

“Remarks on Anti-Racism”

by Lark Madden, FRS Member

January 16, 2022

Good morning. I'm Lark Madden and I want to start by asking you to join me in looking at one of the readings in our hymnal. If you don't have a hymnal don't worry – I'll read it to you.

I like many of the readings in *Singing the Living Tradition*, and I admit to having perused them occasionally in church when I was supposed to be paying attention to the sermon or some other part of the service.

The reading that I'd like to call your attention to is number 563 by Ralph Waldo Emerson, called "A Person Will Worship Something."

Emerson's lines I take as a very real warning: Be careful what you value, what you worship, what you decide is really important, because, as he says – "IT WILL OUT."

Some of the most important experiences I have had at FRS came by way of an invitation. Over the last thirty years or so I've gotten a lot of invitations! Some made me stretch and take risk, some made me uncomfortable, some helped me see the world and human relationships in a different way. Almost all I accepted deepened my connections to FRS folks.

That's one way that this place works. You'll get an invitation, and you have to consider whether it's something you want to spend time on and say "yes" or "no." Nobody tells you that you have to do something here. That's one of the main reasons I like this community.

It all starts with an INVITATION.

As the first few months of the pandemic unfolded, Julie Parker Amery invited the congregation to participate in something called "Seeing White." My wife Annie and I accepted.

"Seeing White" is a multi-chapter series of podcasts created and led by journalist John Biewins and his colleague Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika, in which the long history of chattel slavery, racism, and white Western European and American colonial domination and exploitation of African and Native American people is presented. Further work covers more recent U.S. history, including more on slavery and Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and other contemporary developments.

"Seeing White" endeavors to help participants understand how to recognize WHITENESS and to become much more aware of the structural and inherent nature of belonging to and participating in the white economic and cultural system. I believe it helped me better understand and recognize racism.

Listen – I don't think I'm very different than other people my age: I knew from a very young age that Black people were mistreated and marginalized; I always was aware that I was lucky compared to many Blacks in America; I grew up in segregated northern Virginia; and my parents were liberal and progressive folks who cared about these problems and discussed them with me and my siblings.

But just as George Floyd's murder recorded on video and broadcast to the world did, "Seeing White" tore the cover off my sort of comfortable distance from racism. And that experience also led me to be interested in doing some additional WORK.

Part of that work is a new learning opportunity here at FRS called Living the Pledge. Living the Pledge is another chance to study not just the foundations of racism but what we can actually do about it.

Even here in our not so diverse corner of Essex County, we can learn how to practice anti-racist skills in real time. We can gain empathy for what it must feel like to be ignored, to be treated as inferior, to be threatened.

So here comes the invitation folks: I invite you to consider spending your time and energy on Living the Pledge. I invite this congregation to become learned about the real history of racism and slavery. We may not have lots of diversity in our towns, but that does not exempt us from needing understanding and knowledge regarding what happened in our racial history. And I submit that only by knowing this history can we change our understanding and effectiveness in combatting racism and bigotry. I'm not holding myself out as an expert on these matters – but I am learning, and I hope I am changing.

Later in in this service you'll get some information

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about how, if you want, to say yes to this invitation.

As I finish, I want to come back to Emerson. To me, it really does matter what one “worships.” He says: “That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives and our character.”

I can certainly imagine a better world for people of color. I can certainly do more work to make that happen. “Seeing White” and Living the Pledge have helped me make progress towards that goal.

Racism and its problems are deeply ingrained in our present world; let’s do the work that will allow us to make the future world better.