

“White Privilege OR Supremacy”

A Sermon by The Reverend Bill Clark

I must be honest with you this morning and say how delighted I am, personally, to be addressing this topic, here in May, and not the usual January sermon on MLK Sunday – which if I am to continue to be honest – is generally the only Sunday I have ever talked about race or privilege – which demonstrates to me – very clearly – the water I swim in is called white supremacy.

Now I know that is a loaded word. Images of the KKK, Neo-Nazi’s or other such hate groups come first to our minds. But this is not what we are talking about today. Today, this Sunday, along with 850 other congregations around the United States we are examining white supremacy as “the system or social order that keeps power and resources consolidated among white elites, using an ideology that upholds whiteness as being best or most “normal.” (Alex Kapitan: internet: ‘Radical Copyeditor’ April 21, 2017) Another author states white supremacy as referring to a racial hierarchy in which whiteness sits atop of. The United States was founded on a system – legally, culturally, economically and politically – of white male upper class supremacy.” (Internet: Jesse Benn: [www.twitter.com/Jesse Benn](http://www.twitter.com/JesseBenn))

So if by using the above definitions, white supremacy is called the water we white people find ourselves swimming in, white privilege, on the other hand, **is a reference to the myriad of benefits bestowed on white people stemming from the system of white supremacy.** It was white privilege when growing up having almost all my teachers looked like me. I went to a high school in Maryland, with almost half white and half black students – and still there was only one African-American teacher – one a gym teacher, Mr. Crutchfield.

It is white privilege that allows me to go into a store – any store – and NOT be followed around by a security guard. It is white privilege when I have been stopped numerous times by police officers for speeding, truth be told, I do drive with a heavy foot) and not once received a ticket – never! In fact it happened three times on this very Island.

You see, white supremacy refers to the system, white privilege refers to the benefits. And I am fully aware of the benefits I receive as a white man in our society.

A few years back I gave a sermon titled; 'I am a Racist' and related the story of being a young teenager, 15 years old, and working for Dr. Bullard, helping with yard work and chores. They were redoing their old Maryland farmhouse. When I arrived to work the first day and knocked at the front door – I was told – oh no, you go around to the back door where I met Jim, a black man who I was to be working with.

I recall so vividly how angry, confused and lost I felt as I heard my mind saying – wait I am not that! I am a white teenager doing summer work – I am not like him! After years of reflection I realized what I had lost was my white privilege – and it rocked my young world. I was put on an equal playing field with a black man and it rocked my 15 year old mind. I felt awful. Now I truly was not raised with any prejudice concerning race. Religious prejudice had deeply affected the marriage between my mother and father – my father's father disowning him when he married my mother an Irish Catholic – so thoughts of any one being viewed as less than anyone else – was not part of my upbringing. It just didn't matter! And yet here I was a young teen shattered after losing some of his white privilege. This was the result of the system of white supremacy.

Perhaps some of you have had similar experiences – times when the color of your skin was a reflection of how you were treated by someone – be it an authority figure – a colleague – a stranger! – I can practically guarantee it. This nation was built on the ideal of white supremacy – not that any of us deliberately set up our white lives in this manner – it is simply the system we were born into.

In his book , *Soul Matters: Antiracist Theologies in Dialogue*, author Rev.

James Cone states; ""Talking about how to destroy white supremacy is a daily task and not just for consultants and conferences. If we talk about white supremacy only at special occasions set aside for that, the problem will never be solved. People of color do not have the luxury of just dealing with racism in church meetings. If that were the case, it would not be so bad! No day passes in which blacks don't have to deal with white supremacy. It is found everywhere – in the churches, in seminaries, at publishing houses, in government, and all around the world. There is no escape. If whites get tired of talking about race, just imagine how people of color feel."

So why now? Why on this Sunday in May are we talking about race? I would imagine many of you are aware of the turmoil going on at our Unitarian-Universalist headquarters. The resignation of our President, Peter Morales along with two other white men in leadership roles, resigned over what was termed the hiring practices at the UUA. You can certainly go on-line at UUA.org and

read more about it. The result of such practices revealed a distinct discrepancy in the hiring of white males over persons of color as well as the questioning of funds for the Black Lives Matter movement. Much of this touched on old wounds from the early 1960's to 70's when the UUA's racial justice programs were called into question as funding for such programs were at once taken away and then given back. The outcome of these actions began to erode the trust and goodwill of our African-American clergy and members.

We have come along way since those days and still the culture of white supremacy lives on. What I admire most about what is going on today is that we are taking a good, long, hard look at this system called white supremacy and finding ways to cut loose from its power.

The Reverend Rosemary McNatt, the new President of Starr King Theological School, an African- American woman, whose very hiring was fraught with controversy writes:

“The conversations going on in Unitarian Universalism right now about the power of white supremacy and white privilege to keep us separate from one another are real, painful, even dangerous. In particular, people of color and indigenous people who love our faith are risking their professional futures to speak out about how hard and how damaging it can be to keep faith with a religious tradition that has its roots in white supremacy. That is not an accusation; it is a fact. Our American Unitarian and Universalist past was built by people who believed in the superiority of European Americans to the exclusion of others, and who helped to create structures to support those beliefs. We can't change that past; we can only change our future.”

So it is to the future we are looking to today – a future where we can all attest to the system of white supremacy, which continually grants benefits to white privilege. From our responsive reading this morning we read; “The ultimate measure of a man/woman is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience but it is where they stand at times of challenge and controversy.”
Martin Luther King

It is always said in ministerial circles we are here to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. I know this is uncomfortable. Speaking about racism and white privilege is not why most us come to church. We come to feel good about ourselves and the world we live in- yet when that world shows us the injustices perpetrated by racial tensions – when a 15 year old black boy is shot and killed when a white officer shots into a car of teenagers while driving away from a party – the time to be silent has certainly passed.

In your order of service there is a handout on overt and covert examples of white supremacy. I invite you to take it home – talk about – talk about especially with youth and children – let’s talk about it here during our talk back – let’s find our place of acceptance, repentance, and out and out forgiveness as we study our place in finding the solution to our faiths and our countries system of white supremacy.

I love this faith of Unitarian-Universalism. It has provided me with a religious home where I am continually challenged and pushed beyond my comfort zone – yet at the same time held in a community of love and support. Let us begin together to dismantle the hierarchy of white supremacy and level the playing field for all of our citizens.

Come on board my friends, come on board.

Blessed be and Amen.