

Starlette Thomas

Foreword by Rev. Dr. Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins

TAKE ME to the WATER

*The Raceless Gospel as
Baptismal Pedagogy
for a Desegregated Church*

Bible Studies



“Take Me to the Water”:

An examination of baptismal identity for a lukewarm Christianity

What have I gotten myself into? “Take me to the water: An examination of baptismal identity for a lukewarm Christianity” seeks to explore the message, meaning and models for living into a baptismal identity that challenges watered down versions of Americanized Christianity.



Since the North American church is a traditionally segregated space, this makes one’s awareness of membership and belonging to Christ’s raceless body difficult but not impossible though most Americans are bred with the awareness of being viewed through a racialized lens.¹ Proof of one’s Christian identity is largely thought to be expressed through being marked present in a building versus being joined as members of Christ’s body. Thus, religious conditioning wherein one joins a church, becomes a member of a particular building, and learns their responsibilities as to how to maintain it is not to be confused with spiritual conversion. Regeneration should not be reduced to a change in physical location but in one’s understanding of belonging.

This does not negate the need to gather or dismiss the historic and present need for African Americans to “claim a collective cultural identity as a way of strengthening their campaign to survive and live out their destiny of full humanity.”² Instead, the raceless gospel for a baptismal pedagogy that leads to a desegregated church seeks to undermine the credibility of race and more specifically white supremacy by addressing its pseudoscientific foundation and directing linking the history of violence that comes with a belief in it. The raceless gospel would then reposition us in our deep sense of somebodiness and invite the minoritized and marginalized to no longer defend their humanity since we’re all God’s children.

Galatians 3:27-28 and Colossians 3:9-11 among others offers a theologically corrective lens to view both the individual member and the corporate body of Christ. Coupled with the member’s own experience of believer’s baptism, a bible study gathering could assist in questioning the colonialist’s prejudice of “natural inferiority” among believers, allow for the discussion of the suppressed history of withholding baptism from Africans who were enslaved and provide an emphasis on the immediate effects on one’s understanding and sense of self since “Rev. Charles Martyn, of South Carolina, complained that some baptized slaves ‘became lazy and proud, entertaining too high an opinion of themselves and neglecting their daily labour.’”³ A baptismal pedagogy that addresses the false narrative of race which has been intertwined with the Christian faith is grossly needed.

While the letters to the faith communities at Galatia and Colossae are the basis for the raceless gospel, “the politics of othering and vilification permeates the discourses of Paul himself.”⁴ Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza writes in an essay titled “Paul and the Politics of Interpretation, “Its relentless othering engenders the strategies of marginalization by contemporary exegetical and

theological scholarship. Not just religious studies but all modern theories of political and moral life are shot through with the politics of othering, that is, with ideologies of sexism, colonialism, and racism, the systems and discourses of marginalization, vilification, and dehumanization.”⁵ Consequently, the use of both letters is not taken lightly.

The use of Paul’s writings to the faith communities at Galatia and Colossae are a part of the tradition named by Delores S. Williams in *Sisters in the Wilderness* as the “liberation tradition of African American biblical appropriation,” that is I have used his writings and paradigm to demonstrate the Christlike freedom of believers from hierarchical relationships and their power dynamics through one’s baptismal identity.⁶ Rather than remain in the social context that creates and maintains a racialized reality, the weekly bible study offers participants a glimpse into an undivided “kin- dom” that is coming. It can be offered with the understanding given by James Cone in *God of the Oppressed*, that is, “To know God is to experience the acts of God in the concrete affairs and relationships of people, liberating the weak and the helpless from pain and humiliation.”⁷ A bible study allows baptized believers to practically apply Christian scriptures to social conditions, namely a racialized existence and engage participants in deconstructing the social conditioning of race as a part of the spiritual discipline of self- mortification and the spiritual experience of regeneration.

Lesson 1

“Peter could not truly know Jesus apart from knowing himself in relation to Jesus. He did not know himself until Jesus showed him who he was. But in learning about himself, he also came to truly know Jesus. Deep knowing of God and deep knowing of self always develop interactively. The result is the authentic transformation of the self that is at the core of Christian spirituality.”⁸

| David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call of Self-Discovery*

Scripture Reading: “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which he also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him” (First Peter 3:18-22, NRSV).

There is tap water, mineral water, spring or glacier water, sparkling water, distilled water, purified water, flavored, infused, and alkaline water. There all are kinds of safe drinking water—unless you live in Flint, Michigan. I wonder, “What kind of water baptism requires?” Water that draws out what it means to follow Jesus and drowns out all the competing ways of human being? Water that strains and lessens birthing pains? What kind of water is this?

Holy water. River, stream, pond, baptistery filled with water. Three feet, four feet, five feet, six feet deep, bend your knees, tilt your head back, hold your nose, aid in your own burial kind of water. Warmed and freezing cold water. Dressed in white robes before we enter this water. Eulogy the same: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Our entry into new life is a watery grave. We practice resurrection, Christ’s resurrection.

Water that cleanses for the remission of sins, marks that one is born again and later is added as a condition of church membership. We are given a baptism certificate as if it is a finished work, as if we have done the salvific work ourselves. The right hand of fellowship does not seal the deal. Cleansing ritual and rite of passage, entry point and an exit strategy from the old self, old world, and its habits.

Baptism, *baptizo* for the Greeks, was adapted from the Jewish tradition of immersion in a ritual bath.⁹ Jesus uses water, infuses water into our storied identity, turns water into wine, drives a herd of swine into the water for a man’s deliverance. Water is natural and miraculous. As much as 60 percent of the adult human body is water, according to H.H. Mitchell in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*. Water inside and out, watered within and without, baptism invites us to take on more water.

As baptized believers, we live watery lives. We walk with wet feet. We enter spaces dripping wet with proof of our death and new life with and in and through Jesus the Christ. It drips from our lips and our hair and our fingertips onto floors padded, carpeted, wooden, earthen, scrubbed, polished, dusty, matted with gum and playdough, greasy, sticky, mixed with urine, milk and coffee.

Stained. We get in the water, “the cleansing flood,” after promises that we will be good, clean, saved, righteous. Fresh start, the water erases all that we were. Blank slate but not blank stares, we see as Christ sees now. We are his body.

We speak from submerged places of being. We go down in the deep and into dark spaces where human beings do not live. We go down into water with mammals— sharks and seahorses, whales, octopus, and schools of fish. We go down deep where the Spirit hovers and calls us children of God.

Baptism is story- dependent. We are baptized because of the story of Jesus— but also because of our own story. Our story that separates the good from bad people. Parting waters and drawing a line, baptism is part of our desire to become a good person, to be on the right side.

We want to please our parents, please our grandparents, please God. So, we called out and said, “Please, God, save me” and this made the congregation happy.

We want to be a part of the festivities, join in the shouting and singing. We want to become a member, receive the right hand of fellowship, join the flock, and have a shepherd, a pastor. We want to be saved from some past, present, or future bad person, place, or thing. We want to be saved from our past, present, and future self who was, is and will be in bad places, who has done, is doing and will do bad things. We just want to be called good though God said it in the beginning.

Simon. Cephas. Peter. Rock. He is named first among the Twelve. A member of the inner circle: Peter, James, and John. Talking loudly but said nothing when Jesus was arrested and crucified. Denied Christ three times after professing his love for him.¹⁰

Peter is commissioned by Jesus: “feed my sheep.”¹¹ He confesses that Jesus is the Messiah.¹² It is this rock, this Peter who Jesus builds his church upon.¹³ This Peter who walked side by side with Jesus writes this letter as “an apostle of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ With Paul, he will become a pillar of the early church. He will later die and become a martyr under Nero’s reign.

Peter, who has made some mistakes, who is not all good or all bad, wrote this letter. He said to the scattered church:

“For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which he also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which

this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him” (First Peter 3:18-22, NRSV).

Peter testifies to his relationship with Jesus and puts it in writing. He says that baptism saves us, which is not to be confused with bath time. This is not a physical cleansing. This is a different kind of water. It doesn’t clear up our skin, but it does clear our conscience.

Peter failed the loyalty test with three retakes. Still, Jesus trusts him with his church. What does that say to you about goodness, righteousness, and those baptismal waters?

Questions

1. What is your relationship with water? What are your first memories: splashing, puddle-making, swimming, cleansing/ washing?
2. How did you come to know what was good/bad? How was *your* goodness defined and/or explained? Is there an image, word/phrase or story that comes to mind?
3. How does baptism inform your understanding of righteousness and/or right standing with God? What led you to the water?
4. Water as punishment is revisited in Peter’s epistle through the story of Noah. Noah and his family are saved from the water. What does this story say about the way God sorts human beings out using water?
5. Peter used the phrase, “saved through water.” How has the water of baptism saved you?
6. Water baptism as witness bearing, we proclaim Jesus’ resurrection. How has the church watered down its meaning and daily life implications?
7. After our discussion of water, baptism, and our storied lives, what is floating to the top for you?

Lesson 2

“Baptism asserts that we meet and speak under an identity that challenges and endangers all other identities.”¹⁵

| William H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized*

Scripture Reading: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11, NRSV).

In James Baldwin’s play, *The Amen Corner*, Margaret Alexander, the pastor of the church says, “... your mind ain’t on the Lord. And if your mind ain’t stayed on Him, every hour of the day, Satan’s going to cause you to fall.”¹⁶ As a child, I would join with the congregation and sing, “Woke up this morning with my mind/ stayed on Jesus/ Woke up this morning with my mind/ stayed on the Lord/ Woke up this morning with my mind/ Stayed on Jesus/ Hallelu- , Hallelu-, Hallelujah.”

Some Christians came to faith the hard way, without a full understanding of unmerited grace and the unconditional love of God. Some had yet to learn that this was an inward journey and not a public appearance of holiness. They had not been taught about the inwardness of religion that Howard Thurman wrote about in *The Creative Encounter*. He said, “There need not be only one single rebirth, but again and again a (person) may be reborn until at last there is nothing that remains between (a person) and God.”¹⁷ Again and again, he says.

Like baptism’s inner work, some baptized believers falsely believed that our work consisted mainly of right believing and behaving: no cursing, no smoking, no drinking, no sex. Most often, they were too young to know that faith went so much deeper than this, that to go down in the water didn’t mean that you came up with a list of do’s and don’ts. This is not what it means to be born again.

Matthew’s gospel offers us two baptisms: John’s baptism of water and Jesus’ baptism of Spirit and fire. This is good for a church who desperately needs a “come- to- Jesus meeting,” that needs to repent of its sins and be delivered from its complicity with empire. Because we are not there yet. We are looking at our baptism certificate, the words of Paul to the Galatians: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”¹⁸ and asking Jesus, “Why aren’t we *there* yet?”

Because we have been following Jesus but are still no closer to his vision of a “kin- dom” coming. I’m in the backseat (Because women are terrible drivers, right?) asking, “Why aren’t we *there* yet?” Were we supposed to turn there? Did we get off on the wrong exit? We carry big bibles so how did we miss it?

And this looks so familiar. Because we have been here before. The church is always fighting and splitting, splitting hairs, and splintering off, pointing fingers, and crossing people off their list. Across America, we often stand in large but mostly empty church buildings, bypassing. So, I think this would be a good time to turn around and answer those children, the younger generations in the backseat, who are questioning the direction of the church. Because they realize why we aren't there yet. And they don't want to come along for the ride.

Nobody knows where Jesus is going or what he is talking about. Jesus is rejected and misunderstood—no matter what he does or says.¹⁹ All of this talk of suffering, death, and his resurrection. Not a single disciple, member of the Worship committee or the crowd is following, and, in the end, no one was really going Jesus' way.

The church I grew up in had one message, "Jesus saves!" And we added nothing to it. We woke up, rinsed, came to church, and repeated it. I came to faith in a tradition that centered our living on Jesus' return. "He's coming soon! Get saved now! Time is running out!"

Salvation was on sale every Sunday with the preacher extending his sweaty hand as if this was the last chance, the last time, the last call for salvation. The sky was always falling. Every instance of injustice, of crime and violence, of local and national corruption, every threat of planetary destruction, of war, of lust, of capitalistic consumption was used to drive home the point. "Time was winding up."

"Hurry up!" From sinners to saints, we needed to get our lives in order now. After our confession of faith, all we needed was a high school diploma, both baptism and marriage certificates. A driver's license was optional for women.

We just needed to be in a car with a bumper sticker that read, "Rapture ready." Because no matter the year, the political season or time of day, Jesus was always coming soon—in a cloud near you.²⁰ And there was nothing that we needed to do for a world that was "passing away." Just spread the word by asking the same question, the only question of everyone you met that day, "Do you know Jesus in the pardoning of your sins?" Because Jesus was coming; he just wasn't here yet.

Walter Brueggemann writes in *A Way Other Than Our Own*,

"For I believe the crisis in the U.S. Church has most nothing to do with being liberal or conservative; it has everything to do with giving up on the faith and discipline of our Christian baptism and settling for a common, generic U.S. identity that is part patriotism, part consumerism, part violence and part affluence."²¹

I would agree. Buckle up. Take a ride with me while asking faithfully, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" until there is no end in sight, until we identify with Christ, until we treat each other right for a "kin-dom" that is coming. And perhaps, get back in the water and ready ourselves to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire.

Questions

1. In Matthew's gospel, John said, "I baptize you with water for repentance" (3:11). What does the North American church need to come clean about?
2. What could be our confession?
3. Baptism suggests, "It all comes out in the wash." What then is our work as disciples?
4. What might the spiritual practices of accountability, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation look like?
5. Double baptism, believers go through the rinse cycle twice. What does it mean to be baptized with water and the Holy Spirit?

Lesson 3

“The only fear is that those who have come into God’s spiritual family and have drunk of the one Spirit will not let that Spirit have (the Spirit’s) way in their lives. They may let human divisions take the place of oneness in the Spirit.”²²

| T. B. Maston, *The Bible and Race*

Scripture Reading: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (First Corinthians 12:13, NRSV).

Baptismal water is a drinking hole, a water fountain. Lap it up. Gulp it down. Guzzle it. Drink up. Because we need more water.

Let it wash over us and then come up good as new creatures in Christ Jesus. This is and we are good news. So don’t be afraid of the water as it rises around us. Go down easy. Don’t hold your nose.

Die quickly to what was in exchange for what will always be. “Made to drink of one Spirit,” bottoms up. Let that reality rise in you, to be resurrected into one glorious body. Baptism offers new meaning and a way to live from the depths of our being.

It is the invitation extended to Christians in Corinth and to us who are reading:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

This is the “inward journey.” Howard Thurman writes:

“Whatever may be the occasion there comes a deep necessity which leads you finally into the closet with yourself. It is here that you raise the real questions about yourself. The leading one is, What is it, after all, that I amount to, ultimately? Such a question cuts through all that is superficial and trivial in life to the very nerve center of yourself. And this is a religious question because it deals with the total meaning of life at its heart. At such a moment, and at such a time, you must discover for yourself what is the true basis of your self- respect.”²³

It is an invitation to be this body, his body, to embody his life here and now, to be the Word made flesh in our corner of the world.

Willie James Jennings is preparing us for life after this racialized reality in his book *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*. “The cultivation of belonging should be the goal of all education—not just any kind of belonging, but a profoundly creaturely belonging that performs the returning of the creature to the creator, and returning to an intimate and erotic energy that drives life together with God,” he says.²⁴ As such, it is an opportunity to live fully and not through one category or another. Just be one.

Come alongside, Christ and his members and all other attachments come undone. No strings to pull, no strings attached but instead, a deep unwinding. Rewinding time to take us back to the beginning when the waters hovered and created us out of the deep. In the beginning, there was only us. Them did not yet exist.

So, drink up. Let this awareness fill your cup to overflowing—until there is no distinction, until you cannot make out our differences. Until we are one body, drink up.

Questions

1. Baptismal waters and the Spirit’s fountain, we get in and we also drink up. Why so much water? What do you make of this religious imagery?
2. Paul says to the believers at Corinth that the labels, cultural, experiential, and biological are slippery when wet. What does it mean to identify as a baptized believer then?
3. More than water, what are we getting ourselves into when we get baptized?
4. What are baptized believers called to embody as members of one another and as members of Christ’s resurrected body?
5. “One and the same Spirit,” why is oneness, even in the Spirit, such a tight squeeze for Christians?
6. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his seminal work *Life Together*, “Because Christian community is founded solely on Jesus Christ, it is a spiritual and not a psychic reality. In this, it differs from all other communities.” One body, one Spirit, how do these images inform our understanding of Christian community?
7. As baptized believers, what does the integration of this life look like? Feel like? Sound like?

Lesson 4

“There is almost no teaching about race, as currently understood, in the great religious literatures of the world or in the writings of classical and medieval philosophers. For example, the Bible knows the term ‘race’ only as a contest of speed or endurance. It has scores of references to ‘blood,’ and holds it in awe, but as the seat of the soul, the principle of life, rather than a physiological difference among men. The crowning affirmation about blood, in any event, is that ‘now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ’” (Ephesians 2:13).²⁵

| Liston Pope, *The Kingdom Beyond Caste*

Scripture Reading: “Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit’ (John 3:5, NRSV).

When we recreate human beings as races, it makes us easier to fit into the white supremacist capitalist machinery, which says we come in five colors. We are categorized for a color- coded hierarchy and written off as such for business purposes and for the American empire’s use. But human being and belonging did not always only come in black and white; the meanings of good and evil were not always tucked under our skin.

To be sure, Europeans created a strong case for it. Naturalist George Louis Leclerc Buffon argued that “white” was “normative and the real and natural color of man.” In his 1776 volume *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who coined the word Caucasian to describe the “white race,” said there were five races: Caucasian, Mongoloid, Ethiopian, American, and Malay.²⁶ Swedish botanist, taxonomist and zoologist, Carolus Linnaeus created binomial nomenclature and said human beings came in four varieties: Homo Europaeus, Homo Asiaticus, Homo Afer and Homo Americanus. Georges Cuvier and John Hunter both counted three. Paul Topinard had nineteen and placed them under three headings. Edmund Burke managed to find sixty- three races.

Today, we count five different kinds of human beings, color- coded, sorted and then stereotyped. These identities are not rooted in earth, in dirt, in soil, in country of origin as there is no white country, no black country, no red country, no yellow country, no brown country, no beige country. Where then do these colored people come from—because white is a color too? Their origin story is that of race. We are all re- created as people of color, which does not double as children of God.

Considering their travels, Europeans in the late 17th century began to view themselves as superior, referring to themselves as enlightened and renaming Africa the “Dark Continent” or the “terra nulla.” It was a second Genesis narrative. Race initially meant heredity, but Europeans would redefine it to depict them in the best light and re- create themselves as white. Europeans created a theory to support it, invented pseudo- scientific fields to prove it, wrote books to

endorse it, stole a country it renamed the “New World” from its indigenous community and enslaved another for more than a century to demonstrate it.

The church fabricated theologies to center it as if the gospel of Jesus Christ is about whiteness or white supremacy, which is heresy—because “all power belongs to God.”²⁷ We believe that the Imago Dei, that is, the image of God can be reduced to a color, as if we can color in God’s face, as if any of us has seen the face of God and lived to talk about it. And all of this is somehow inspired by the Holy Spirit. Do we really believe this?

Because none of this has anything to do with the “kin-dom” of God that Jesus was talking about. Yet, we have made it this and thereby racialized his gospel. We’ve gotten way off topic and away from Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. For this, let us repent.

Jesus says that if we are to lay eyes on the “kin-dom” of God, then we must be born again of water and Spirit. Our skin and its social coloring have nothing to do with it. Born from above, it all goes over Nicodemus’ head and ours too if we are honest. Still, we are back at the water again and pushed forth by the Spirit of God.

Thus, we come through the water. We begin our new life by way of baptism, which offers Christian believers an opportunity to see ourselves afresh and as the unsegregated body of Christ—identified fully without the labels of race, class, or gender. Fresh out of the water, we are joined as his members. Consequently, this calls into question the North American church’s alignment with race’s color-coded caste system and its socially upheld power differences.

This watery grave is a dividing line. Baptism is the place where we cross over to the other side. It is the Lord’s side. Its deep end is death. But without it, there is no new life. So, we grab a towel to go and die with Christ. When we rise, we speak again and yet for the first time as one born from above.

Questions

1. Why do we continue to racialize Jesus’ gospel?
2. Why do we color in the face of God, paint Jesus into our corner of the world and then point to it as “a slice of heaven”?
3. What does it mean to be born from above, to be parented by way of the water and the Spirit?
4. Considering Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, how should we talk about baptism?
5. What have you drawn from the water of baptism?

I hope these lessons won't mark the end of your engagement. Instead, continue to talk about baptism, race, and what you can draw from its waters, especially if you still have questions like Nicodemus. Someone once said, "The ground is level at the cross." The same can be said of the waters of baptism. Eye to eye with Jesus, you don't come up and look down your nose at anyone. But if you do, then what really drew you to the water?

End notes

¹ See books like Jay David, editor, *Growing Up Black: From slave days to the present- 25 African- Americans reveal the trials and triumphs of their childhood*, (Avon Books: New York, NY, 1992), Debby Irving, *Waking up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race*, (Cambridge, MA: Elephant Room Press, 2014) and Daniel Hill, *White Awake: An honest look at what it means to be white*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017).

² Homer U. Ashby, Jr., *Our Home Over Jordan: A Black Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 72.

³ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 123.

⁴ Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Paul and the Politics of Interpretation," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium and Interpretation*, Richard A. Horsley, ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God- Talk* (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 2.

⁷ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 57.

⁸ David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self- Discovery*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004), 30.

⁹ "Baptism," New World Encyclopedia, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Baptism.

¹⁰ John 19.15-19

¹¹ Luke 22.32

¹² Matthew 16.16

¹³ Matthew 16.18

¹⁴ First Peter 1.1

¹⁵ William H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 13.

¹⁶ James Baldwin, *The Amen Corner*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1998, reprint), 9.

¹⁷ Howard Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1972, reprint), 40.

¹⁸ Galatians 3.28, NRSV

¹⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996), 126.

²⁰ The Revelation 1.7

²¹ Walter Brueggemann, *A Way Other Than Our Own: Devotions for Lent*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2017), 2-3.

²² T. B. Maston, *The Bible and Race*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1959), 26.

²³ Howard Thurman, *The Inward Journey*, (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1961), 40.

²⁴ Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 11.

²⁵ Liston Pope, *The Kingdom Beyond Caste*, (New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1957), 21.

²⁶ Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1997), 36,37.

²⁷ Psalm 62:11, NRSV