



Matthew 25 Gathering 2017: Anglican Justice and Mercy Contending for Shalom

David Hanke – September 28, 2017

My name is David Hanke. I'm the rector of Restoration Anglican Church, a parish in Arlington, Virginia, that was planted by the Falls Church in 2009. It has been a great joy to pastor that church.

Arlington is the first suburb of Washington, DC, so my local paper is actually the *Washington Post*. On September 24, 2017—this past weekend—they ran a picture of Colin Kaepernick and Tim Tebow accompanied by some commentary by a writer named Michael Frost. I don't know Michael, and I'm not sure I would agree with everything he says, but he was very thoughtful in the way he wrote about these players.

“They're both Christian football players,” Frost writes, “and they're both known for kneeling on the field, although for very different reasons. One grew up the son of Baptist missionaries to the Philippines. The other was baptized Methodist, confirmed Lutheran, and attended a Baptist church during college.” Some of that sounds a lot like my story.

“Both have made a public display of their faith. Both are prayerful and devout,” he continues.

“During [Tebow’s] college football career, the Heisman Trophy winner frequently wore references to Bible verses on his eye black, including the ubiquitous John 3:16 during the 2009 BCS Championship Game. He has been outspoken about his pro-life stance and his commitment to abstinence from sex before marriage.”

Kaepernick has also talked about his faith, and as an example of this, Frost shares the following Kaepernick quotation: “My faith is the basis from where my game comes from. I’ve been very blessed to have the talent to play the game that I do and be successful at it. I think God guides me through every day and helps me take the right steps and has helped me get to where I’m at. When I step on the field, I always say a prayer, say I am thankful to be able to wake up that morning and go out there and try to glorify the Lord with what I do on the field.”

Unless you’ve been under a rock, you know that beginning in 2016, Kaepernick refused to stand to attention during the playing of the American national anthem, and these are Colin’s words again, as excerpted by Frost: “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.”

And most of us have heard the response to Kaepernick’s action as well—the way that other football players joined him and then were lambasted by our president. As summarized by the *Washington Post*, “At a rally Friday in Huntsville, Alabama, President Trump called on NFL

owners to release players who took a knee during the national anthem like former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who intended to draw attention to police violence against African Americans.” That’s putting it nicely. President Trump tweeted that the owners should fire those “sons of bitches.”

This creates a tension for us. Both players have a relationship with God. Both are speaking and demonstrating about what they believe. Both have created controversy and inspired backlash, and neither are currently working in the National Football League today. These players suggest a broad conversation that gets into a lot more than football, flags, and patriotism. They pose questions about how we use our platform, how we respond to the injustice we see around us, and how we respond with mercy to the needs around us.

I believe there are three responses to injustice that most of us will choose from. The first is that we protest with our words, both written and spoken. That is the way that people have responded to injustice for hundreds and thousands of years. We use our platforms and our audiences to raise awareness. We join with the biblical prophets who condemn the way God’s people treated the sojourner, the orphan, the widow, and the poor. We use our words, written and spoken, to protest.

The second way we respond to injustice is to lament. In the National Museum of African American History and Culture there is a special room dedicated to the life and death of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955. Emmett was lynched because a white woman said she was offended by him in her family’s grocery store. As

you approach this particular room in the African American history museum, there are signs warning that what you're about to see is graphic and difficult to see. There are also signs asking guests to honor Emmett by not taking photographs. This room is the emotional center of that museum.

The centuries of oppression, decades of change, and ongoing pain all find a locus in Emmett. As Mamie Till-Mobley, his mother, said, "When people saw what happened to my son, men stood up who had never stood up before." The public lynching of Emmett Till caused a shift in our culture's conscious.

When I visited the museum, I watched for about thirty minutes as people entered the room. People would come in and just begin to weep silently. I think some of those guests were weeping in exhaustion; others wept in disbelief. The question on their minds seemed to be "How long? How long will this continue?" They were like Jeremiah who said, "Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night" (Jer. 9:1 ESV).

And third our third response to injustice is to work and serve. It's what you are doing: community development, meeting the needs of the hungry, meeting the needs of the homeless. We follow the guidance of Acts 6, when there was a complaint by the Hellenists against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected and a solution was identified to find food for the widows.

Quite often we respond in all three ways. We protest, we lament, and we work and serve. It's what makes our work exhausting and exhilarating at the same time. It is critical that we spend time thinking about the role race plays in these exhausting and exhilarating responses—how does race affect our protests, laments, and works of justice and mercy?

My European heritage and light skin tone is a filter through which all I say and do is received. That's just a fact. Everything you experience of me is through my European heritage and light skin tone. And from that fact, from that starting point, comes an endless number of subjective questions and perceived conclusions that you are making about me right now, questions and conclusions about my privilege and prejudice, about my opportunity and oppression, about my convictions and condemnations. Race plays a role in everything we do, even if it is something we have invented, as Albert Thompson mentioned earlier. We ignore the reality of race to our own peril.

I've asked four friends to come up. These are people who are doing works of justice and mercy, and I've asked them to reflect on the following questions: What have you noticed about the effect of race in your own work, especially as you think about the things you do day in and day out? How have you been discouraged by the way race is refracted in this work? And is there anything that gives you hope about race, justice, and the gospel?

Let's start with introductions.

Bill Haley: Hello, I'm the associate rector at the Falls Church Anglican, as well as the executive director of Coracle. I live in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

Christopher Jones: Good morning, I am the assistant pastor for community engagement outreach at Holy Cross Anglican Church in Tallahassee, Florida. Previous to that, I was a church planter in a predominately black neighborhood called Frenchtown at Incarnation. We'll talk more about that later.

Betsy Rager: Hi, I'm from Chicago, and I'm with Greenhouse. Greenhouse exists to follow the Holy Spirit together for the spontaneous expansion of the church. I'd also like to add that Canon William Beasley sends his greetings and blessings to this gathering today.

I'm working with Pastor Michael Wright, who you might remember from a previous gathering. He's the facilitator of the African American arm of Greenhouse, Jubilee, which was formed partly as our admission that we don't know how to be the church with our black brothers and sisters, much less how to be on mission with the church together. I am supporting him in the coordination of Jubilee.

Patty Brown: Hi, I'm the assistant director at the Lamb Center. I'm blessed to be here with you and with my boss—most people go away on a gathering to get away from their boss, but I brought mine. His jokes, though, I'm not responsible for. The Lamb Center was created in Fairfax, Virginia, as a ministry to the homeless, the economically poor, and the poor in spirit. It

started twenty-five years ago over a pawnshop in our community, serving doughnuts and coffee and prayer to five people a day.

It then moved to a 7-Eleven-sized building back fifteen years ago, and a year ago we moved into a brand new \$4.5-million building that the Lord paid off. I came to the first Matthew 25, and I can't count the number of days in which I draw strength from just being among all of you and knowing somebody else is in this with me and knowing that I can do this.