



St. Joseph's
Episcopal Church

Jesus and the Disinherited

by Howard Thurman

Tuesday, February 8
Chapters 2 and 3





COURSE NORMS

JOIN FROM A QUIET PLACE

Be sure you can hear us, and that we can hear you by joining us from a room with a closed door, without the TV or another device on.

MUTE YOUR MICROPHONE

Keeping your microphone muted when others are speaking helps reduce background noise and allows everyone to hear better.

TURN ON YOUR CAMERA

Please turn on your camera, so that we can speak with each other and participate fully in this experience

BE RESPECTFUL

Please be mindful of your fellow participants' feelings as we discuss topics integral to our faith.



THIS IS A SAFE SPACE

- * This is a space for learning and discussion.
- * No question or answer is stupid.
- * Your thoughts are valid and important to this experience.



AGENDA

Opening Prayer

Recap | Foreword & Chapter 1

Chapter 2 | **Fear**

Chapter 3 | **Deception**

Closing Prayer



Opening Prayer

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— Book of Common Prayer, page 823

Recap





Foreword & Jesus—An Interpretation

- Howard Thurman was a prophet-mystic who was deeply influenced by his grandmother, a formerly enslaved woman who, while illiterate, was a firm believer in Jesus Christ.
- Thurman wrote his work during the time of segregation and Jim Crow, the Great Migration, WW II, and the Decolonization Movement. He met with Gandhi and studied with a Quaker mystic after becoming a pastor.
- His intention for Jesus and the Disinherited was to explore Jesus' teachings and what they have to say to the oppressed, those "with their backs against the wall."



Foreword & Jesus—An Interpretation

- Modern Christianity is not the religion of Jesus Christ because it is often used by the powerful to oppress the disinherited.
- Jesus was disinherited. He was a poor Jew in a land occupied by the Romans. He was a radical genius who understood being oppressed and taught us how to rise above it.
- In America, today's disinherited are Black, Indigenous, people of color, LGBTQIA+, disabled and those with mental illness, HIV+ (stigmatized diseases), compromised immune systems, non-Christians, women, immigrants and refugees, prisoners, homeless, food-insecure, and the forgotten



Foreword & Jesus—An Interpretation

- Jesus' solution was for us to follow his teachings that we are all part of God's divine creations as "the kingdom of God is within." We must abandon fear and love God, ourselves, and each other.

Fear





What is fear?

Fear is one of the persistent hounds of hell that dog the footsteps of the poor, the dispossessed, the disinherited...It is nowhere in particular yet everywhere. It is a mood which one carries around with himself, distilled from the acrid conflict with which his days are surrounded. It has its roots deep in the heart of the relations between the weak and the strong, between the controllers of environment and those who are controlled by it...it is clear that it arises out of the sense of isolation and helplessness in the face of the varied dimensions of violence to which the underprivileged are exposed. Violence, precipitate and stark, is the sire of the fear of such people.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 36-37). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Fear and inequality

In a society in which certain people or groups—by virtue of economic, social, or political power—have dead-weight advantages over others who are essentially without that kind of power, those who are thus disadvantaged know that they cannot fight back effectively, that they cannot protect themselves, and that they cannot demand protection from their persecutors. Any slight conflict, any alleged insult, any vague whim, any unrelated frustration, may bring down upon the head of the defenseless the full weight of naked physical violence.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 37-38). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Fear and the threat of violence

The **threat of violence** within a framework of well-nigh limitless power is a weapon by which the weak are held in check. Artificial limitations are placed upon them, restricting freedom of movement, of employment, and of participation in the common life. These limitations are given formal or informal expression in general or specific policies of separateness or segregation. These policies tend to freeze the social status of the insecure. **The threat of violence may be implemented not only by constituted authority but also by anyone acting in behalf of the established order. Every member of the controllers' group is in a sense a special deputy, authorized by the mores to enforce the pattern.**

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 41). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



How has fear been used against the disinherited—primarily people of color—at any point in the history of America? How is it being used today?



Effects of fear

There are few things more devastating than to have it burned into you that you do not count and that no provisions are made for the literal protection of your person.

Through bitter experience they [the weak] **have learned how to exercise extreme care, how to behave so as to reduce the threat of immediate danger from their environment.** Fear thus becomes a form of life assurance, making possible the continuation of physical existence with a minimum of active violence.

Thurman, Howard. Jesus and the Disinherited (pp. 39 and 40-41). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



How do we as Black people “*behave so as to reduce the threat of immediate danger*” from our environment?



Segregation

A peculiar characteristic of segregation is the ability of the stronger to shuttle back and forth between the prescribed areas with complete immunity and a kind of mutually tacit sanction; while the position of the weaker, on the other hand, is quite definitely fixed and frozen.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 42). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Segregation

Most of the accepted social behavior-patterns assume segregation to be normal—if normal, then correct; if correct, then moral; if moral, then religious. Religion is thus made a defender and guarantor of the presumptions. God, for all practical purposes, is imaged as an elderly, benign white man, seated on a white throne, with bright, white light emanating from his countenance. Angels are blonds and brunets suspended in the air around his throne to be his messengers and execute his purposes.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 43). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



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Segregation

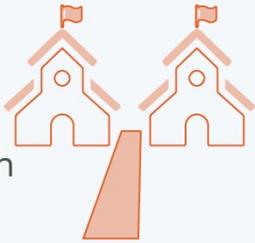
The fear that segregation inspires among the weak in turn breeds fear among the strong and the dominant. This fear insulates the conscience against a sense of wrongdoing in carrying out a policy of segregation. For it counsels that if there were no segregation, there would be no protection against invasion of the home, the church, the school. This fear perpetuates the Jewish ghettos in Western civilization, the restrictive covenants in California and other states, the Chinatowns, the Little Tokyos, and the Street of the Untouchables in Hindu lands.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 44). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Does a renewed trend in school segregation serve the powerful?
*Ruby Bridges is 67

Renewed Trend in School Segregation



Percentage of Black students at schools with a majority of White students, by U.S. region

South Border Northeast Midwest West



Border includes Delaware, D.C., Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma and West Virginia
Sources: Civil Rights Project at UCLA, NCES





Fear and the oppressor

Anti-Semitism is a confession of a deep sense of inferiority and moral insecurity. It is the fear of the socially or politically strong in the presence of the threat of moral judgment implicit in the role of the Jewish community throughout human history.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 44-45). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Do you think cultural appropriation is an example of Thurman's theory of the oppressor developing an inferiority complex?



Jesus and the answer to fear

The core of the analysis of Jesus is that man is a child of God, the God of life that sustains all of nature and guarantees all the intricacies of the life-process itself. Jesus suggests that it is quite unreasonable to assume that God, whose creative activity is expressed even in such details as the hairs of a man's head, would exclude from his concern the life, the vital spirit, of the man himself. This idea—that God is mindful of the individual—is of tremendous import in dealing with fear as a disease.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 49). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Who am I?

The idea was given to her by a certain slave minister who, on occasion, held secret religious meetings with his fellow slaves. How everything in me quivered with the pulsing tremor of raw energy when, in her recital, she would come to the triumphant climax of the minister: “You—you are not n***s. You—you are not slaves. You are God’s children.” This established for them the ground of personal dignity, so that a profound sense of personal worth could absorb the fear reaction.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 50). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



What am I?

All of the inner conflicts and frustrations growing out of limitations of opportunity become dramatically become focused here...Even though he may no longer feel himself threatened by violence, the fact remains that for him doors often are closed.

If a man's ego has been stabilized, resulting in a sure grounding of his sense of personal worth and dignity, then he is in a position to appraise his own intrinsic powers, gifts, talents, and abilities. He no longer views his equipment through the darkened lenses of those who are largely responsible for his social predicament.



What am I?

Nothing less than a great daring in the face of overwhelming odds can achieve the inner security in which fear cannot possibly survive.

Here we reach the high-water mark of prophetic religion, and it is of the essence of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth.

Here are the faith and the awareness that overcome fear and transform it into the power to strive, to achieve, and not to yield.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (pp. 55, 56, and 57). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Do you think Thurman's antidote to fear is confined to the religion of Jesus?

Deception





What is deception?

Deception is perhaps the oldest of all the techniques by which the weak have protected themselves against the strong. Through the ages, at all stages of sentient activity, the weak have survived by fooling the strong.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (p. 58). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Choice 1 | Accept deception to survive

The advantaged group assumes that they are going to be fooled, if it is possible; there is no expectation of honesty and sincerity. They know that every conceivable device will be used to render ineffective the advantage which they have inherited in their position of the strong. The pattern of deceptions by which the weak are deprived of their civic, economic, political, and social rights without its appearing that they are so deprived is a matter of continuous and tragic amazement. The pattern of deception by which the weak circumvent the strong and manage to secure some of their political, economic, and social rights is a matter of continuous degradation. A vast conspiracy of silence covers all these maneuvers as the groups come into contact with each other, and the question of morality is not permitted to invade it.



Choice 1 | Accept deception to survive

It is a simple fact of psychology that if a man calls a lie the truth, he tampers dangerously with his value judgements.

[Jesus said] “A house divided...divided against itself...cannot stand.”

The penalty of deception is to become a deception, with all sense of moral discrimination vitiated. A man who lies habitually becomes a lie, and it is increasingly impossible for him to know when he is lying and when he is not.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (p. 64, 65). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



What or who is an example of deception backfiring?



Choice 2 | Compromise

All over the world there are millions of people who are condemned by the powerful in their society to live in ghettos. The choice seems to be the ghetto or suicide. But such a conclusion may be hasty and ill-advised...For all practical purposes there are great numbers of people who have decided to live, and to compromise on the matter of place and conditions.

Above all else the disinherited must not have any stake in the social order; they must be made to feel that they are alien.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (p. 67, 69). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Do you compromise? If so, how?

What are life sustaining compromises that people of color have had to make in the United States?



Choice 3 | Radical Honesty

Jesus said, “Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.” Matthew 5:37

Unwavering sincerity says that man should always recognize the fact that he lives always in the presence of God, always under the divine scrutiny, and that there is no really significant living for a man, whatever may be his status, until he has turned and faced the divine scrutiny...No man can fool God. From him nothing is hidden.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (p. 71). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



Choice 3 | Radical Honesty

[Gandhi wrote] “Speak the truth, without fear and without exception, and see everyone whose work is related to your purpose. You are in God’s work, so you need not fear man’s scorn. If they listen to your requests and grant them, you will be satisfied. If they reject them, then you must make their rejection your strength.” The acceptance of this alternative is to be simply, directly truthful, whatever may be the cost in life, limb, or security. For the individual who accepts this, there may be quick and speedy judgement with attendant loss. But if the number increases and the movement spreads, the vindication of the truth would follow in the wake.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (p. 70). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



What is an example of truth creating a movement for the oppressed?

How has the Episcopal Church used honesty in social justice?



Effects of honesty and sincerity

Hypocrisy on the part of the disinherited in dealing with the dominant group is a tribute yielded by those who are weak. But if this attitude is lacking, or is supplanted by a simple sincerity and genuineness, then it follows that advantage due to the accident of birth or position is reduced to zero. Instead of relation between the weak and the strong there is merely a relationship between human beings. A man is a man, no more, no less. The awareness of this fact marks the supreme moment of human dignity.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited* (p. 73). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.



What are the ways in which honesty can level the playing field for the oppressed?





Closing Prayer

Almighty God, source of true justice and peace, in you there is no distinction of persons, for in you we are equally loved. Reconcile us that we may live and work with each other and with you to establish your Kingdom on earth where there is no poverty, war, or any oppression, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

— From the Manual of the Society of the
Companions of the Holy Cross

February 15th

Chapter 4 | Hate



Black History, Freedom, & Love

