

# Welcome to the Just Mercy

## Summer Grace Group

### Second Session



[\(31\) Marion Williams - The Old Rugged Cross - YouTube](#)

Linda Hitchens and Ed Bryant

# Bless You

- Awesome response to the class
- We will make every effort to make this a rewarding experience
- You make the class
- Thank you, Grace
- Opening Prayer

# Psalm For Praying, By Nan C. Merrill, Psalms 83

O Great Creator, do not keep silence;  
Do not withhold your peace or  
    be, O Giver of Life  
For fear is rampant in the world;  
those who rule by oppression  
    rise up with power.  
They lay deceptive plans against  
    the people;  
they consult together against  
    Freedom and justice.  
Crafty words belie intent as thousands  
    reap dire consequence;  
nations go to war and the innocent suffer!  
Yes, they conspire with one accord;  
against Love they make a covenant  
    No institution is free from the  
    insidious arm of corruption,  
    at home and in the fields afar.  
Who will speak up on their behalf  
Let all with faith-filled hearts rise up with Love!  
Clothe us in the dress of your peace  
and the stronghold of your mercy,  
that we might bear the power of Love

Let us walk in shoes of integrity,  
and don the mantle of truth.  
let us shed the tatters of envy and fear,  
The rags of anger and greed,  
And say, "We shall seek only  
    The Truth,  
    Which will set us free!"  
O Beloved, let all that is unholy  
    Within us be cleansed,  
    erased as chalk from a slate.  
As fire consumes the forest,  
as the flame reaches up to the heavens,  
Let the refining Fire of your Love  
    reach into the hidden places  
    within open hearts!  
Forgive us and let the deep regret  
    of our souls  
    rise up as contrite offerings,  
let the people seek your Word,  
let the nations turn from  
violence and destruction.  
Let the m know that You alone,  
You who reign with Love,  
are the Most High over  
    all the earth!



# Chapter 4, Old Rugged Cross

- February 1989 - opening of nonprofit law center in Tuscaloosa, then Montgomery
  - Providing free, quality legal services to the condemned to death row
- Change in Supreme Court responses to appeals and a shift in political winds
  - Significant push to execute condemned prisoners
- Death penalty cases
  - Michael Lindsey – life sentence changed by judge to death sentence
  - Horace Dunkin – severely intellectually disabled
  - Herbert Richardson – traumatized Vietnam War veteran
  - Charlie – placed in an adult jail
  - Walter McMillian – wrongly convicted of murder
- “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view”, Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mocking Bird*
- The use of music – *The Old Rugged Cross*

# What Is Institutionalized Racism Within the Criminal Justice System?

- Majority of victims are African-American men
- African-Americans treated with greater suspicion
- Targeted by law enforcement due to his affair with a white woman
- Constant racial slurs, slander, and reference to lynchings
- Intimidation of defendants and witnesses
- Few black jurists – hand-picked all-white juries
- Harsher treatment and punishments
- No empathy for the traumatic life or mental conditions of the victims
- Sheriffs, judges and jurists informed by racial prejudices
- Volunteer or low paid lawyers
- Willingness to ignore real evidence, logic and common sense
- Encouraging and accepting trumped up charges
- Short trials
- Judges elevating the charges
- Law enforcement making unprecedented decisions
- Presentation of no defense
- Goal is finality not fairness
- Lack of interest or concern – indifference
- No opportunity to appeal
- Abuse of power
- No commitment to the rule of law – no accountability and no shame
- The victimization of and burden on the whole Black community

# Chapter 5, Coming of John

- Walter Family meeting
  - “This Trial was constructed with lies”
  - Meeting with friends and extended family energizes Bryan
- 1903, WEB Du Bois, Coming of John story
  - Reflection of the impact if injustice to the black community
- “Interesting”
- Darnell Houston account of Bill Hooks
  - Proof of innocence
  - Arrested for perjury
- Meeting with the DA
  - Hopes of a fresh perspective
  - Replaced with reality of a rigged judicial system

# Chapter 6, Surely Doomed

- Tragic story of Charlie – the abuse he witnessed and endured
  - Fourteen-year-old, “Good kid”
  - Abusive boyfriend assaults his mother
  - Charlie murders the boyfriend, a cop
  - Prosecuting children as adults – clients getting younger and younger
- The awkward, confusing, and slow first hour of their meeting
  - Bryan learns of the abuse (sexual molestation) while in prison
- Bryan is successful in getting Charlie tried as a juvenile and released
- The friendship of Mr. and Mrs. Jennings
  - Helped with GED and financed college education
  - “If we don’t expect more from each other, hope better for one another, and recover from the hurt we experience, we are surely doomed”

## Reflections from Ed

Chapter 6 hit me right between the eyes. Like many of us, I keep asking myself as I read this book, "what can I do?" I want to do something. This class can open your heart and eyes to an opportunity to make a difference when the time comes. Just like Mrs. Jennings said to Bryan. But her statement includes ourselves as well as others.

# Recent event or supporting topic

- Missouri Governor Mike Parsons' failure to "find time" to release Kevin Strickland, falsely imprisoned at 18 years for three murders. Serving a life sentence since 1978, even prosecutors say he was wrongfully convicted.
- 54 years ago last weekend the United States Supreme Court struck down all legal barriers to interracial marriage. Loving Day is celebrated on June 12.
- Juneteenth – a holiday celebrated on June 19 to commemorate the emancipation of enslaved people in the US.
  - Tuesday, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution establishing June 19 as Juneteenth National Independence Day, a US holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States.
  - Wednesday, House approves the resolution
  - Thursday, Today, the President signed into law

# Discussion and Questions

- Anything we did not highlight that the group would like to share?
- Was the account of the execution raw and horrifying for you to read?
- Failure to block unjust executions

# Next Class, Chapters 7 to 10

- Justice Denied
- All God's Children
- I'm Here
- Mitigation

# Resources and References

## ■ Primary Resources

- Just Mercy – the movie, available on Prime Video and YouTube
- Opinion: When it comes to knowing U.S. history we should all be 'woke' (an article from the Washington Post):  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/05/27/american-history-we-should-all-be-woke/>
- 13th - A Documentary by Ava Duvernay

## ■ Recommended reference materials

- CNN documentary film **Dreamland: The Burning of Black Wall Street** – Monday, May 31, at 9 pm
- ***The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*** by Jemar Tisby
- ***So You Want to Talk About Race*** by Ijeoma Oluo