

Video Six: Barbara Batson, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia
“Life or Death”

Opening Prayer (Facilitator)

Small Group Covenant

Scriptural Passage: So Jesus spoke again, “I assure you that I am the gate of the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and outlaws, but the sheep didn’t listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief enters only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:7-11 CEB).

The first Africans were traded in exchange for supplies when an English privateer ship arrived at Point Comfort, Hampton, Virginia, in August 1619. On June 19, 1865, the people of Galveston, Texas, learned that all slaves were free. Legal slavery ended on December 6, 1865, with the 13th amendment to the Constitution.

For 246 years, many White Christians believed God created their Black brothers and sisters to be subservient to White people. Or many White Christians ignored the political and social systems that enslaved Black people to build financial wealth for some Americans.

Neither a declaration of independence nor a proclamation of emancipation could erase the system of White power and dominance. For 246 years, few Africans or their descendants earned wealth from the labor of their physical bodies. Their bodies were the heavy machinery that operated the economic system in Virginia. And they derived no profit from their skills, knowledge, or hard work as laborers, artisans, boatmen, or caretakers.

Who tended to the children of God before, during, and after the Civil War? Who were the shepherds for native, enslaved, or free children, women, and men? How did Methodist clergy strengthen them, heal them, bind their wounds, or seek God’s justice for all God’s children? Did Methodists reject race-based slavery? Did Methodists in Virginia engage in political discussions about a new economy not based on slave or free labor?

VIDEO

Discussion Question

The movement towards greater justice and inclusion in our country has been fitful, and uneven. Progress for some has not been progress for all. What reactions or reflections do you have about what you learned in the video?

Barbara ends the video pointing out that when the Virginia constitution that disenfranchised Black men was ratified, White churches were largely silent, while Black churches were vocally opposed. Modern opinion polling shows that even today Black and White Christians don't see things the same way. Have you experienced this kind of division within the body of believers?

How can the church become a force for dialogue and understanding about these kinds of differences in experience and viewpoint?

Scripture Passage: They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it (Jeremiah 6:14-15a, 16 NIV).

Discipleship in Action: The Good Shepherd Brings Abundant Life

As you shepherd others, how will you lead them to do no harm and to do good to all God's children? How might you use a rod and staff of love to lead others to acknowledge harmful attitudes, actions, and words? How will you guide your group from lament to life-giving interaction in your community to dismantle racism?

Time for Self-Reflection

What will you do with the power and freedom God gives to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? Reflect on patterns of behavior that do not transform life to the fullest. Think about where the good way is for you.

Closing

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

Participant

A native of North Carolina, Barbara Batson is a museum professional with experience in history museums. Since 1997, she has been the exhibitions coordinator at the Library of Virginia. Barbara also curated *Freeing Art from Wood: The Sculpture of Leslie Garland Bolling*, the first major exhibition and catalogue of this African American artist since the 1940s.

A lifelong Presbyterian, Barbara is a Second Presbyterian Church member in Richmond, where she sings in the choir and is a member of a committee examining Second's relationship to Richmond's Black community since 1845.