



What is Truth?

An Embodied Lenten Series

By Katie Ernst and Hazel Monae

Part of “A Toolkit for Reparations in Community: A Resource for the Body of Christ” www.diomass.org/reparations-toolkit

Developed by the Subcommittee on Reparations of the Racial Justice Commission
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Introduction

What is Truth? is a six-part series created to accompany groups during the season of Lent (and beyond). This Lenten series offers an opportunity to deepen spiritually; engage in embodied practices that allow for deeper knowledge of self, God, and others; and build resilience in preparation for conversations about reparations within the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. It is not until the fifth session that the precise language and conversation of reparations appear. This is intentional. The first four sessions cover areas that allow us to cultivate the tools, relationships, and spiritual fortitude to engage the conversation and actualization of reparations.

The *What is Truth?* Lenten series unfolds in a particular order but, just like our liturgical calendar, it encourages us to return for deeper reflection and conversation as we ready ourselves to do the challenging and transformative work of reparations. Each session in the series includes prayer, Scripture or contemporary material for reflection, embodied practices, questions to ponder, and resources to deepen the learning. Embodied practices allow us to shift from a head/mind “knowing” disposition and invite us to center in the wisdom that comes from paying attention to what’s happening in our bodies and spirits. Each session is designed to be 120 minutes to allow ample time to get to some of the core resources to do this work (for example: building trust, relationships, silence, and space for listening). For some communities, this amount of time may not be feasible in this particular season. These suggested resources, [here](#) and [here](#), may not require as big a commitment.

Background

In Lent 2019, the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston invited pastors, poets,

and scholars to preach on the question “What is Truth?” The title is taken from Pilate’s question at the end of his interrogation of Jesus (John 18:38). This *What is Truth?* series is a part of a year of study for the diocese, called for by a resolution of Diocesan Convention, to include discernment about what the diocese as a body imagines reparations to be, as well as to share and collect personal and communal stories of harm.

How to use the Session Guides

The *What is Truth?* Lenten series is intentionally designed to be done as a collective community process without the need for an instructor or leader’s guide. It’s recommended that all participants have a copy of the guide with them for the session. While there is no right or wrong way to navigate this series, each person is encouraged to approach the practice with sacred intentionality, understanding that reparations is about our collective lived reality, not a disembodied intellectual exercise to be completed.

Creating the container

“Creating the container” is an essential part of building trust, relationship, and healthy group process. Below is an outline of how it will unfold in this series.

*There is no such thing as a “safe space” —
We exist in the real world.
We all carry scars and have caused wounds.
This space
seeks to turn down the volume of the world outside,
and amplify voices that have to fight to be heard elsewhere,
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be
But
It will be our space together,
and we will work on it side by side.
— By Beth Strano [Used here with permission]*

Each session, after the centering breath, begins with this untitled poem by Beth Strano to “create the container” as the group explores what it means to create brave spaces that enable us to listen to one another, build trust, and deepen relationships. Remember that creating such spaces requires intentional and repetitive practices that invite us to go deeper into relationship with each other and with the truth each time we engage.

If it would be helpful for your group to establish group agreements before diving into this work, take a look at “Taking Action” (from the top of page 8) in [“The Process Toward Reparations Template”](#) or use the following simple outline from Human Systems Dynamics Institute:

Creating Courageous Space:

When you start to feel uncomfortable, unsure, or frustrated:

- Turn judgement into curiosity
- Turn disagreement into shared exploration
- Turn defensiveness into self-reflection
- Turn assumptions into questions

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Remember to:

- Begin each session by reading the poem by Beth Strano and reflect on the stanza in bold type.
- Take a position of curiosity and wonder with the material and fellow participants.
- Allow space for reflection and silence.
- Pay attention to what comes up in your body and how you react to it.
- Consider how to respond when harm happens in the group. How do you want to tend to each other?
- Remember you have everything you need—learn to trust the process.

Going deeper

Each session outline includes suggestions for individual and household follow-up reflection, study, and action to take on during the week, before the next session. These offerings are an acknowledgement that this work is ongoing and cannot be contained within a single conversation—and that while some is done within your small group and community, there is also much action to take within ourselves and our households.

Encouragement for the journey

Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color are encouraged to notice the ways these conversations may bring up trauma that is living in your body and tend to your needs as they arise. It is fine if you need to step away from the conversation for a moment, for the remainder of the session, or for the remainder of the series.

People who are white are encouraged to go past the comfortable places of intellectual ponderings and do the soul work this series invites. Together, let us be encouraged to hold one another with love and allow the discomfort to be our teacher.

Brief Overview of Sessions

Session 1: Telling the Truth

Why is it so hard to tell the truth, the whole truth, about what it means to live in and be part of the fabric of the United States? Who benefits from telling partial truths and who is harmed? Session 1 explores the often difficult landscape of truth telling and how truth isn't always what it seems.

Session 2: Moving with Tension

The practice of telling the truth requires us to view tension as healthy and a productive part of the process. This is particularly hard in Christian spaces and predominantly white spaces where we have too often replaced the goal of “being nice to each other” for the Gospel imperative to “speak truth to each other in love.” How far can the collective or individual stretch before something breaks? What boundaries need to be put in place? Session 2 dives into practices that will enable the group to build capacity to be in and move with difficult conversations.

Session 3: Rooting in Relationship

How deep are our relational roots with ourselves, one another, and God? Session 3 examines where there might be weak and shallow roots and where there might be a need to continue to nurture roots that run deep and therefore can weather the work of reparations.

Session 4: Moving at the Speed of Trust

When we are immersed in the white dominant culture it is easy to get caught up in the urgency of quick fixes and sweeping solutions. These come at the cost of cultivating deep trust with those who are most impacted. Session 4 engages this reality and invites us into exploring how we begin to create and sustain trust in relationship with one another.

Session 5: (Repair)ations

During this session we will wrestle with the difference between repair, reparations, restitution, restoration, recognition, and repentance and how all these fit into the practice of (repair)ations—especially, how these play out systematically and interpersonally. Ultimately, as the Psalmist points out, this work is laced with singing and joy. How do we become stewards of joy and reparations?

Session 6: Building Resilience

The practice of telling the truth isn't always easy; in fact, it can be incredibly challenging and costly. Therefore, we must build up our resilience to stand firm amidst opposition, sacrifice, and hopelessness. Session 6 explores how white dominant culture often places hope at the center of the work instead of right action and moral imperative. How do we build collective practice and memory to weather the challenges ahead?