SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — August 17, 2025

One thing I remember missing as a youth was being able to go swimming on a hot summer day like today. Many of our neighbors belonged to the local "swim club." We did not. It was only recently that I learned 'the rest of the story.'

I was born ten or so years too late for the public swimming pool movement in America — large and numerous pools built and maintained by public tax monies in hundreds of communities across the nation. It began in the 1920's and really picked up steam in the 30's, as part of the New Deal philosophy of creating work on public projects. What happened to all those pools today? Racism.

The pools were run by white people, like everything else in the country, so the vast majority of the 'public' swimming pools ended up being for whites only. In some northern cities, they dedicated one of their pools for people of color — like the #2 pool in the Baltimore.

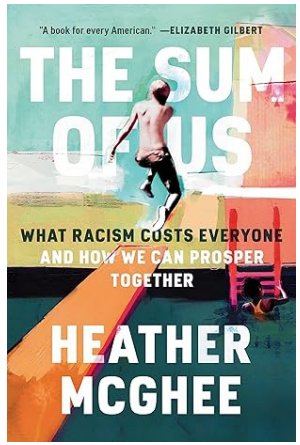
City of Baltimore Pool #2 in 1948

A sudden change occurred the year before I was born. In 1955 the Supreme Court ruled in *Palmer v. Thompson* that, if pools were built and maintained with public tax monies, then *all* of the public should have the same access to them. The white people in charge almost immediately defunded the public schools. By the time I was a youth ten years later there were almost no public swimming pools left. Instead, wealthier white people built and maintained private "swim clubs," where they could make the rules without Supreme Court oversight. Better to shut down the public pools than share them with unwanted neighbors — even if that hurt some white people, too.

Baltimore Pool #2 today

Since Jesus was an indigenous person living in someone else's empire, we been seeking to understand the economics of God's reign through indigenous wisdom. Jesus' economics are grounded in seeing the creation as a gift of God's abundance for all to share. "Consider the ravens . . . the lilies," he says. We have consulted Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *The Serviceberry*, where she dispenses similar indigenous economic wisdom (she is Potawatomi), that focuses on the gift of creation — 'Consider the serviceberry tree. . . ."

My other favorite book on economic policy also is also in the category of indigenous wisdom, written by an African-American woman: Heather McGhee's The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together. As you might guess from the book cover, McGhee uses the story of public swimming pools as a metaphor to tell the story of much of our American economic policy, especially the last 40 years. Wealthy white leaders tell the story in terms of a Zero-Sum Game — that there's always winners and losers in the economic game because there's not enough for everyone. They convince enough of their fellow white citizens that their economic plan will make sure that they stay ahead of their fellow citizens of color.



It's all a lie, of course. There is enough for everyone. The truth is that the economic policy of the wealthy is designed to make them more wealthy. If other white people experience economic hardship, it is because the wealthy are hoarding much more than their fair share — not because those inferior "others" are trying to shove their way into the bounty. It is the same age-old tactic of the wealthy for man millennia, keep the masses content using Us-vs-Them thinking that assured the average citizen that *We* are at least getting more than *Them*.

This is the Lie that Jesus will die on the cross to expose. Today's Gospel Reading begins with him almost yearning to have the fiery baptism of the cross over and done with. What he says next about coming to divide people rather than bring peace expresses his frustration and sorrow of the first effects of taking away our age-old recipe for maintaining peace through the divide-and-conquer Us-vs-Them thinking. Because he exposes our way of peace as a Lie, it will divide us. Until we choose his story that includes everyone, that is the Sum of Us.