



## A Call to Justice and Mercy

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

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### Getting started on the journey

A Call to Justice and Mercy is a journey we're taking together as a church.

A Call to Justice and Mercy:

- is for everyone at Bethel of all ages. We're *all* called and invited.
- is part education (phase 1) and part action (phase 2).
- is built around powerful books, movies and music which will be springboards into discussion with friends, in families, and in small groups. (Education phase)
- explores how people of color have been harmed by racism and how white people have been hurt in other ways, drawing us together to work for change. (Action phase)
- is a spiritual journey following the example of Jesus to remove the barriers that separate us, heal the hurt and restore God's community.

### Our destination

We want to 'do something' about racism yet it's an ambitious goal. Some will say too ambitious. We want to 'do something' but...

Racism is big. It's everywhere - in healthcare, education, employment, housing, and the justice system. Many have tried to 'do something' about it and yet it's still with us, as strong as ever. Plus, it's not a comfortable topic.

A Call to Justice and Mercy is a call from God. We're called as church not because racism is a social or political issue but because racism separates us. God abhors what separates His children. His kingdom is one where we're together.

Our job as church is to bring about God's kingdom on earth. Jesus shows us the way and he's made us his body to get the job done. During his ministry Jesus removed barriers between the "in" people and the "out" – lepers, widows, children, tax collectors, sinners. He made the last first. He healed those who had been broken by separation. He restored the community.

We're to do likewise. That's our call and our job as church because it takes all of us. We're in this together as members of Christ's body and He is with us.

*But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends. The type of love that I stress here is not eros, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not philia, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is agape which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization. —The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*



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## Our roadmap for the journey



In one respect our roadmap is simple. Jesus said “follow me.” Remove the barriers that separate us. Lift up those who’ve been outcast. Heal the hurt. Restore the community so we’re together as God envisioned.

But first we have to see. And that’s not always easy or simple. Jesus wants us to see the kingdom as God envisions it so he painted word pictures – parables. Then he told his followers to open their eyes (and ears) to their neighbors and see them as God does. When we do that, we can’t help but also see what’s come between us.

Seeing and learning is where our journey begins.

Racism didn’t exist in Jesus’ day. (It was invented by European colonists in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.) Yet Jesus’ words apply. We have to see racism for all that it was for 400 years and is today in the United States because we can’t remove a barrier we don’t see and know.

## “The Bigs” -- Education Phase (2020-2021)

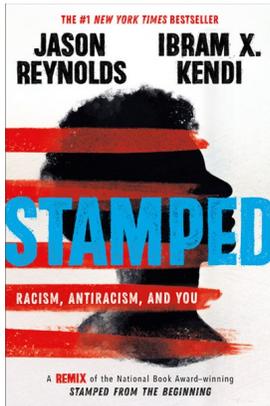
We’ll educate ourselves using books, movies and music. Everyone is invited to read the same book (Big Reads), watch the same movie (Big Watches), and listen to the same music (Big Sings.) Then we’ll talk about it. The Bigs give us a common language to have conversations about what we see. Each quarter we’ll have a Big Read, a Big Watch and a Big Sing as we explore the many facets of racism.





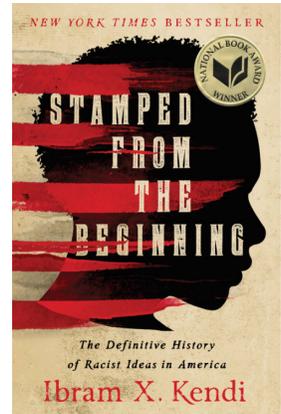
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In October, 2020, we'll start with the book *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi. This is a young adult book for ages 12+ that's fast-paced and easy to read for adults too. It tells the history of race in America from the perspective of Black historian and professor Ibram Kendi and young adult author Jason Reynolds.

Stamped is a remix of Dr. Kendi's *Stamped From the Beginning* which won the 2016 National Book Award.



Parents: Note that the n-word appears in *Stamped*.

Optionally you may want to read [Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America](#) by Ibram X. Kendi. This is more detailed and formally written than *Stamped*. Both books follow the same organization and the same discussion questions apply.

## Discussion Groups (Step two of “The Bigs”)

We can learn new things from reading a book or watching a movie. Even deeper learning happens when we talk about the book or movie with someone else, when we combine our impressions and questions that leave us feeling perplexed, uneasy or unresolved and address them together.

The Big Reads and Big Watches *will* leave us with impressions and questions to be resolved!

Here are some suggested ways to talk about The Bigs with someone you trust and can be candid with:

- Find a conversation partner. This can be a friend, a spouse or partner, a parent.
- Talk as a family
- Talk in your Bethel small group such as a women's circle, book group, men's group, youth group, XYZ, etc.

In all cases:

- Agree to carve out time for discussion with minimal distractions



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- Use the suggested discussion questions posted on the ACTJAM page on Bethel's web site. Note that the discussion questions are written for white people because Bethel is predominantly white.
- Remember this is sacred conversation.

## How do I participate in ACTJAM?

### Do I need to sign up?

No. Although you may want to join the ACTJAM Facebook Group. Send an email to [ACTJAM@bethel-madison.org](mailto:ACTJAM@bethel-madison.org) to join.

### Where can I find information about the next Big Read, Big Watch or Big Sing?

The Bethelite and Bethel Weekly will announce the Bigs. Discussion questions for the Bigs will be posted on Bethel's web site on the ACTJAM page.

### Where can I get the books for the Big Reads?

Check out the book from your local library or buy it from a book seller. Bethel will have a limited number of loaner copies available at the Reception Desk on a first come/first served basis. Conversation partners and families may want to share books.

### How can I watch the Big Watch movies?

Big Watch movies can be streamed on a streaming service such as Amazon or Netflix. Some documentaries may be viewable through the PBS web site.

### Are the Big Read books and Big Watch movies suitable for children?

We're intentionally selecting some books written for young adults. Typically, this means ages 12+ although parents may deem the book appropriate for their younger children. We will identify the ratings for the Big Watch movies.

### What if I want to read a different book?

There are dozens of wonderful books on the topic of racism with new ones coming out each week. Read them and bring what you learn into the discussion of the Big Read. Please try to also read the Big Read so you can participate fully in the discussion.

### What if I don't have time to read the Big Read? Can I still participate in the discussion?

Yes, but let the others know you haven't read (all of) the book. Try to read as much of the book as you can. Also, the ACTJAM page will provide links to other information on the topic of the Big Read that you can review.

### I'm white. My conversation partner is white. My family is white. My Bethel small group is all white. Is that a problem when it comes time to discuss a Big Read, Big Watch or Big Sing?

No, it's not a problem if your discussion group is all white people. That is to be expected at Bethel because our membership is nearly all white. The books and movies for our Bigs, along with the supplementary material, bring the voices of many people of color to our discussions. That's an important reason for the selection of these books, movies and music.



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It's up to us to listen to these voices and bring them into our discussions. Also, people of color are often called upon to do the educating of white people on the topic of race and racism, placing an unwelcome and uncomfortable burden on them. Finally, race is not a topic many white people are comfortable talking about. White people are especially hesitant in the presence of people of color for fear they may say something problematic or offensive. For this reason, it's common for discussions about race to be done in "caucuses" of white people. Sometimes this is segmented by white women or white men to create a trusting environment and reduce anxiety.

### **What if I have a question about ACTJAM or a suggestion?**

Please send an email to [ACTJAM@bethel-madison.org](mailto:ACTJAM@bethel-madison.org)

### **Who at Bethel is sponsoring ACTJAM?**

The Caring for Social Justice Team (C4SJ) is the sponsor of ACTJAM.