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ARTICLE

Sharing in the indiscriminate generosity of God: Exploring missional engagement of racial justice funded by the economy of God

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Abstract

This article further probes three of the findings of the author's DMin project thesis, which explored God's call of racial justice in a predominantly white, affluent Episcopal church. The research revealed theological and missional challenges that inhibit the church from joining in God's mission of justice, namely participants viewing the church as the host of missional engagement, white privilege hindering the practice of listening and the reluctance of members to articulate the presence and activity of God as it relates to justice. In consideration of these obstacles, this article recommends the indiscriminate generosity of God for funding the imagination of the missional community for faithful innovation related to racial justice.

Keywords: Racial justice, Economy of God, Missional engagement, Luke 14, Practice of listening, Eucharist

Introduction

During the summer of 2022, I implemented a Doctor of Ministry research project at St Paul's Episcopal Church in Jackson, Michigan seeking to discern God's call of racial justice in our local community (Magnusson 2023).[1] Being a socially progressive congregation, I anticipated little resistance from members and, instead, a readiness for joining in God's work of justice in our local community. While few participants

1 I participated as an active layperson at St Paul's for seven years preceding the research project. The Institutional Review Board of Lipscomb University approved the project prior to its commencement. The rector of the church and all participants provided informed consent permitting the church to be named and forbidding all individual participants to be named or identified in the project.

opposed the central aim of the project, data reveals theological and missional challenges that inhibit the church from joining in God's mission of justice, namely participants viewing the church as the host of missional engagement, white privilege hindering the practice of listening, and the reluctance of members to articulate the presence and activity of God as it relates to justice. This article briefly summarizes three of the eight findings of the project and posits the economy of God as an appropriate theological framework for deepening missional engagement.

Context and Rationale for the Research Project

St Paul's is a predominantly white, affluent church located in a predominantly Black, low-income neighbourhood of downtown Jackson, MI. In recent decades, the denomination of the Episcopal Church has made intentional efforts to confess and repent of long-standing complicity in systemic racism (General Convention 1989: 329–30; Spellers 2021). Over the past several years, many members of St Paul's have learned from books and films about racial justice, and the topic has surfaced frequently in sermons, prayers, Bible studies and fellowship groups. Unlike some predominantly white churches in the US who deny the presence of ongoing systemic racism, St Paul's began the project with a degree of awareness and consensus related to the reality of racial injustice and the Episcopal Church's historical participation.

The project pursued the following research question: How might a congregation of the most historically powerful, prominent and affluent church in the US imagine its life in the Jackson community in light of Luke 14 and encounters with people who experience racial injustice (Spellers 2021: 53)? I was motivated by the disconnect between discernible congregational interest in supporting racial justice and our insufficient practice of it. The Black community of Jackson is not experiencing equitable and just conditions as the result of the church's proclaimed support of racial justice. I found Jemar Tisby's invitation appropriate for St Paul's at the time: "[Y]ou cannot read your way, listen your way, or watch your way into skillful advocacy. At some point you must act" (2019: 214).

I suspected that a contributing factor to our paralysis is that we conceive of racism primarily in terms of racial identity and often overlook the exploitative realities of racial capitalism, a distinction Jonathan Tran makes in *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*. To get at this, Tran believes that asking the questions "What does racism accomplish?" "Whom does it benefit?" and "How does it work?" can get us closer to the exploitative and commodifying roots of racial capitalism (2021: 294). As an affluent congregation, we appear to have more comfort in taking the "love our neighbours" or "welcome everyone" approach of antiracism, which falls more within the scope of Tran's identarianism, than we are willing to name our ongoing complicity in and benefit from racial capitalism. Tran's work pulls back the curtain on the power of mammon in our lives: "Those Americans worried that justice will take

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away their advantages like nothing more than to talk about identity. They love diversity, inclusion, representation, multiculturalism, and the like because it leaves their stuff – what Jesus in Luke 12 called 'barns and bigger barns' – untouched" (2021: 295). Therefore, I wondered if our attachment to material comforts is an untapped area of the conversation and desired to invite us to confront the greed of our white privilege.

Method of Research

As a way of stimulating these discoveries, the project revolved around two practices of listening: Dwelling in the Word in Luke 14 for seven weeks interlaced with three occasions called Listening Opportunities as a way of attending to perspectives other than our own. I invited all members of the congregation to participate in both listening practices and complete surveys after each of the Listening Opportunities. Additionally, I selected seven participants to attend a minimum of four Dwelling in the Word practices and two Listening Opportunities.[2] At the end of the study, I divided the seven participants into two focus interview groups and asked the same set of questions to each group. In reflection on both practices of listening, I invited participants to share regarding their most dominant feelings, moments of surprise, experiences of discomfort and grief, awareness of God's presence, reoccurring themes from Luke 14, learnings from the practice of listening, God's calling related to racial justice, and lingering questions.

Dwelling in the Word is an extended communal practice of listening to God through both scripture and one another. The practice followed the same steps each week: listen to all or a portion of Luke 14 while noticing the word or phrase that catches one's attention; practise a minute of silence, "find a reasonably friendly looking stranger and listen them into free speech" (Keifert 2006, 163); gather again in the large group to share what each person heard their partner say, communally observe the week's themes, and conclude in gratitude for God's Word and the Holy Spirit that continues to speak through both scripture and the community. I gathered data from the Dwelling practice by keeping field notes of the responses that participants made to the text. Additionally, I asked questions during the focus group interviews drawing out the participants' reflections on the Dwelling practice.

On weeks one, three and five of the study, I invited all members of the church to participate in Listening Opportunities hosted by three local Black leaders referred to as Conversation Partners (CP) in the project. I selected the CPs because they are each professionally involved in the work of racial justice in Southeast Michigan

2 I originally invited eight members of the congregation, four women and four men of various ages, to be focus group participants. I selected participants based on their ability to attend the practices consistently and reliably during the summer timeframe of the study.

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and already had a trusted relationship with the rector of the church. CP 1 consults with various groups seeking diversity, equity and inclusion as well as advocating for racial justice in the local education system. CP 2 was incarcerated in Michigan for several years and now works with a non-profit organization to create policy changes that yield more just and flourishing conditions for formerly incarcerated persons returning to society. CP 3 is ordained by the Episcopal Church and assists congregations in the work of racial healing in their local communities. I asked the CPs to share about local racial justice efforts and appropriate ways that a predominantly white church might participate. Each of the three CPs shared a blend of autobiographical experiences, information about systemic racism, and opportunities for the audience to engage in racial justice.

After the seven weeks, I performed inductive coding of the data gleaned from the three Listening Opportunity surveys, the two focus group interviews, and my field notes from both Dwelling in the Word and Listening Opportunities. I identified eight themes and will explore the implications below of three of the findings through the lens of the economy of God.[3]

The Economy of God

I suggest that the economy of God may serve as a theological foundation for missional engagement of racial justice. Jonathan Tran contrasts the political economy of racial capitalism with the "deep economy" of God by describing God's created order as one of liberation and flourishment (2021: 21, 207). Alternatively, racial capitalism marches to the synchronous beat of scarcity and insatiable consumption while rejecting the fundamental notion that the world and everything in it has been created by and belongs to God (2021: 210). Tran offers hope that the pervasive forces of scarcity and exploitation are mutable, especially when communities seek to share with their neighbors in the economy of God.

Due to the prevalence of the prosperity gospel, it is essential to differentiate between prosperity and God's abundant economy (Mumford, 2011: 222). The prosperity gospel turns on the claim that God grants economic wealth and physical health to the righteous and faithful. The prosperity pursued in this approach often pertains more to the interests of the individual or the church than to the wider community. Conversely, the abundance of the economy of God is not for self-gain or the aggrandizement of the church. Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff make this distinction by noting Israel's experience in the wilderness, "The manna economy displays an

3 The eight themes that emerged from the data are explored at length in the author's project thesis (Magnusson 2023).

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abundance that does not serve the purpose of accumulation. It serves the purpose of nourishment for the day, of fulfilling the basic needs of the community" (2007: 99).

Eucharistically-informed Missional Imagination

St Paul's as Host

One missional and theological challenge that surfaced for joining in God's mission of justice is that some participants unwittingly made suggestions that arranged individuals and St Paul's as the hosts and saviours related to racial justice. In Dwelling, the group frequently interpreted Jesus' table instructions to the Pharisees to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind," as a model for the church to invite our neighbours into worship. "So, who are [we] called to invite to our banquet?" asked an interviewee in reflection on the text. St Paul's was typically seen as the location where God's banquet occurs. Conversations often went down the path of asking how St Paul's can become more inviting to our Black neighbors and diverse: "I would like people of other races to feel they would be welcome to attend St Paul's and that they would be truly welcomed." These sentiments led to palpable anxiety and concerns such as how St Paul's could get Black people to attend and remain; whites and Blacks not being able to relate with one another; and changing worship styles – "Can Episcopalians still revere / embed English culture while appreciating / celebrating / welcoming other cultures? Must we CHANGE to do this?" (emphasis original). Members rarely considered that God's banquet can take place in other social locations and on terms other than our own.

I also identified the impulse for some participants to serve as white saviours. For example, after CP 2 shared about their experiences of incarceration and current efforts of changing legislation, a member approached them offering to speak to other groups alongside them, "It might be nice to have a white [person] by your side.... I'd like to be your [person]." While the member had the intention of helping the CP, they overlooked how the CP was sufficiently compelling on their own as they spoke before a predominantly white group.

Willie James Jennings explores how predominantly white churches like St Paul's have come to assume the role of host:

> *[T]he Christian theological imagination was woven into processes of colonial dominance. Other peoples and their ways of life had to adapt, become fluid, even morph into the colonial order of things, and such a situation drew Christianity and its theologians inside habits of mind and life that internalized and normalized that order of things.... Indeed, it is as though Christianity, wherever it went in the modern colonies, inverted its sense of hospitality. It claimed to be the host, the owner of the spaces it*

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entered, and demanded native peoples to enter its cultural logics, its ways of being in the world, and its conceptualities. (2010: 8, emphasis added)

Despite God being the host in the narratives of scripture, the colonial theological imagination of Western Christianity continues to have an insidious grip on communities of faith, even those who have emerging awareness of systemic racism and white privilege.

Disconnect Between the Eucharist and Missional Engagement

In reviewing the data, I was surprised that the Eucharist, the pinnacle of Episcopal worship, did not give greater shape to members' understanding of God as the host. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are principal actors in the liturgy, communicating clearly that God is the host of the table (Episcopal Church 2007: 361–6). After receiving the bread and wine, the community affirms that this feast is gifted by God and sourced from the body of Christ himself: "you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of [Christ's] Body and Blood" (2007: 365). The weekly gathering at the table of the Lord reveals the underlying belief in the unceasing abundance of nourishment that God provides. No one would return to a table known to be empty. Furthermore, because God is the host of the table and extends welcome to all, St Paul's participates in God's welcome and inclusion by sharing the Eucharist with whomever comes forward to receive. While the church regularly engages this theologically rich sacrament, seldom do members explore together or reflect consciously on questions such as, "What understanding of the world is implicit in this practice? What vision of the kingdom is carried in this ritual?" (Smith 2009: 199). The Eucharist does not appear to inform public engagement and is an underutilized gift for shaping the church's imagination of the relationship between God, church, and world and its impact on racial justice.

God as Host

Scripture offers many narratives that locate God as the host at the margins, particularly through the numerous table scenes in Luke and Acts. In these volumes, Jesus and the Spirit disrupt ancient social conventions of the table and transform it into a place of boundary transgression, intimate communion and belonging. Jesus rearranges the table and establishes himself as the host while simultaneously being one who serves (Lk. 22.7–30). Specifically in the Dwelling passage of Luke 14 selected for the project, Jesus unseats the religiously, socially and economically powerful Pharisees from the host position and rearranges the table in alignment with the kingdom of God.

In the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14.15–24, the privileged invitees snub the master's invitation with absurd excuses. One by one, they each tell the master's

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servant that they must attend to their possessions: a piece of land, five yoke of oxen and a new wife. The parable signals their preoccupation with possessions while also exposing the deeper truth of the Pharisees' preoccupation with themselves. The privileged invitees do not regard the master as honourable enough for their presence. In a culture of beneficence and reciprocal obligation, to associate with this master potentially brings shame upon the initial invitees, a risk they are unwilling to take (Green 1995: 112–21). Jesus demonstrates to the Pharisees that the Greco-Roman code of honour and shame has shaped how they perceive God and God's kingdom more than they realize.

Jesus presses on and dispels societal arrangements of patronage by establishing God as the indiscriminate host or "Supreme Benefactor" of the table (Green 1995: 116). The Pharisees, who are the original hosts in this narrative, suddenly discover they have been replaced by a host who has endless room for those who would be regarded as having no honour. Laurence Hull Stookey concludes of this passage, "The heavenly banquet hall is vast, and God desires urgently that it be filled, for our Maker has an expansive nature, and the sharing of good things is at the center of divine creative love" (1993: 136). God's way of beneficence creates an economy of shared abundance, which Jesus holds in clear contrast to Greco-Roman exploitative practices of patronage.

Eucharistically-informed Missional Imagination

Though the sacrament of the Eucharist has its elevated place in the weekly service, St Paul's imagination for joining in racial justice may be additionally formed by the economy of "God's life as a 'perpetual eucharist' for all of creation" (Milbank 1995: 152). God is ahead of and beyond the church, feeding and nourishing the world long before and after the church gets involved. I anticipate that we will begin to be attuned to God's abundance in our community as we learn to consistently show up as guests at God's table wherever it may be found and regularly consider questions such as, "How might God be hosting us in our encounters and through our neighbors?" and "What gifts are we receiving from our community for which we may give thanks?"

Receiving Through Listening

White Privilege and Listening

Unsurprisingly, white privilege was detectable despite the education about racism that the members of St Paul's had previously engaged. The first CP stood before a predominantly white, affluent crowd concluding that, "If we get down to the real root of it, in my opinion, fear and greed are the real issue." When I heard the phrase "fear and greed" I anticipated comments or pushback in the surveys. Surprisingly, out of

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16 surveys for CP 1, only three mentioned the phrase and only one of seven interviewees briefly mentioned it.

Instead, there was a higher prevalence of two things. Participants freely offered opinions on the demeanour and effectiveness of the CPs. It is noteworthy that some of these comments were shared in response to the invitation for personal reflection: "As a way of describing your experience while listening, please share one to three words or brief phrases that express *your* most dominant feeling(s) or reaction(s)" (emphasis not on survey). Instead of participants sharing about themselves, they reversed the attention of the question and critiqued the presenters. Some said CP 1 was "confrontational", "extreme" and "antagonistic". Others viewed CP 1 more favorably by expressing they were "helpful", "engaging", "inspiring" and "courageous". Comments about CP 2 were less polarized and assessed the presenter as "effective", "persuasive" and "mesmerizing", and "had us eating out of the palm of [their] hand". Participants described CP 3 as "uplifting and encouraging" and "having very deep roots in God's presence, like an ancient tree". While it could be argued that these words and phrases reflect dominant personal reactions of the participants, it seems significant how often responses were an assessment of the CP more than a self-reflection of the participants' feelings.

Second, rather than focusing on the substance of the presentations of the CPs, there was a higher prevalence of comments about minor things than anticipated. When I asked about a surprise during the Listening Opportunities, some noted specific details of the personal lives of the CPs, such as their hobbies or the number of children they have. While personal anecdotes gave the audience a fuller and more autobiographical picture, I wondered why those were the chosen moments of surprise for participants. By focusing on the trivial, the white listeners might have been demonstrating that we have enough societal power to deflect difficult truths and be selective about our engagement.

Not only did the participants reveal white privilege, but I also discovered it in myself. When the first Conversation Partner declared that "fear and greed" are the root issue of racism, they quickly moved to a different segment of their presentation without expounding upon those words. This could have been a rhetorical strategy, some understandable nerves that overcame them, or something I cannot imagine from my limited perspective. Whatever the CP's rationale, I felt uneasy. It was not, however, because I disagreed with them. I designed the project with the undergirding belief that greed has something to do with racism. My challenge was CP 1's *method of delivery*. An interview participant shared my reaction: "It wasn't that you didn't agree with what CP 1 was saying. It was the way [they] said it. It was a matter of delivery. [They were] adversarial."

For days, I found myself vacillating between two thoughts. In the practices of teaching and preaching, I believe it is wise to invite others to walk alongside me to

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grapple with a difficult truth. I desire to avoid provoking hearers from shutting down too early and wondered if the CP spoke too confrontationally. I sincerely wanted CP 1's words to be heard and was concerned that attendees would not have ears to hear because of the delivery. However, as I mentally gave CP 1 well-intended suggestions, I realized how white privilege and fragility were shaping my assessment and notions of effective rhetorical strategies. A person of privilege has the leisure to slowly and gently invite listeners alongside them. A person who experiences ongoing oppression needs immediate justice and should not be expected to remain quiet or peaceable. Further, I was allowing the predominantly white audience to determine the "wisest" course for racial dialogue. I was mentally tone-policing CP 1 and hoping for them to conform their delivery in such a way that white people could hear it. I had performance standards shaped by white privilege and fragility and was unsettled when CP 1 did not fit that mould. While there is value in knowing one's audience and speaking in a way that can be heard, this experience reveals that a predominantly white, upper-class audience would be wise to attend to the dialogical problems our privilege creates.

Signalling Mastery

Perhaps one could say that the questions on a survey immediately following a speaker solicit evaluative responses. In our consumer-oriented society, people are frequently asked to rate their customer service representative or answer presidential approval polls. Due to this kind of cultural conditioning, participants possibly assumed that the survey questions were of that nature. I wonder, however, if the trend of a white, upper-class group immediately evaluating the demeanour and effectiveness of the Black presenters is more than customer service and more than a deflection tactic. This phenomenon might signal what Willie James Jennings calls "the performance of the self-sufficient white man" (2020) and Miranda Fricker's "testimonial injustice" (2007: 9–29). Jennings describes how the colonial legacy of Western education has distorted our imaginations in such a way that we are enthralled by the performance of possession, control and mastery (2020: 6–7). We have learned to love a specific kind of intellectual form of whiteness and measure all performances in relation to it (2020: 29). A highly educated group that has been historically shaped by the performance of white, male priests seems to freely evaluate everyone by these standards. Fricker uses different terms to explore the listening dynamics between two groups of people. She describes how speakers of colour experience "testimonial injustice" because white hearers' hearing is shaped by implicit biases and scepticism of non-white cognition (2007: 2–3, 5–6). The white hearers' ingrained habit of "judgment of credibility" supersedes the testimony of the speaker and blocks the flow of new learning (2007: 3). This dynamic increases what she calls "hermeneutical marginalization", where some social groups are unable to contribute to the pool of shared

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social meanings (2007: 152–61). While it is impossible to know the extent to which the participants' judgment of credibility was at work, it is valuable to reflect upon these possible explanations for the evaluation of the CPs.

God's Economy of Encounter

In a "zero-sum" constructed world, white privilege maintains the myth that there is not enough space for multiple voices and perspectives to be shared, so the assertion of one voice means the negation of another voice (McGhee 2021: xix). The habits of criticizing, correcting and directing – Andrew T. Draper calls this "exercising the ethnographic gaze" — help white listeners to maintain control of the assets of the conversation, even if the thoughts go unspoken (2018: 204).

An additional barrier for interracial conversations and encounters is that white, upper-class people tend to view white people as having and deserving all the goods and racialized others as having all the needs, which is ironic on the heels of contending that white people demonstrate a scarcity mindset! With seemingly endless access to education, employment and resources, white listeners have difficulty recognizing the deficiencies and needs of the white community and the abundant gifts existent in other racialized groups. Complicating matters is the misconception that goods consumed with financial capital are more valuable than gifts that cannot be purchased. This perceived imbalance of surplus and needs between racialized groups predisposes white listeners to have an unreceptive posture.

In God's economy, however, the gifts of God are always at hand. Encounters with the other are occasions for God's abundance, not scarcity. Though we believe that God's Spirit is poured out upon *all* flesh, we struggle to embody the truth of this statement (Mather 2018: 14). Asset-Based Community Development expert Michael Mather insists that many of God's gifts go unnoticed because we are asking the wrong questions and looking for the wrong answers (2018: 17). Rather than focusing on needs, he suggests that communities learn to ask things such as "Who are the healers, teachers and artists around here, and how may we invest in them so that their gifts may flourish?" (2018: 33). Additionally, Andrew T. Draper suggests that white Christians "practice hearing and speaking the glory of God in unfamiliar cadences" (2018: 203). Whatever and however a person communicates their experience may be received as a gift. Draper wonders, "What if we as White people saw correction and anger as gifts given to us by people of Color, gifts that signal a desire to relate in a healthier manner?" (2018: 184). These gifts reveal passion and engagement, not apathy and resignation. As the members of St Paul's practise receiving what is unfamiliar or what might be perceived as undesirable, I anticipate we will discover the abundance of God's gifts for the work of racial justice.

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Speaking of the Living God

Where is God?

For several years preceding the project, St Paul's utilized the phrase "Celebrating Christ's Presence in a Changing World" as a way of communicating to our neighbours what St Paul's believes about Christ, the church and the world. Given the ubiquity of the phrase, I was surprised to discover that several participants were hesitant to name the presence of God during the project. As I was processing the Listening Opportunity surveys, I noticed that the question that was most frequently left blank was the question that asked, "If you were aware of God's presence today, write 1–2 sentences to describe what you noticed." Out of 44 responses, this question was left unanswered 16 times, far more than other questions. Possibly due to the overwhelming nature of systemic racism, one response said, "If anything, it feels like He's decidedly absent."

Hesitant Speech

There are several reasons why participants were less likely to name the presence of God in these instances. One is that Christianity in the West has largely kept God out of public matters, especially when it comes to social justice (Dupont 2013). God is experienced in the worship setting, and possibly during private devotions, but not often in other arenas of our lives. This has largely been shaped by the Western theological and ecclesial imagination that locates God in the church and positions the church over and against the world. When Christianity has been brought into public matters, it has often been for the sake of further subjugation of already marginalized groups, such as efforts of some conservative Christians to limit the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. This kind of public engagement has not fostered a sense of God's presence and has typically done the opposite.

One interviewee named the troublesome history of Christians using the Bible to condone slavery, which causes this participant to feel some hesitancy around involving the Bible in discussions on racial justice. It seems less complicated to avoid God in the discussion and advocate for racial justice on humanitarian terms. This participant expressed that they want to avoid evangelicalism, and I suspect that their avoidance is shared among much of the congregation. In my observation, Episcopalians often try to distinguish ourselves from American evangelicals. In the effort to keep from misrepresenting God's presence, we find greater comfort in avoiding speaking about the activity of God altogether.

Additionally, Charles Taylor has identified that we find ourselves in an age of disenchantment and secularism where the assumption and belief that God is present and acting in miraculous ways has faded (2007). This posture has become so prevalent that many progressive Christians rarely attribute anything to the presence and activity of God. If something miraculous occurs, it is more often deemed as a

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fluke rather than the work of God. In Dwelling, for example, the comments largely exhibited an intellectual criticism and curiosity about Luke 14 and less often considered how the Spirit might be calling us to respond.

Healing is Possible

Inherent in the claim of the economy of God is a living and active God. The Spirit of God, the giver of life, is the source of the ever-flowing stream of justice and righteousness (Amos 5.24). When Christian communities seek to participate in God's work of justice, we confess that God is interested and involved in creating more just conditions for all of humanity and creation. It is not purely up to human efforts to address systemic racism. In mysterious ways, God brings unexpected harvest (1 Cor. 3.5–9). It is easy for the daunting work of racial justice and the seemingly endless bad news of police brutality, unjust incarceration, housing discrimination, underfunded schools and banned literature to cloud our vision. Further complicating efforts of justice is our own attachment to white privilege. The project demonstrates that St Paul's could benefit from attending to the ongoing work of God in the world, thereby increasing trust that God can bring liberation and justice.

The Dwelling text for the project offers good news in this regard. Luke 14 opens with a healing that appears to be disconnected from the table instructions that follow. One Sabbath day, Jesus is eating in the home of a leader of the Pharisees when a man with dropsy – excessive water retention – suddenly appears before him (Hartstock 2013: 342). Jesus heals him, and it seems as though the purpose of the healing story is to expose the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees' Sabbath customs. However, Chad Hartstock demonstrates that dropsy was a prevalent metaphor in the ancient Greco-Roman world for greed, such as Diogenes referring to money-lovers as "dropsies" (2013: 349). Hartstock insists that Luke employs dropsy as an accusation of the insatiable greed of the Pharisees (2013: 353).[4] Luke's audience would have readily made the connection. Those with never-ending desires for wealth and power are akin to those who suffer from dropsy and in need of a miraculous healing they cannot generate themselves. While Jesus elevates mercy, healing, and liberation for those who have been marginalized, he also offers healing for those attached to privilege. In this simultaneous healing, Jesus offers a new vision of human flourishing for all.

4 Several instances in Luke highlight the theme of the greed of the Pharisees: 11.39; 12.15, 18, 45; 16.1–14, 19–31. Contrast with Zacchaeus' generosity in 19.1–10.

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Taking a Risk on the Living God

At St Paul's, there are not many spaces where members speak of God's involvement in our lives other than the bold claims about the activity of God in the liturgy. I have heard a few people timidly share accounts of God's stunning work in their lives while being quick to offer a caveat, "Now, some of you might not believe this, but …" In large part, members take a curious and intellectual approach to the Bible. On the one hand, unbridled engagement with the text is a gift. Many of the questions and comments at St Paul's would never be spoken in a conservative Christian setting. On the other hand, intellectual inquiries and bold critiques of scripture appear to hinder the community from hearing the calling of the Spirit. As an effort to separate ourselves from that which might be regarded as undiscerning theological speech of conservative evangelicals, the St Paul's community has swung in the opposite direction of struggling to identify the presence and activity of God. Therefore, I see an opportunity for St Paul's to grow in our belief in the living God and risk articulating what God appears to be up to in our community (Hagley 2019: 124–6). As we make it a regular habit to share how we sense and believe God is present in our daily lives, we might realize that God can heal us from our attachments to privilege more than we imagined.

Contrary to what is often assumed in Christian spaces, humans move from experience to theology rather than from theology to experience (Love 2023: 132–3). Mark Love discusses the theological significance of the practice of reflection in the life of the congregation: "We seldom draw people into meaningful reflection on their experiences. Because we do not think of experience as a source for theology, we do not ask our members to consider how their experiences are related to what God is doing in the world" (2023: 133). Today, within any church context, there are endless daily experiences people may bring forward for theological consideration. As St. Paul's struggles to articulate the presence of God outside of worship, the regular practice of communal storytelling might be one avenue for surfacing the activity of God. Practising theological reflection together as a community brings in necessary other perspectives and guards against the formation of self-serving theological conclusions. Additionally, for those who are uncomfortable with making theological claims, we hold space for future corrections by using words of possibility, "God *might* be present or leading in this way…" Risking theological speech trusts that the economy of God is generous with grace and mercy when we get it wrong.

In bringing attention to the power of God for justice, in no way do I desire to promote a pollyannaish approach to racism. Injustice is alive and well in the US, and it is beyond time for white Christians to participate more radically in racial justice. In this endeavour, we discover that hope and celebration are bundled up with discouragement and lament. I am heartened by Ruth A. Meyers' eschatological frame for this tension: "Our thanksgiving does not deny the suffering and struggles of the

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world, but rather locates them in the larger horizon of the arc of salvation history" (2014: 168).

Conclusion

When I began my research project at St Paul's, I hoped it would yield clear and immediate paths for the church's participation in racial justice in the city of Jackson. Instead, I discovered some deeply rooted theological challenges that inhibit our participation in the mission of God, specifically viewing ourselves as the host, white privilege hindering receptivity in the practice of listening, and hesitancy in naming the liberating activity of God. In this article, I have identified that these inclinations are each reflective of racial capitalism's economy of scarcity and considered how locating ourselves within the indiscriminate generosity of God's economy could reshape our engagement in matters of justice.

Regarding the first identified challenge of participants inadvertently viewing the church as the host, I suggest that the liturgy of the Eucharist contains great potential for reorienting churches around God as the host. In this, churches may discover the abundance of God that is available beyond the walls of the building and around the tables of our neighbours. The second challenge reveals how white privilege continues to exert itself in progressive spaces, skewing perceptions of the gifts of God that are available in all people. By cultivating the practice of hospitable receptivity, churches may discover the abundance of God in the neighbourhood that is available for justice. Finally, the research reveals that a church's reluctance to identify and articulate the activity of God potentially weakens the church's partnership with the living God in the work of racial justice. Through the practice of risking theological speech in storytelling, churches may become more attuned to the power and presence of God in the social fabric of our communities and experience the necessary empowerment for justice. While socially progressive churches might be eager to take swift actions of justice, the work appears to be hindered without missional and theological impulses flowing from the generous and indiscriminate economy of God.

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