

Video Five: Benjamin Campbell, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia "The Untold Story"

Opening Prayer (Facilitator)

Small Group Covenant

Scriptural Passage: This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: *For this people's senses have become calloused, and they've become hard of hearing, and they've shut their eyes so that they won't see with their eyes or hear with their ears or understand with their minds, and change their hearts and lives that I may heal them* (Matthew 13:13-15 CEB).

Virginia lawmakers shut their eyes to the fundamental rights of human beings who were not White. The Virginia code of race-based slavery considered the bodies of Black, Native American, and mulatto slaves as "real estate." Enslaved persons baptized into the faith remained in bondage. If any slave was injured, mutilated, or killed while resisting correction or discipline, slave masters were exempt from all punishment under Virginia law.

Discussion Question

Have you ever been disappointed to learn about the history- of a person, or a place, or an institution? Something you thought was good and pure that turns out to have a troubled past? How did you deal with it?

VIDEO

Discussion Question

Rev. Ben Campbell talks about the trauma caused by the inability to tell the truth about our history, and how it was hidden from many of us. What is your experience with learning about slavery and the darker side of Virginia and US history? What were you taught, if anything, in school, at home, in church?

The churches in Richmond, including the Methodists, moved their buildings away from the sight of the trade in enslaved people. Are there parallel ways that we today chose to hide sin from our sight rather than confront and challenge it?

What might your church's role be in telling your community's story more fully- for the sake of healing and reconciliation?

Scripture Passage: You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16 CEB).

What did the Church and Methodists fail to see, hear, or understand about the parables of Jesus?

Jesus chose salt and light, two everyday and significant objects, to symbolize faithful living. Does salt have an expiration date? Can salt go bad? Yes. It may look like salt, but its ability to season and preserve foods is lost. The early Methodists proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Shockoe Bottom of Richmond, Virginia. To whom did they share the message of good news? These believers worshipped near the slave market and were positioned to raise their voices for the liberation of all God's people. They chose to relocate their houses of worship at a distance from the gruesome sights, sounds, and smells of the slave market.

It takes courage to be like Jesus, to be the light of the world. To cry out for liberty for all people. Patrick Henry's cry was the beginning of the American story for freedom and liberty for all White men with property. Nat Turner's shout was for righteous vengeance on White people. The cry of Jesus was to bring relief, release, and liberty to the "least of these." Between 300,000 to 500,000 Black bodies trampled through the slave market on their way to the deep south. Who was the witness of salt and light to them, to both body and soul?

We can learn from our past and allow what we know to shine a light in the dark places of our hearts, actions, families, and churches. Let us shine our light on the darkness of racism born out of race-based slavery in Virginia.

Discipleship in Action: The Power of Truth

Ben Campbell's video documented that culture could hide a true story for many centuries. The whole truth of our stories may not be in textbooks, or tradition, or historical biographies. Will you be an intentional learner to pursue the unwritten, untold, and unshared stories of our past as Virginians, Methodists, and Americans?

Time for Self-Reflection

Do you fear learning more might cancel out your story, your origin, your experience? Do you have the emotional and spiritual capacity to learn about others' heritage while honoring your own? How can the words of Jesus lead us into this self-discovery?

Closing

Take time for comments, questions, and announcements. The facilitator or a participant offers a closing prayer.

Participant

Ben Campbell serves as Pastoral Associate at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia. Besides being a priest and known civil rights [activist](#) in Richmond, Ben is also a father; a husband; a twin; a seventh-generation Virginian; the author of "*Richmond's Unhealed History*," and the founder of [Richmond Hill](#), a residential Christian community and spiritual retreat center in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond. Bio: [St. Paul's Episcopal Church](#).