**Dead to Sin – Alive in Love**

**Narrative Lectionary**

**August 20, 2017**

Romans 6: 1-11 Russell Mitchell-Walker

It’s been quite the week in the US as well as here in Canada with the rally in Charlottesville in support of white supremacy and white nationalism, which horrifically ended with a car being driven into the crowd killing one, and injuring at least 19 others. There were counter protesters as well, most of whom were non-violent, a number were church leaders, trained in non-violent resistance, some of whom I know. Then followed the US President’s responses, which flip flopped throughout the week but in the end, showed his inability to denounce the racism, hate and violence of the white nationalists. The fact that there was also inference that there was equal violence on both sides, indicated that he did not have his facts straight. I have read enough accounts from those who were there, to know that the “other side” were not instigating the violence and there were stories that the anti-facist protestors often stepped in between the white nationalists and the clergy to protect the clergy who were totally unarmed. It is amazing that there were not more injuries that were serious than what was reported. There also were many more injuries than the 19 reported from the vehicle driving into the crowd. One wonders where the police were and what their strategy was that they did not intervene sooner because they were there. As [Brian McLaren](http://brianmclaren.net/what-i-saw-in-charlottesville/) witnessed and reflected:

In my fields of observation, they did not seem present to intervene quickly when skirmishes broke out. They seemed to stay back in the background. Perhaps this was intentional and strategic for reasons I don’t understand. Be that as it may, I couldn’t help but think about the contrast between the hands-off way heavily armed white supremacists were treated by police in Charlottesville and how unarmed African Americans in other demonstrations have been beaten and arrested around the country over the years … or how unarmed Native Americans were treated at Black Rock a few months ago. That contrast is haunting, itself an expression of white privilege.

The reality that many of us have come to realize or name, is that while we haven’t seen this kind of movement by white nationalism and white supremacy at this level, it is not new. A climate has been created where these groups feel emboldened to gather and protest like we have not seen in decades. What has also become clear for many in the church, is our role to name white nationalism, white supremacy, and [racism as sin](http://www.united-church.ca/news/its-time-re-commit-racial-justice-and-equity), and denounce and resist such beliefs, movements and gatherings. White supremacy is the systems and policies, which support white nationalism, that whites are a superior race, promoting a white national identity to the detriment of other racialized people and cultural identities including sexual and gender identities. We cannot be silent, for our silence is seen as support and we become complicit in dehumanizing others, and as such diminish the image of God in one another.

In the reading from Romans today, Paul writes about how we are baptized in Christ and through this baptism are dead to sin – the old self is crucified with him, and we are no longer controlled by sin. It does not mean that we won’t sin, but that sin no longer rules our lives in the same way. In the previous chapter, Paul talks about God’s abundant grace such that, the Romans were thinking that they could go on sinning because they will still be forgiven by God’s abundant grace and God continues to love us anyway. Paul challenges this thinking. In Christ we have experienced God’s abundant love and grace and as such it is something that we want to maintain and live in. We want to please and honour God who offers this amazing love and grace, so that keeps us from being slaves to sin, from abusing God’s grace by living in sin. It is this abundant love and grace that sustains us as well to challenge sin where we need. This includes challenging systemic sin such as racism, and the ways that it manifests in individuals and groups. We also need to know, that we cannot be complacent thinking things are different in Canada. There are similar white nationalist movements here and there is an anti-immigration rally in Quebec today and a few rallies that were planned but since cancelled or postponed. The cultural genocide of the First nations as named by the Truth and Reconciliation commission is the result of white supremacist policy, including the [Doctrine of Discovery](https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/imperial-rivalries/resources/doctrine-discovery-1493) by the Catholic Church. So we as a church are called to be vigilant and work to create diverse communities of love and justice.

This year I will be taking the [Leadership in The New Parish](http://theseattleschool.edu/programs/leadership-in-the-new-parish/) program at the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. The program focuses on how to be church in and connected with the local neighbourhood. In preparing for its first intensive weekend in October, I have been reading a book called [Disunity in Christ](https://www.amazon.ca/Disunity-Christ-Uncovering-Hidden-Forces/dp/0830844031): Uncovering the Hidden Forces that keep us Apart by Christena Cleveland. It is about how we have created communities and that we have a tendency to keep to those who are similar or like ourselves. Thus creating diverse, multi-racial, multi-ethnic communities takes intentional hard work. She names a number of ways of changing how we think and react to one another. These include:

* Changing our language to avoid talking about us and them. When we name groups as part of us, it diminishes the othering that can happen, ‘they’ are not seen as different.
* She talks about cognitive generosity-which is rethinking how we categorize people and catching ourselves in the assumptions we immediately make due to stereotypes and ‘polluted perceptions’ of others.
* Working to equalize opportunities when working with groups in different cultures.
* Understanding our privilege and working to give up our privilege to provide opportunities for learning and experiencing another culture in their context and on their ‘turf’

These are just a few examples that are really thought provoking and challenging as we look at how to be communities of diversity together. It is who God in Christ calls us to be. Dying to the sin of separation and rising to new life of a generous and just love.

We are all alive to God in Christ; dead to sin having control over us, because of God’s abundant love and grace. May that manifest in how we live in relationship with others, with those who are different, and challenge the white supremacy in ourselves, in others, and in institutions when we notice it, hear it, or witness it.