*Waking Up White*

Book Study 2020

Christ the King Lutheran Church

Tigard, OR

Excerpt from “*White Supremacy’s Hidden Logic: The racial script”* by Reggie Williams

From *Christian Century* magazine, September 23, 2020 edition

“The premise is White supremacy. Recent events have opened more eyes to its reality, but most people still struggle with language to name it. In everyday conversation about racial oppression, terms like *xenophobia, prejudiced,* and *White supremacy* are often used interchangeably. This doesn’t help. We’re not likely to prescribe the right treatment without an accurate diagnosis. Misdiagnosing the problem makes it difficult to understand how profoundly insidious White supremacy is – and how embedded it is withing the story this nation believes itself to be living. It’s so much more than a few bad apples. White supremacy sits deep inside of the way we’ve been made to understand the world after centuries of reality-bending cruelty. If there is any possible way to address the problem, we must recognize what it is and what it is not.

First, although White supremacy often includes affect, it is not about your feelings, which is to say, it is not a matter of liking or disliking people of different races. History is replete with White supremacists who love Black people, sexually or otherwise.

Nor is White supremacy the same as xenophobia or prejudice, thought it often includes these ideological gangsters and others. Xenophobia is essentially the opposite of hospitality: it is an attitude of unwelcome for strangers, foreigners, or anything unknown. It is not selective about which foreigners or strangers to dislike. By itself, it is not White supremacy – though it may play a part in White supremacy by working to maintain exclusively White space.

As for prejudice, we practice it when we produce or embrace knowledge about people that is not based on actual experience with them. It is bias or contempt that results from unsubstantiated information about others. Howard Thurman’s description of hatred, in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, is a good primer on prejudice: hatred includes (1) contact without fellowship, which leads to (2) unsympathetic understanding, which generates (3) ill will, finally giving rise to (4) hatred walking . One might say that prejudice is a matter of the heart.

But prejudice alone is not White supremacy. It is vital to understand the difference: any individual may harbor unfounded bias or contempt toward a person or group of people. And while an individual’s affect toward others can change, that is not the kind of transformation that will end White supremacy. No amount of hugging will eliminate it, because White supremacy is not about affect – it’s about anthropology. How do we understand what it means to be human? The historical answer to that question has been a hegemonic one: White supremacy.