

The Third Sunday in Lent

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Saint Paul's Episcopal Church/La Iglesia Episcopal de la Resurrección

Mount Vernon, WA

March 23, 2025

Deacon Dennis Taylor, RN

I listened to Diana Butler-Bass after Ash Wednesday talk about how more than individuals need to have the deep contemplation of Lent that the ashes should call us to, institutions and communities should contemplate their transgression and the meaning of life and death. We could be asking the streets.

Over the last few months, I have again been engaged by the Doctrine of Discovery, most recently when Bp. Phil could not be with the deacons; the Rev. Rachael Taber-Hamilton led a program on that topic. Recently, my reading has also mentioned, used, or focused on the Doctrine of Discovery and the particular United States' version of Manifest Destiny. Looking at how this fifteenth-century European-Christian Doctrine primarily set out in a series of papal bulls, a papal edict sealed with a lead bulla, starting with Pope Nicolas V's papal bull of 1452, *Dumn Diveras*, which granted Portugal the following rights:

To invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens (Muslims) and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery.³⁵

This bull, along with Pope Alexander VI's bull, *Inter Caetera*, of May 1493, validates Spain's ownership rights of previously "undiscovered" lands in the Americas following the voyages of Columbus, elevating those practices that had been accepted into official church doctrine and international law. Affirming the church's blessing of and interest in political conquest, "that in our times especially the Catholic faith and the Christian religion exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to faith itself."² The Protestant monarchs were quick to pick up these rules and were not to be left out of the competition among European powers to carve up this new "found" land among themselves bringing dehumanization and devastation to Indigenous people globally and baked-in white supremacy worldview wherever European colonization occurred.

I first learned more than the phrase "doctrine of discovery" at an Association of Episcopal Deacons conference in Williamsburg, VA. There, we explored the coming together of three cultures: Indigenous, European, and African, how the Doctrine and the slave trade that was spawned from it affected these three groups, and the knots people tie themselves into to justify the practices.

One of the presenters at the conference was James Cameron, who portrays, "John Rollison was a free man of color born in a way into aristocracy, his father was gentry, and his mother was mulatto. He rose to be a master shoemaker, which shows you

he's educated," his 8000 hours of study allowed him to inhabit and portray the first person of color at Williamsburg. He tells Rollison's story from his 18th-century perspective. Despite being one of the wealthier men in the Tidewater area and sitting on some political boards, he cannot marry his White partner, and he cannot vote, but his children can. He was a landowner who was very active politically, but his name was lost to history until James Cameron.

At the same conference, Katrina Brown, a White documentarian, Episcopalian, and descendent of slave traders in Rhode Island, spoke about her journey following the slave trade, sharing the story of her family, the DeWolf family, which became wealthy from the slave trade. She created a documentary called *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*. The General Convention of the Episcopal Church 2009 repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery and called for all dioceses to show this film. And now we are going backward and trying to rebury this history because it makes some White people uncomfortable.

Like many people in this room, I grew up during the mid-last century Civil Rights struggle in the country's Mississippi River drainage, from Chicago to Independence, KS, Baton Rouge, LA to Pierre, SD, and a few other stops. I attended integrated schools before they were mandated, and I attended segregated schools after *Brown v. Board of Education*. They were anything but equal.

We all have stories about what has brought us to who and where we are today. Paul talks of Corinthian ancestors under a cloud, being led, passing through the sea, and being baptized into Moses. They were all fed spiritual food and drank the spiritual water from the rock that was Christ. But the people were idolaters, chasing after those who were sexually immoral and did not respect the worship of God. It is idolatry, not immorality, that gets them into trouble. Paul is warning the Corinthians not to be arrogant or that hubris could bring them down as it brought some of their ancestors down. It is about turning to God and following God's lead. God will provide and be faithful and remain faithful amid our temptations and suffering, providing new life through radical love. Christians are called to do the same: to love others into new life.

In Luke Jesus tells us about Galileans who had been killed by humans and had their blood mixed with the blood of sacrificed animals, a ritualistic transgressions, and by others who died in a tower collapse, wrong place, wrong time. People suffer. It is part of creation, and these Galileans are no worse sinners than the rest of us; they may even have been better. God is at work in the world, and our lives extend the gift of grace to us. Like the fig tree, we are often given multiple opportunities to do better, to be better, or to do the right thing. The grace that God extends to us, we must also extend to one another.

The Doctrine of Discovery has been built into our culture and continues to push us apart. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg cited it in

a 2005 8-1 decision in *Sherrill v. Oneida*, rejecting the Oneida Nation's attempt to reincorporate, for tax purposes, land that was historically lost and recently repurchased.³

Remember, as Jamar Tisby states and the readings attest to: "God loves justice, and God takes sides." From Luke: "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; if not, you can cut it down." Who is tending the roots of Saint Paul's/Resurrección and you? What are you going to do with that year?

The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy and the Path to a Shared American Future

Robert P. Jones, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks © 2023

¹ The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy Pg 15

² The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy Pg 16

³ The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy Pg 295