let David go take care of his kids. If anyone would like to stay for another half hour or so afterwards to just debrief and talk, I will be available for that. Otherwise, you can always call me. I am here. Ethan's here. David's not here. But you can read his book, so I'm going to switch us over. Let's take a minute to just be quiet and bring our thoughts and our hearts before the Lord while I switch over to the slide here.

Amanda Rosengren: I invite you to pray with me. O God make speed to save us. Oh, Lord, make haste to help us. Glory be to the father and to the Son, to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen. Alleluia.

Amanda Rosengren: Let's read this psalm all together. When the Lord overturned the captivity of Zion, then were we like those who dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy. Then they said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. Indeed, the Lord has done great things for us already whereof we rejoice. Overturn our captivity, O Lord, as when streams refreshed the deserts of the south. Those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. He who goes on his way weeping and buries good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy and bring his sheaves with him. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be a world without end. Amen.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old is gone, the new is here, all this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." The word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Amanda Rosengren: I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth. Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us.

Amanda Rosengren: Let's pray this prayer together that our Savior taught us: our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.Amen.

Amanda Rosengren: Oh, Lord, hear our prayer. And let our cry come to you, let us pray.

Amanda Rosengren: Oh, God, you made us in your own image and you have redeemed us through your son, Jesus Christ. Look, with compassion on the whole human family, take away the arrogance and hatred which in effect, our hearts take down the walls that separate us, unite us in bonds of love and work through our struggle and confusion. There's probably lots of confusion and struggle for those of us on this call today. Work through it to accomplish your purposes on Earth that in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Let us bless the Lord, thanks be to God.

Amanda Rosengren: All right, everybody, thank you, David, I know we covered a lot today. Again, I'm really grateful for your work and actually I want to take a moment for us to pray for you before we say goodbye. Thanks for everyone who was able to join, feel free to follow up by email or phone or whatever. We practice things not being resolved. There might be a lot that's not resolved in this call. And that's OK. Let the Lord work through it. Let's pray for David and then we'll say goodbye.

Amanda Rosengren: Father, I thank you so much for the work you've done in your servant and your child, David. Empower him by your spirit for this work. Lord, we thank you that he's not especially special, but he's your servant and enable him to be your ambassador to those of us who are white and thus protect him, protect his family, may they flourish and may your blessing rest on him. Amen.

Amanda Rosengren: All right, everybody, thank you again, David. Blessings on your work. If anyone would like to stick around for a few minutes to debrief, feel free, otherwise enjoy the rest of your Saturday. It's A beautiful day here and we'll see you tomorrow.

Thank you very much, David. Appreciate it very much.

David Swanson: Thank you. Blessings. Thank you, Amanda. Thank you, Ethan.