

**A Resource Guide  
In the Aftermath of the Shooting of Michael Brown  
Ferguson, Missouri August 9, 2014**

**Reconciliation Ministry, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**



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# CALL TO WORSHIP

(BASED ON EXODUS 3:1-15)

BERE GIL SOTO

**One:** Brothers and sisters, we have come today to worship  
The One who has been, who is and who will be.

**Many:** We come with sorrow, hurt and some of us even with  
anger for the injustice we have experienced in the past  
weeks.

**One:** Friends, as The Lord told Moses, The Lord is telling us  
today, “I have heard the cry of my people... I know their  
sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them and to  
bring them out to a good and broad land.”

**Many:** We want to live in that land! But we need to work hard to  
get there. We ask you O, God, for your wisdom and  
courage.

**One:** The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of  
Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob... the God  
of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X, the God  
of Rigoberta Menchu, Cesar Chavez, Travon Martin and  
Michael Brown, the same God has sent us and blessed  
us to work for a land of justice and reconciliation.

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## PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE

RONNIE BELL

Eternal God, we come before you now. Righteous, Almighty God, in you we find our strength and purpose. In your Spirit we find our comfort and in your Son we find our redemption. Be with us today and always. The Scriptures tell us that for centuries and centuries you have called your people to be committed to loving you, loving their neighbor and speaking the truth in love.

In this often dark and broken world, allow us to shine your light. Help us to remember our brothers and sisters in violent struggle in the Middle East. Be with our brothers and sisters in Ferguson, Missouri. Be with the grieving family and friends of Michael Brown. Be with the people who fear for their lives and safety.

Be with the agents of government and civil service who have the duty of keeping people safe. Work in their hearts and allow them not to abuse their power. Allow people to realize that forgiveness does not mean silence in the face of injustice.

Allow us to realize that as your people it is also our duty to look after the well-being of our brothers and sisters. God, let the people in violent, unstable parts of this country and this world find peace in you. Work in the hearts of those who perpetrate violence.

For God, you have shown us through the centuries that you raise up unlikely and undeserving people to lead others to do your will. Even people such as Paul, people who for years have persecuted your people can eventually change their hearts, change their ways, find forgiveness from the very people they persecuted and eventually become your servants, expanding your holy kingdom.

Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. God raise your holy church as your hands and your feet in this world. Give us the courage to do your work, to speak out against evil, to feed the hungry, to visit the imprisoned and to heal the sick. Continue to guide us, for without you we are so very lost and we don't know our way.

We ask these things in the name of our redeemer, example and teacher, Jesus Christ, Amen.

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## COMMUNION MEDITATION

REV. APRIL JOHNSON

Come to the Table. Jesus invites ALL to the table of Reconciliation. It is here at this table that we re-member – where we are re-joined as the whole family of God in the sacred act of communion. Here we acknowledge our brokenness and our desire for healing as well as a return to wholeness. We have been torn apart by perceived difference, indifference, by inequity, by racial injustice and misunderstanding. We come to the table to acknowledge what is the depth, breadth and length of God’s love for all of God’s children. Here we remember Christ’s broken and bruised body for the forgiveness of sin. We remember the blood that was shed for you and for all people for our re-joining to the body of Christ.

There is a Methodist church just north of Chicago outside of which it has a sign (not a marquee) that reads, “We see, welcome and value all.” What an invitation! Is it possible to belong to a community of faith that sincerely sees, welcomes and values our whole selves? Indeed! Here at this table we celebrate Christ’s generous invitation of the possibility of our restoration to wholeness. It is here in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the wine that Christ, our host, sees all, welcomes all and restores the inherent value every member of the body of Christ to be reconciled to God and one another. Come to this table of reconciliation.

For on the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took the bread. He gave thanks and gave it to his disciples saying, “Take, Eat. This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Again after supper, he took the cup. After giving thanks he blessed and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for the forgiveness of sin. Every time you drink of this cup, you do so in remembrance of me.”

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## SERMON RESOURCES

### “CAN WE BE FRIENDS?”

REV. FRANK A. THOMAS, PH.D

*And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water. (Exodus 2:10)*

Several Sundays ago, Nikolas Kristof, in a New York Times op-ed, entitled “When Whites Just Don’t Get It,” said that many White Americans are fed up with the coverage of the Ferguson shooting of Michael Brown. A plurality of whites said the issue of race is getting more coverage than it deserves. Kristof then recounts a 2011 study by scholars at Harvard and Tufts that found that whites, on average, believed that anti-white racism was a bigger problem than anti-black racism. He sees this as white delusion and gives several reasons why race and race relations deserve more attention, not less:

- The net worth of the average black household in the United States is \$6,314, compared with \$110,500 for the average white household, according to 2011 census data. The gap has widened in the last decade.
- The black-white income gap is roughly 40 percent greater today than it was in 1967.
- A black boy born today in the United States has a life expectancy five years shorter than that of a white boy.
- Black students are significantly less likely to attend schools offering

advanced math and science courses than white students. They are three times as likely to be suspended and expelled, setting them up for educational failure.

- According to a study from the National Bureau of Economic Research. Nearly 70 percent of middle-aged black men who never graduated from high school have been imprisoned.

When I finished reading the article, as an African American male, I realized that *I* had been drawn from the water. The metaphor being “drawn from the water” is found in our text in Exodus 2. A man of the house of Levi marries a woman of Levi and they have a son. She saw that he was a special child. Because of the threat of death, from the Egyptian edict that every Hebrew boy that was born was to be drowned in the Nile, she hid him for three months. And when she could no longer hide him, she made an ark of bulrushes. She waterproofed the boat and she put the child in it and set it afloat in the reeds at the edge of the Nile. The baby’s older sister stood from afar to see what would happen to the child.

When the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river with her maidens, she saw the ark among the reeds. She sent her maids to get it. When she opened it, the child cried. She had compassion on him and said, *“This is one of the Hebrews’ children.”*

Then his older sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter – *“Let me go and find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for you.”* And the child’s mother was found and was paid to nurse the child. The child grew up and was brought unto Pharaoh’s daughter and became her son. And she called his name Moses, because she said, *“I drew him out of the water.”*

Being drawn out the water is a metaphor of salvation. It is to be delivered from state sanctioned death into a life of privilege and resources, and ultimately a call to draw others from the water. After reading Kristof's article, that is how I felt – as an African American male, who had risen to the level of professor. I was drawn from the water. I had beaten the odds. I had escaped the death sentence so often given to African American males in this culture. 'What is this cultural death sentence that you are talking about'? you ask. Permit me to explain.

One of the major points of the Kristof article was that friends open our eyes. When we are friends with people who are different, our eyes are opened to their truth and their reality. Kristof says: Some straight people have changed their attitudes toward gays after realizing that their friends – or children – were gay. Researchers have found that male judges are more sympathetic to women's rights when they have daughters. I believe that we are more sympathetic to immigrants when we talk with them and hear their stories. I think Blacks or more understanding of Whites when they have true white friends. Yet because of the de facto segregation of America, whites are unlikely to have many black friends: A study from the Public Religion Research Institute suggests that in a network of 100 friends, a white person, on average, has one black friend. ***Can we be friends?***

Can I speak openly and honestly about the reality I see? I have totally abandoned the argument of trying to convince individuals or this society at large that America is "racist" or of the existence of "white supremacy." Most whites, not all, simply refuse to be convinced. Most are simply not interested in the plight of black people, immigrants from south of

the border, or other people of color unless it causes pain in their lives. I subscribe to the term, white supremacy to describe this phenomenon. Rather than try to convince people, I simply clarify what I mean when I use the term “white supremacy.” Following Thomas Kane,

I don’t mean to suggest that the entire nation is wearing Klan gear or painting graffiti swastikas; instead, I intend the term to connote a de facto white supremacy, where the privilege of whiteness is assumed and perpetuated across generations so that taking the historically long view, the majority of property, wealth, and material goods are owned and operated for white profit. This inequality is embedded in our society by generations of average Americans choosing the comfort of apathy over genuine challenge of equality – material, political, rhetorical, and representational.

Michele Alexander defines racial indifference as “a lack of compassion and caring about race and racial groups.” It is the myth of a “post-racial” America. Racial indifference is different than racial hostility where the assumption is that systems are intentionally structured to harm other racial groups.” Most racial indifference is hidden in a system of practices that perpetuate the lifestyle and habits of European immigrant descendants over others. Therefore, many whites deny the reality of white privilege and refuse to accept it. ***Can we be friends?***

With that said, the events in Ferguson represent the frustration regarding the issue of violence against the black community, from “law and order,” to the “war on drugs,” to “mass incarceration” to “stop and frisk,” or “driving while black,” to “shoot every bullet and ask questions later.” The result being the militarization of police in attitude and equipment.

Racial indifference propagates the myth of pure and “simulated suburban society” that has become our national self-image. This myth perpetrates the ghetto as a living nightmare, a place of violence and warfare – a jungle. Therefore some believe the militarization is justified as the police are doing the best they can in the jungle. This mischaracterization is perpetrated in the media as random and apparently senseless acts of violence that wear only a black face. Ten people out 20,000 can be looting and the message we receive is that the whole community is looting and rioting. Racially indifferent institutions often uphold this stereotype.

I was raised in a black neighborhood, went through much of this and live to say that I beat the odds. And we wonder why people in Ferguson are angry as they see a son shot and left for four hours in the open air. I was angry. *(pause)* I was drawn from the water. ***Can we be friends?***

I realize that I am not the only one who has beat the odds. There is someone here, probably a woman, and maybe a man, who has suffered from abuse –sexual and verbal, domestic violence or child abuse, and you are sitting here today ‘clothe and in your right mind’. You can say that *you* beat the odds and have been drawn from the water. Or, there might be a same sex loving person here, who has known discrimination, bigotry, intolerance, and violence. By all rights and privileges you should be bitter and filled with hate, but you have been drawn from the water. Or, maybe you are Hispanic and live with suspicion and are constantly reminded that you do not belong here. Maybe it was bankruptcy, illness, the challenge of a special needs child, a painful divorce, or isolation and you have been

drawn from the water. I am not the only one here who beat the odds. ***Can we be friends?***

I wonder if those of us who beat the odds realize we beat the odds *because* we have friends. ***Can we be friends?***

I believe that this text shows God's ability to provide friends for our deliverance. In this text God provides friends, including family, so that Moses could beat the odds. I want to highlight Moses' friends by three direct quotes from the text. The first is in verse 6: Pharaoh's daughter says, *"This is one the Hebrews' children"* When she saw the child, she recognized that the child was different. The child was not one of her group or race. We all see difference. Some people say that they are color blind – what I believe they mean is that they see color and do not associate a negative value to what they see. When she saw the child she had compassion on him. She had friendship, mercy, and love on him. Ultimately, she adopted him as her son. How did she get this compassion? She probably had some Hebrew friends.

Then in verse 7: His older sister says, *"Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?"* I say to people of color -- do not give up on being friends and being close. A whole lot of things can happen when you are close. Dialogue can happen when you are close. Understanding can happen when you are close. Friendships can happen! The older sister was close enough to Pharaoh's daughter to suggest a solution. – Pharaoh's daughter had enough trust in

her to value her opinion. Even if you are in the minority, do not give up on relationship. How did the older sister get close to Pharaoh's daughter? She probably had some Egyptian friends.

And finally, "She called his name Moses because he had been pulled from the water." The whole plan comes together and God shows us that God is our friend. God put the plan together to pull Moses from the water. In Pharaoh's daughter, God is our friend. God names us. God has compassion on us. God loves us and adopts us as God's children.

- If you are sitting here in your right mind despite all you been through, God pulled you out. If you have been able to go on despite disappointment and heartache, God pulled you out. If you have beat the odds – made it when things were not tilted in your favor - God pulled you out.
- Every time someone calls me "professor" – I hear drawn from the water by God.
- Every time I hear Frank A. Thomas, Ph.D – I hear pulled from the water by God.
- Every time I hear Reverend Dr. – I hear drawn from the water by God.

We do not have to go that deep – every time I hear myself labeled Christian, I hear drawn from the water by God. It took me a while to figure this out because I thought that I had delivered myself. I thought my intelligence pulled me out. But one day, when I finally figured out who had pulled me from the water, you know what I said –"Take me to the water, and let me be baptized" – I went to the water. And when I came up out of

the water, I heard a voice – say – Go, make friends of all nations and baptize them. Pull them out of the water – draw them from the water. Pull out black folks, and Hispanic folks, and white folks and gay folks and straight folks and say to them, ***Can we be friends?***

Who does God want *you* to befriend?

Discussion Questions.

1. In the article that Dr. Thomas cites, the author Nikolas Kristof notes a fatigue factor with the coverage that race is receiving as a result of the ‘shooting of Michael Brown’ in Ferguson, Missouri. Why does race relations continue to be a worthwhile conversation to pursue or why not?
2. How have friends that are different in nationality, race, gender/orientation or economic background “opened your eyes” to another reality other than your own?
3. How have you been “drawn out of the water” by God through the help of friends, family or someone else? How have you or do you plan to draw others out of the water?

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## “JOSEPH WEEPS”

REV. BRITTANY BARBER

Our reading today comes from Genesis 45.1-15:

*<sup>14</sup>Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. <sup>15</sup>And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.”*

Last week we talked about the dysfunctional family that is before us—Jacob’s sons—a family so fractured that brothers were pitted against one another. A family so broken that the stronger brothers sold their younger brother into slavery and faked his death to their father. It is a horrible story. A story, though, that perhaps we all can understand some aspects of because we come from flawed families. We have flawed, human families.

Over the last week a horrible story has played out in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri. Just down the road from my husband's mother's home. I am from greater St. Louis county, and I have an idea of what it means to live in Ferguson. Well ... I have an idea of what it **meant** to live in Ferguson before Michael Brown was killed, before the police military vehicles arrived, before tear gas flew, before journalists were detained, before it all broke loose and the social fabric began to fray.

There is an entire segment of our population in the United States that has been thrown into the pit by his brothers. There are people who have been made to understand that their citizenship is not the same as mine. We have brothers and sisters who fear that their children will not make it home — **because they may walk wrong or because someone will see them**

**and feel afraid or because the police will not respect their life and they will shoot an unarmed child.**

We want to protest — **“That is not right!”** But are we protesting for justice for Michael Brown, or are we protesting a view of the US that we do not recognize to be us? Police in riot gear, many cans of tear gas flying through the air — is the photo from the streets of the Ukraine or Syria or Gaza — NO! It is Ferguson Missouri. Can this be our country?

*(Silence.)*

Where are the people of faith?

Thankfully, they came out in droves—signs held high: “We are the village.” and “Hands Up, Don't Shoot.” Pastors, priests, rabbis, and other religious leaders. Clergy and laity. People demanding justice while the world was spinning out of control. And they were shot with rubber bullets as they chanted, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” It is hard to remain calm, it is hard to remain peaceful—when the tension is thick in the air.

Last Sunday, the Very Rev. Mike Kinman, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis offered these words in his sermon on the Gospel lesson, the story of Jesus walking on the water (Matthew 14.22-33):

*“Yesterday afternoon, 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by police in Ferguson. We don't know all the facts of the case, but witnesses say that he was unarmed and had his hands in the air when he was shot multiple times by a police officer. His grandmother went out looking for him and found his body in the street. ...*

*I stand before you this morning maybe as you do, with a heavy heart and a troubled spirit. I weep for Michael Brown, for his parents, his*

*grandparents, his community and his friends. I weep for the police officer, and I wonder what caused him to pull that trigger again and again, I weep for the cost that is exacted on his or her soul for taking another human life. I weep for my friend, mayor James Knowles of Ferguson, trying to hold his community together in a time of great tragedy. ...*

*And then I hear this morning's Gospel reading. And I see Jesus calmly walking towards us. With the storm whipping all around us and the storm whipping all around him. And I know he is there. And I know he has some words for us. ...*

*Because Jesus doesn't command us to do the easy and the expected. And Jesus certainly doesn't command us to cling to the sides of our boats, tossed about by the waves and despairing of the storm. Jesus commands us to do what seems impossible. ...to walk out on the waters into the very heart of the storm. He does not promise that it won't be scary. In fact, we can pretty much guarantee that it will be scary. He does not promise us that we will always succeed. But he does promise us that if we keep our eyes on him we will not perish. He does promise us that in him, nothing is impossible, but we have to step out of the boat. ...*

*St. Louis is waiting. Waiting for us. Each of us and all of us. To show that love is greater than fear. To listen deeply and speak plainly. To demand justice and to build bridges over divides that are deep and wide. ... the storm seems too big and the challenge seems impossible. But we were born to walk on water. We can do impossible things. It is scary. It is the opposite of safe. But it is our mission if we choose to accept it, it is our only hope in times like these, times of trouble and despair, ...and it will be our salvation.*

*We were born to walk on water. We can do impossible things. We were born to walk on water ... and it's time to step out of the boat.*" [From The Very Rev. Michael Kinman, Christ Cathedral, St. Louis: <http://yourcathedral.blogspot.com/2014/08/we-were-born-to-walk-on-water-but-we.html>]

Like our reading from Genesis today, we are challenged by the stark reality of relationships torn by violence, jealousy, even hatred. The evil of this reunion of brothers could have ripped out of control. Yet instead of further violence we encounter a Joseph who is willing to reach out to his brothers—despite what they have done to him. This is not a Broadway musical ending to a horrendous journey—do not bring up the band, put away the costumes. The reconciliation here is hard won. Life and death are real in this scene. Joseph's brothers are desperate, they wouldn't have left home if they were not. The famine is real—they are starving—they will die if left to their own devices.

And then God steps in—giving them back the brother that they had sold away. Joseph has risen in the ranks and has power in Egypt, he could have his brothers thrown in prison or down into a pit as they did to him. But he does not. Instead we have this scene of restoration, healing, reconciliation.

In Ferguson and around the world, there will be no peace without justice. Systemic racism will not just be wiped away. We must work to bend that arc of justice toward us again. We are the only ones here to do it. So put on your shoes and get out of the boat. Walk into the room with the brother you have wronged — look him in the eye and ask for forgiveness. *"It is scary. It is the opposite of safe. But it is our mission if we choose to*

*accept it, it is our only hope in times like these, times of trouble and despair, ...and it will be our salvation.” Amen.*

#### Discussion Questions:

1. *“And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.”* Ferguson and the people are crying out loud, are we going to do something or are we going to be like the Egyptians and Pharaoh’s household and just listen to Joseph to cry?
2. *“I am Joseph”*... *“We are the village!”* ... Are we willing to be humble and brave enough to hear Mike Brown’s echoes for justice and regardless of the color of our skin, work together in the midst of this famine of justice and peace?
3. What will it take to acknowledge the hurt that we have caused others and that others have caused us, for us to reach out for restoration, healing and reconciliation?

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## **“YOU ARE THE ROCK”**

REV. MARGARET PRIDE

Matthew 16:13-23

This morning I have chosen the scripture from Matthew 16:13-23 as the basis of my sermon. I have had a hard time writing this sermon. Every time I have sat down to write, I have been interrupted. The needs have been so great this week. Many homeless people have crossed I have listened over and over again to the pain and hurt of our community over what’s happened in Ferguson and continues to happen every day on and in our city streets. I have also witnessed some good and helpful St Louis city police officers.

In the middle of the night brooding about everything, I thought about this text. Jesus has been hearing all the things that people are saying about him. Some say John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter, the same Peter who will later deny him and run away from him in his time of need, says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus says, “Good for you, Simon, Son of John! For this truth did not come to you from human beings

but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. And so I tell you, Peter; you are a rock and on this rock I will build my church and not even death will ever overcome it. I will give you, you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven; what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Now that friends is the basis of our church. It is the confessional statement of our denomination, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). When people come forward, the pastor asks, “Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ and take him as your personal Lord and Savior?” When people say, “Yes!” they officially become a member of the church. It is a wonderful confession. BUT what we seldom include is what Jesus says after this. He talks about what it means for him to be the Christ. He will suffer and die. Then and only then will he be raised by God. And Peter, like most of us doesn’t want to hear that, “No that will never happen to you.” And Jesus says, “Get behind me, Satan, you are setting your mind on human things and not divine things.” Whew, hard words and still Peter not only is told he is the rock, he becomes the rock not for his character but because of his faith. He believes Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

These days in St Louis have been heartbreaking days. The death of Michael Brown exposed the reality that for many black people the police do

not protect but terrorize communities of color. I'm grateful that things are better in Ferguson, I deplored the violence, all of it. Now as things quiet down, I agree with those voices calling for a new normal, a fundamental change in our society but that will not happen easily. We must all commit ourselves to being a part of such a change, by voting, becoming more politically involved, by choosing to act in our daily lives for righteousness and truth. I have been listening a lot and trying to insure that Memorial Boulevard Christian Church continues in the ministries we are doing. I cannot do this alone. It is not about me. It is about God. What are you willing to give your life for? I am willing to give my life to insure that this church is a safe haven for all who come to our doors. We have been doing this as best we can.

Peter was human and flawed and so am I. I can only do so much. You are human and flawed, you can only do so much. We are human and flawed. We can only do so much. And that friends is all we need if, IF we believe that Jesus IS the Christ and take him as our Lord and Savior. God has and is using us, the church, to be the church for this time and place. So I recommit myself. I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He is my Lord and Savior. I would not have gotten through this week

without the help of the Lord. I cannot continue in this ministry without Jesus who showed that it is NOT might that makes right but sacrifice, sacrifice to a living God who is our light and salvation. With him, I AM not afraid. I am grateful to God and I pray you can say the same. With God's help, we will make it through these times and we pray for righteousness and truth and justice to rule in our lives, in our church, in our society and in our world!

#### Discussion Questions.

1. What does it mean for you to understand yourself as “human and flawed?”
2. Does our confession of faith strengthen you in difficult times such as the events in Ferguson?
3. What does it mean for members of the church to become more involved politically and to act for righteousness and justice in your church?

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