SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — May 17, 2026

My retirement story:

- In January 2015, 8+ years into my call at Prince of Peace Lutheran in Portage, MI, I proposed goals for that year of deepening our anti-racist identity and becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation — sharing the proposal with my staff and Church Council
- Before anything else could happen my Dad came down with pneumonia wintering with my sister in Arizona. I spent much of February and March there helping to care for my Dad. He died in hospice on March 27 and was buried a couple weeks later after Holy Week services.
- Along the way, under stress, I herniated a disc and underwent back surgery to repair it in late April.
- When I finally was able to return full-time in mid May, I had lost the congregation. How much was because I has announced the goal of anti-racism and RIC in January? I'll never know for sure. At only age 59 but almost 30 years since ordination, I decided to take early retirement.

Am I still somewhat hesitant to bring up my passion for anti-racism? I'd like to rectify that this morning and tell you the story of how I've come to see the Gospel itself in terms of working to heal those things which block what Jesus prays for in today's Gospel: that we human beings may be one as God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — is one. I shared with you, as Bethania began the journey of becoming a Reconciling in Christ congregation, my journey to find healing from homophobia. This morning I'd like to share more about my journey to find healing from racism.

When I arrived at my second call in June 1988 to Grace Lutheran in Howell, MI, this was the local person making the news there:

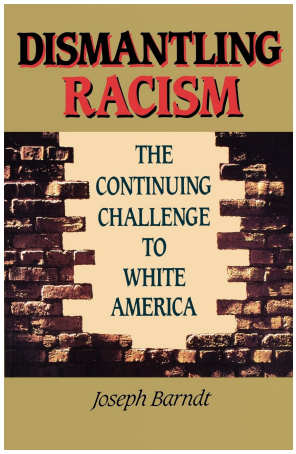
Robert Edward Miles (January 28, 1925 – August 16, 1992) was an American white supremacist theologist and Grand Dragon of the Michigan Ku Klux Klan from Michigan. In 1970, he founded the Mountain Church of Jesus Christ the Savior on his property in Cohoctah Township (about 8 miles north of Howell, MI — in Livingston County just NW of Detroit), becoming a major "dualist" religious leader, and allied himself with various groups that constituted the racist and anti-Semitic political-religious movement known as Christian Identity, including Aryan Nations. In the early 70's he did prison time for his role in bombing buses used for desegregating school children in Michigan. He was acquitted for plotting to overthrow the United States government in the Fort Smith, Arkansas Sedition Trial of February–April 1988.

Miles looking at a "Don't Tread on Me" flag in 1972

Here's highlights in our family's anti-racism journey:

- Not long after we arrived in Howell, an African American family had a cross burned in their yard. I worked with a community group (funded by Citizens Insurance, the largest employer) to build awareness of racism and to become a more welcoming community to people of color.
- In 1992 I discovered the work of René Girard, whose theory about scapegoating helps to understand why whole groups are scapegoated as structures in our community institutions.
- When we arrived in our third call in 1994 at Emmaus in Racine, two of the synod pastors we first got to know were Chuck and Sue Ruehle, who were major leaders in Crossroads Ministry (now known as Crossroad Antiracism Organizing and Training), along with founder Joseph Barndt, whose book *Dismantling Racism* I had read in Howell. Ellen, beginning in 1998, worked at Crossroads as administrative staff for 12+ years.
- Then, in 2005, when we adopted two sons from Liberia, Africa, antiracism had to be a core part of our family's identity — though as white parents of kids of color the journey is never done.

Reading the Bible for being antiracist:



- **John's Gospel**: In addition to today's prayer for oneness, there is John 3:16 in which Jesus makes it clear that God has sent the Son in love for the *whole* world; Jesus converts a Samaritan village; and there is this prophecy about the cross from Jesus in John 12:31-32: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."
- **Mark's Gospel**: In the middle section on discipleship, Jesus "crosses over" between Jewish and Gentile territory numerous times, performing healing to both Jew and Gentile, rich and poor.
- **Matthew's Gospel**: Magi from the East come to worship the child Jesus. The ultimate measure of nations in Matthew 25 is how they treat their marginalized, the least of Jesus' family: the hungry and thirsty, the sick and naked, the immigrant and the incarcerated.
- **Luke/Acts**: Simeon prophesies that the baby Jesus will be a light to the Gentiles; a Roman Centurion declares the crucified Jesus as "innocent"; the Book of Acts portrays the Gospel going out to the "ends of the earth" (especially through St. Paul). In last week's text of Paul speaking to the Athenians, he tells them that we all come from one ancestor. (See today's Excerpt Page from Jared Diamond for a historian's antiracist account of the oneness of the human family.)
- **Paul's Letters**: are the richest source for antiracism. Paul's core ministry of the Gospel was to bring healing to the division of Jew and Gentile. It is everywhere in his work, far too numerous to detail here. By analogy, we need to ask ourselves: if the Gospel in Paul's time compelled him to primarily work on healing the divide between Jew and Gentile, to restore the unity of the human family, what is the divide today that most needs addressing? Isn't it White Supremacist Racism?

Racism today: The Supreme Court effectively hollowed out the Voting Rights Act of 1965 through three major decisions: *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* (2021), and *Louisiana v. Callais* (2026).

Yesterday's March in Selma, AL

- *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013): The Court ruled in a 5-4 decision that Section 4(b) of the VRA — which provided the coverage formula determining which jurisdictions were subject to federal preclearance under Section 5 before altering voting laws — was unconstitutional. This effectively halted the preclearance requirement, rendering Section 5 inoperable.
- *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* (2021): The Court ruled 6-3 to uphold Arizona's restrictive voting laws regarding ballot collection and out-of-precinct voting. The decision established stricter tests for Section 2 claims, making it significantly harder for minority voters to challenge discriminatory voting laws in court.
- *Louisiana v. Callais* (2026): By a 6-3 vote, the Court struck down Louisiana's congressional map. The decision further weakened Section 2 of the VRA by severely restricting the consideration of race in redistricting, effectively dismantling protections for drawing majority-minority districts.

Closing quote from N.T. Wright's *The Challenge of Acts* (p. 14) on the Ascension:

> We need to consider . . . what it means to say that Jesus is already ruling the world. People will say, as they've always said: 'Look at the world around you; just look out of the window! It doesn't *look* as though Jesus is in charge.' But think what we are saying. It is *Jesus*, not Caesar, not Herod, who's in charge. As Jesus made clear in Mark 10 and John 19, there is a sharp contrast between two different types of ruling, of authority. The rulers of this world stamp their will on their subjects by bullying and violence. Jesus wins the victory through the power of self-giving love. His followers will have to do the same: through their suffering, their martyrdom, their loving witness, their creation of communities that, by their very existence, call the world to account. The results are mostly not instantaneous. That's not how self-giving love works. But they will quickly be remarkable . . .