



# 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](http://www.diomass.org/reparations-toolkit)

Developed by the Subcommittee on Reparations of the Racial Justice Commission  
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

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## Session 5: (Repair)ations

### Overview

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?

### Preparation and set-up

This session includes a YouTube video to watch. You will also need access to this document online to explore some of the hyperlinks to information on topics mentioned in the video.

### Centering breath (five minutes)

As a group, breathe in for a count of three, hold for a count of three, and exhale for a count of three. Do this three times.

Opening prayer (five minutes)

**Psalm 126** (*The Book of Common Prayer, page 782*)

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negev.

May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

*God, we trust that you have gone ahead of us to pave the way for this conversation. Our Psalmist reminds us that we are called to be a part of bringing about rejoicing for those who have sown in tears, yet, we know we have work to do to get there. Be with us as we explore our histories and do the work you have set for us to do. Amen.*

### Creating the container (20-30 minutes)

Read the poem one time through. Sit in silence for one minute. Read the poem again. Sit in silence for one minute. For the final time, read only the lines in bold type.

*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]*

Reflect on the following questions.

- Has this Lenten series been what you expected so far? Why or why not? Regardless, how have you created a community in the midst of it?
- If your group has created group agreements or expectations, revisit them and adjust as needed.

### Embodied exercise: Count to 10 (15-20 minutes)

Count, as a group, from one to 10. Example: One person says “One,” another says “Two,” etc. If more than one person says a number at the same time, the group must start over.

Remember: Listen intently. Let go of needing to be in control or get it right. Preference the process over the end.

If you get to 10, reflect on what made that possible.

Following are additional questions for reflection:

- Did you notice yourself getting excited about getting to 10? Did that hinder your ability to listen to one another?
- Where did you jump in? Where did you step back?
- How did you know who would keep the counting going?
- What do you think the goal of this exercise is?
- If you found yourself getting frustrated, how did you regulate?

## Engagement and reflection (40-50 minutes)

Before this next exercise, take three collective breaths as a group, coming back to your center and to your breath.

Ah! We have arrived at last at the conversation of reparations!

As we continue the Lenten journey of walking this path toward Jerusalem (one we have walked many times before), we are invited to bring along with us the learnings, practices, feelings, and questions that came up for us in our previous sessions as we engage this reflection. We are reminded that the work of reparations is a big question that requires more than an easy answer or a quick fix.

Watch: [Ta-Nehisi Coates's opening statement to testimony on reparations at the U.S. House of Representatives on Juneteenth \(June 19\) 2019](#) (5 minutes, 15 seconds). He was testifying at a hearing on H.R. 40, a bill that would commission a study on reparations.

Reflect: Take 10 minutes to reflect together. What came up for you? What are your initial thoughts?

Read: Take 20 minutes to read the transcript below and explore different parts of our history by clicking on the various hyperlinks (source transcript [here](#)).

*"Yesterday, when asked about reparations, [Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell](#) offered a familiar reply: America should not be held liable for something that happened 150 years ago, since none of us currently alive are responsible. This rebuttal proffers a strange theory of governance, that American accounts are somehow bound by the lifetime of its generations. But well into this century, the United States was still paying out pensions to the heirs of Civil War soldiers. We honor treaties that date back some 200 years, despite no one being alive who signed those treaties. Many of us would love to be taxed for the things we are solely and individually responsible for. But we are American citizens, and thus bound to a collective enterprise that extends beyond our individual and personal reach. It would seem ridiculous to dispute invocations of the Founders, or the Greatest Generation, on the basis of a lack of membership in either group. We recognize our lineage as a generational trust, as inheritance, and the real dilemma posed by reparations is just that: a dilemma of inheritance. It is impossible to imagine America without the inheritance of slavery.*

*"As historian [Ed Baptist](#) has written, enslavement "[shaped every crucial aspect of the economy and politics](#)" of America, so that by 1836 more than \$600 million, almost half of the economic activity in the United States, derived directly or indirectly from the cotton produced by the million-odd slaves. By the time the enslaved were emancipated, they comprised the largest single asset in America. Three billion in 1860 dollars, more than all the other assets in the country combined.*

*"The method of cultivating this asset was neither gentle cajoling nor persuasion, but torture, rape, and child trafficking. Enslavement reigned for 250 years on these shores. When it ended, this country could have extended*

its hallowed principles—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—to all, regardless of color. But America had other principles in mind. And so for a century after the Civil War, black people were subjected to a relentless campaign of terror, a campaign that extended well into the lifetime of Majority Leader McConnell.

“It is tempting to divorce this modern campaign of terror, of plunder, from enslavement, but the logic of enslavement, of white supremacy, respects no such borders and the guard of bondage was lustful and begat many heirs. [Coup d'états](#) and [convict leasing](#). [Vagrancy laws](#) and [debt peonage](#). [Redlining](#) and [racist G.I. bills](#). [Poll taxes](#) and [state-sponsored terrorism](#). We grant that Mr. McConnell was not alive for [Appomattox](#). But he was alive for the electrocution of [George Stinney](#). He was alive for the blinding of [Isaac Woodard](#). He was alive to witness [kleptocracy](#) in his native Alabama and a regime premised on electoral theft. Majority Leader McConnell cited civil-rights legislation yesterday, as well he should, because he was alive to witness the harassment, jailing, and betrayal of those responsible for that legislation by a government sworn to protect them. He was alive for the [redlining of Chicago and the looting of black homeowners of some \\$4 billion](#). Victims of that plunder are very much alive today. I am sure they'd love a word with the majority leader.

“What they know, what this committee must know, is that while [emancipation](#) dead-bolted the door against the bandits of America, [Jim Crow](#) wedged the windows wide open. And that is the thing about Senator McConnell's ‘something’: It was 150 years ago. And it was right now.

“[The typical black family in this country has one-tenth the wealth of the typical white family](#). Black women die in childbirth at [four times the rate of white women](#). And there is, of course, the shame of this land of the free boasting the [largest prison population](#) on the planet, of which the [descendants of the enslaved make up the largest share](#). The matter of reparations is one of making amends and direct redress, but it is also a question of citizenship. In [H.R. 40](#), this body has a chance to both make good on its 2009 apology for enslavement, and reject fair-weather patriotism, to say that this nation is both its credits and debits. That if [Thomas Jefferson](#) matters, so does [Sally Hemings](#). That if [D-Day](#) matters, so does [Black Wall Street](#). That if [Valley Forge](#) matters, so does [Fort Pillow](#). Because the question really is not whether we'll be tied to the somethings of our past, but whether we are courageous enough to be tied to the whole of them. Thank you.”

Reflect for as much time as you need. Remember to listen deeply to what's coming up for yourself and others.

- What surprised you?
- What did you learn about United States history?
- How well do you know the whole of your own past (ancestors and heritage)?

- From a community's perspective, how well do you know the history?
- Are there areas you want to explore more?
- When we talk about reparations, what are we talking about?

### Closing Prayer (five minutes)

As a group, breathe in for a count of three, hold for a count of three, and exhale for a count of three. Do this three times.

Invite one of the group members to offer the following prayer to close.

*God, we have explored concepts that invited us to places we had not explored. We thank you for the conversation and the learning, and we ask that you enable us to continue letting the wisdom and questions sit with us during this week and beyond. Give us the spiritual fortitude to respond to Psalm 126 with openness and joy. Amen.*

### Going deeper

*Suggestions for individual and household follow-up reflection, study, and action:*

- Take each day of this week to do some deep reflection and meditation with the following words and definitions. Spend 20 minutes free writing about what comes up for you and how it is related to this Lenten series.

Repair: to fix something that is broken, damaged or torn

Reparations: money that is paid by a country that has lost a war, for the damage, injuries, etc. that it has caused; the act of giving something to somebody or doing something for them in order to show that you are sorry that you have caused them to suffer

Restitution: the act of giving back something that was lost or stolen to its owner

Restoration: the act of returning something to its correct place, condition, or owner

Recognition: the act of accepting that something exists, is true, or is official

Repentance: the act of showing that you are sorry for something wrong that you have done

Rejoice: to express great happiness about something

- The 2022 Lenten Preaching Series hosted by the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston—"The Spiritual Practice of Truth"—will follow the session themes in this series. You are invited to reflect further on each session theme by watching the corresponding sermon from the preaching series, which will be available at <https://www.stpaulboston.org/sermon-index>.