

Seeing White and the Gospel of Luke Study Guide



How to get started:

- Join a group by emailing peace@peaceofplymouth.org or form your own.
- Download the study guide at peaceofplymouth.org
- Get the podcast - Scene on Radio, Season 2, **Seeing White** (from February 2017). www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/ or wherever you get your podcasts.

Starting the first week of January and continuing for seven weeks, individuals will read from the Gospel of Luke, listen to two of the *Seeing White* podcasts per week, and discuss with their small group. Some families might choose to do this together; other people might organize a group of friends or neighbors. Still, others will participate in a group from the church as we seek the truth and learn... all of us journeying toward the world God desires.

Introduction

Throughout scripture there is a dominant theme that communicates God's desire for the "lowly to be lifted up" and for God's creation to be filled with justice and righteousness. When God is seeking justice one phrase reverberates around the Old Testament "the widow, the orphan and the foreigner." These are the most vulnerable of the time and therefore we extrapolate God's command for us to seek justice for the most taken-advantage-of in our time.

In the New Testament Jesus says blessed are the meek and poor for theirs is the kingdom of God, and that when we encounter the homeless and imprisoned we see Jesus. Jesus proclaims God's love by healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out oppressive spirits, teaching through vivid parables. In the Gospel of Luke salvation is not just far off and eternal, but here and now. Salvation looks like people being restored to full participation in society. Jesus' actions make clear, charity isn't the goal of God's love, but rather God seeks a changed world, where there truly is justice for all.

The predominant source of injustice in the United States is race--whiteness has been privileged since before the creation of our nation. God's call for justice demands that we Christians engage in the work of dismantling the racism built into our systems and institutions. Truth-telling, education and reparations are steps in that journey toward the world God desires.

Epiphany is the season of the church year that literally means a manifestation of a divine or a moment of sudden revelation or insight. Epiphany is about SEEING and now is the time for **Seeing White**. This Epiphany, Peace Lutheran will use the Gospel of Luke as a lens to look at whiteness in America. Individuals will listen to two of the Seeing White podcasts per week, read the prescribed lessons from the Gospel Luke and discuss with their small group. Some families might choose to do this together, others might organize a group of friends or neighbors, still others will participate in a group from church as we seek the truth and learn... journeying toward the world God desires.

Police shootings of unarmed African Americans. Acts of domestic terrorism by white supremacists. The renewed embrace of raw, undisguised white-identity politics. Unending racial inequity in schools, housing, criminal justice, and hiring. Some of this feels new, but in truth it's an old story.

Why? Where did the notion of “whiteness” come from? What does it mean? What is whiteness for?

Scene on Radio host and producer John Biewen took a deep dive into these questions, along with an array of leading scholars and regular guest Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika, in this fourteen-part documentary series, released between February and August 2017.

On one level, it seems Americans talk about race and ethnicity all the time. The news media always seem to be reacting to the latest racial “incident,” while pundits ponder “race relations” year in and year out. The premise of the Seeing White podcast series is that the American conversation about race, and the stories we tell ourselves about race and ethnicity, are deeply incomplete and often misleading. We need new stories and new understandings, about our history and our current racial and ethnic reality.

Seeing White's host and producer John Biewen set out to take a different kind of look at race and ethnicity, by looking directly at the elephant in the room: white people, and whiteness. White supremacy was encoded in the DNA of the United States, and white people dominate American life and its institutions to this day, and yet whiteness too often remains invisible, unmarked, and unnamed. In embarking on this journey into whiteness, past and present, Biewen sought guidance from an array of leading scholars, and from professor, journalist, artist, and organizer Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika.

A caution: *Race and racism are sensitive subjects, as we all know. It's important to create an environment of safety in your discussion group. Our advice is to say something like this:*

The subject of whiteness is potentially uncomfortable for people of any race or ethnicity. People of color may react to the topic of whiteness by thinking: Really? We live in a world dominated and controlled by white people. Whiteness is our often-uncomfortable reality. Do we have to have a discussion about whiteness? For folks feeling that way, please understand: This is not about celebrating whiteness. We're here to take a critical look at whiteness and how it functions in the life of our society, how it affects us all. Because it does, and we usually don't talk about it directly. White people, on the other hand, may react with unease: Am I about to be attacked? Is the point of this discussion that all white people are bad? To those people we can say: The point is not to attack every individual of European descent. None of us chose our “race,” nor did we create the society that we were all born into. In this discussion group, we're in this together, trying to understand how we all got here. A conclusion of the Seeing White series is that white people must own and take responsibility for the advantages that come with whiteness, but that is not the same as saying that you as a white person are to blame and need to feel ashamed.

Additional guidance on leading discussions on race, particularly for young people, from the [Anti-Defamation League](#).

Week One: Jan 3-9

Matthew 2: 11-15, the Magi visit, Jesus and family flee to Egypt

Podcasts 1 & 2

1. How does whiteness fly beneath the radar? Think of the institutions that you are part of, in particular the church. In what ways does the idea of whiteness act as the norm within the church? [Part 1]
2. The flight into Egypt and return is a reminder of the story of God's people and the recollection of God's presence with them in the delivery from slavery and bondage. At the same time Matthew's unique inclusion of the story of the massacre is a reminder that God's promises are always at risk. Based on this, why are we talking about whiteness and racism?
3. Chenjerai Kumanyika says that he hopes the **Seeing White** project will focus on systemic, structural racism, not individual bigotry or "race relations." What does he mean? What's the difference? Can you give an example of each kind; individual and systemic racism? [Part 1]
4. Before hearing this episode, how would you have imagined that the notions of "black" people and "white" people came into being? How does it change the way you think of your racial/ethnic identity to know that race was invented to justify the exploitation of other human beings? [Part 2]
5. John Biewen asks, Where did whiteness come from? What's the answer that he finds? [Part 2]
6. Who invented whiteness, and when? For what purpose? [Part 2]
7. Why would you say that race as we know it –"blackness," "whiteness," etc. –was not invented until the 15th century? [Part 2]

Week Two: Jan 10-16

Luke 3:1-22 John baptizes Jesus, bear fruit worthy of repentance, share what you have

Podcasts 3 & 4

1. In our baptisms we are claimed as beloved children of God. How does your "belovedness" impact the way you hear and tell the stories of America's history with slavery?

2. What are some of the ways that American culture minimizes the legacy and impact of 250 years of chattel slavery, or reinforces the impression that it all happened in the ancient past? How could our schools, media, churches and popular culture tell a truer story about slavery and its effects on people alive today? [Part 3]
3. As American-style slavery evolved into the 1700s, how was it different from the slavery practiced by the early British colonists? [Part 3]
4. When laws were changed in colonial America to give lower-class white people advantages over Africans, how did that make life easier for large landowners and other powerful white people? [Part 3]
5. Do you think that historic figures should be forgiven for beliefs and actions that you consider repugnant on the grounds that those people were “of their time”? How does that apply to us? Are we doing things, individually or as a society, that we should be forgiven for by future generations because we are people “of our time”? [Part 4]
6. American leaders assert almost universally that the words of the Declaration of Independence, “all men are created equal,” have been a consistent guiding principle in American life and law. Do you agree? [Part 4]
7. This week’s reading from Luke instructs that if we have two coats give one to someone that doesn’t. How or how aren’t the people of God living this out in relations to race in America?

Week Three: Jan 17-23

Luke 4: 14-30 Sermon at Nazareth (Isaiah fulfilled, Elijah and widow, Elisha and Naaman)

Podcasts 5 & 6

1. Do you think that most parts of the United States have events in their history that have been suppressed because they don’t reflect well on the dominant group in that place? What can we gain, as communities and as a larger society, from talking more honestly about the past? [Part 5]
2. Jesus says a prophet isn’t accepted in their hometown. Share a time when you have spoken the truth and it was not appreciated, was discredited or you were attacked.
3. When the United States government acquired the land that became part of the state of Minnesota from the Dakota people, did it do so in an honest and respectful way? [Part 5]
4. If the people of Minnesota prefer not to remember violent racial episodes in their region’s past, why might that be? [Part 5]

5. What is the meaning of aversive racism? Often people think of racism as a problem of bigoted individuals, or organizations like the KKK. What are some of the ways that racism takes on more-subtle but perhaps more-pervasive forms? [Part 6]
6. What does philosopher Shannon Sullivan mean by “good white people?” [Part 6]
7. People in the American North often believe that the Civil War was a moral crusade in which the Union intervened to end slavery and “save” black people from bondage. Is this an accurate summary of what happened? [Part 6]
8. When listening to the story of Jesus in his hometown it is easy to identify with Jesus. When have you said, “those people are so bad,” ignoring your own participation in the problem?

Week Four: Jan 24-30

Luke 5: 1-11 Great catch of fish, Peter will fish for people

Podcasts 7 & 8

1. What is the cost of racism to white people? Can you add to this list? <http://paulkivel.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/thecostsofracism.pdf> When are the times that you feel able to see the benefits of being white? [Part 7]
2. What are some of the benefits for white people in creating scientific reasons for white superiority? How do beliefs about the genetic superiority or inferiority of racial/ethnic groups manifest in the everyday life of our culture? [Part 8]
3. Scholar Dorothy Roberts says that race scientists of the 17th to 20th centuries used science to “confirm their reality.” What was the “reality” they were trying to confirm? [Part 8]
4. Peter is slow to listen to Jesus’ direction on how to fish, Peter believes he is the expert. How has whiteness influenced the church’s beliefs about who had wisdom and the ability to interpret scripture?
5. What does today’s genomic science say about the biological/genetic significance of “race”? [Part 8]

Week Five: Jan 31-Feb 6

Luke 6: 1-16 Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath and call of disciples

Podcasts 9 & 10

1. In this story from the Gospel of Luke the pharisees let their attention to laws get in the way of doing what is right. What are examples from this week’s podcasts where people were harmed by following the law? When have people broken the law in order to do what is right?

2. An expert on “sundown towns” has identified hundreds of communities across the United States in which black people, and sometimes Jews or other groups, were or still are not welcome. Read this article and discuss. [Part 9]
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2008/does-my-town-have-a-racist-past>
3. If the people of Minnesota, or of Corbin, Kentucky, prefer not to remember violent racial episodes in their region’s past, why might that be? [Parts 9]
4. If you are white, or partly white, how do you identify ethnically? (Irish, Italian, English, etc.) Research when those ethnicities became fully “white” in America. What laws were changed to allow for that ethnic identity to become legally white? [Part 10]
5. When it comes to defining whiteness, for determining American citizenship or other legal or social purposes, have the standards been consistent over the years? [Part 10]
6. When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the citizenship cases of Ozawa and Thind in 1922 and 1923, what was the one thing that remained consistent in the justices’ rulings? [Part 10]

Week Six: Feb 7-13

Luke 7:1-17 Healing the centurion's slave by a word and raising the widow's son at Nain.

Podcasts 11 & 12

1. Unlike explicit bias, which reflects the attitudes and actions that someone has at a conscious level, implicit bias is judgement and behavior that often operate unconsciously, and without intentional control. How does someone’s unconscious reaction to people of a different race influence their judgement and behavior? What are some examples? [Part 11] <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>
2. The Centurion in our Bible reading is a Roman military and political leader, the group that is oppressing the Jews. Where do you see explicit and implicit bias at work in this story?
3. In telling the story of his encounter with “Michael” in Philadelphia, John Biewen says that, looking back, he was “pretty white” in some of this thinking at the time. What does he mean? [Part 11]
4. During the 400-year history in which people of European and African descent have lived in what is now the United States, which of those groups has committed more violence against the other? [Part 11]
5. What are some “white” characteristics that can be seen? Are there characteristics of whiteness that cannot be seen? What are they? [Part 12]

6. Myra Greene talks about the “social context” of the history of photography, and “who controls what parts of the image.” What do you think she means by that? [Part 12]

Week Seven: Feb 14-20

Luke 9:28-45 Transfiguration, healing a boy with a demon, passion prediction

Podcast 13 & 14

1. How do politicians and the media talk about government programs in a way that obscures benefits that have gone to white people in the past and present, while emphasizing the “handouts” given to people of color? [Part 13]
<http://newsreel.org/guides/race/whiteadv.htm>
2. Considering all racial and ethnic groups –White, Black, Latino, Native American, Asian – which group has benefited the most from government programs and largesse throughout American history? [Part 13]
3. Consider your sphere of influence - that is, people and organizations that you have some influence on. What could bring about change? [Part 14]
4. In doing antiracist work, what is the difference between actions taken by individuals and those made by the society as a whole, through the federal government –and why might the latter be appropriate and necessary? [Part 14]
5. The disciples take most of the Gospel of Luke to understand the meaning of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. How is our anti-racism work participating in the bringing about of the Kingdom of God? How are we co-creating the world Jesus longs for?

Study guide created by John Biewen with assistance from Jenna Chandler-Ward, Co-Founder of Teaching While White and Co-Director of the Multicultural Teaching Institute. Faith and Gospel of Luke questions written by Pastor Kjell Ferris.