

Rev. April G. Johnson:

I want to couch my comments around the assumption that you want to talk about and do something about racism: For that I want to suggest you must USE YOUR VOICE.

My “hacks” will center around how you use your voice in this critical conversation:

1. *Channel Your Strength and Courage to Lift Your Voice:*

Strength and courage are a product preparation. The conversation about racism is not just a courageous one, but it is one in which you prepare (or one that you prepare for). None of us intentionally show up for a public speaking engagement without preparing or a marathon. Because the conversation about racism is a sustained ongoing one, we must prepare for the journey, the marathon, not the sprint. Strength and courage come from discipline and preparation allows you to build the muscle for this sustained engagement.

Prepare by listening, learning, reading, and watching the history of our nation’s racial evolution from narrators that offer a critical perspective or from non-white historians and literary artists.

- Watch PBS the Power of Illusion,
- Read Howard Zinn “A Peoples History of the US”, or
- Ibram Kendi “Stamped from the Beginning”, or
- Nella Larson a novel called “Passing” the focusing on white-centering among the Black affluent.

Preparation through Listening and learning allows you to develop the muscles you will need for the rough spots in the conversations: The blow back, the fear of saying the wrong thing, and the endurance to resist the temptation to cut and run. Strength and courage allow you to Lift Your Voice and speak up about disrupting racism.

2. *Channel Your Prophetic Imagination to Share the Voice of God*

All of us are prophets. It is a shared calling. Using your theological voice to talk about racism requires that you read the biblical text from the lens or perspective

of the voiceless. Whose voice is silenced and what is happening to them. The prophets of old, Micah and his contemporaries, and the gospel writers attributed to the disciples – were not heroes of the status quo. Nor were they allies of the Empire. They were counter-narrative activists. I don't want to give away the punchline or offer a spoiler alert here folks but Luke's "Good Samaritan" is an oxymoron. He doesn't even have a name in the parable. But Samaritans were bi and multi-racial people, related to the non-valuable real estate, stereotyped as poor and prone to violence. Yet the parable shows this unnamed Samaritan as compassionate and wealthy. What if you read the parables from that perspective and offered or write a new narrative giving the victim in the parable a name: Ahmuad, Breonna, George. Channel the voice of God and talk about racism in your pulpits and your church small groups with creative and prophetic imagination.

3. Channel Your Inner Child's Voice

Know your why. If we are honest, we engage the conversation about disrupting racism for our children. Our desire is to create a good and better society for the next generation and beyond. For that reason, I want to suggest that you write a note to your inner child. My mother used to say to me when I was experiencing indecision or dilemmas, "If I knew then, what I know now." If I knew at your age, what I know at this age, maybe I would have the courage to speak up, to stand up, to show up for change and a better world. This is a season of reflection so capture that reflection in a note to your child or our inner child. What would you do then, knowing what you know now? How would you be different? Would you like to have someone talk to you about the myth of race in storytime? Did you envision a grown-up world where only some people matter and some people were marginalized? Did you learn the tools to bridge that gap and to confront and change the narrative of difference means deficiency? Consider where and how you learned about racism and how you might improve on that learning for your inner child or child. Consider Jane Elliott's Brown-Eyed Blue Eyed on YouTube. Earlier exposure helps children to understand the myth of race, the reality of racism, and the brave responsibility to challenge racist behaviors.

- CBS Note to Self Series featuring Rep. John Lewis: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD2qsfiBrg>
- Jane Elliott "Brown-Eyed/Blue-Eyed experiment": <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/introduction-2/>

4. Channel Your Angry Voice to tap into the voice of accountability.

Earlier I mentioned preparing for the rough spots in conversations about race. Very often, it will come from you. When you develop the muscle and the fortitude to disrupt racism, you must develop a cadre of accountability partners. Identify who are truth-tellers in your life, particularly on this subject. Who can you call when you want need to be reeled in or when all you know is that you should say what might be harmful (and if you're like me, after you have done the deed?). The conversations and ongoing work of disrupting racism, be clear will be disruptive to you. In my role as Minister of Reconciliation, I have an advisory committee that developed a mechanism for how we process our anger, our difficult meeting moments, and hold each other accountable.

- One of the tools in that process, you may of heard of before, is the acronym H.A.L.T. It means to call a pause, a hard-stop to acknowledge pain is present. It means Never proceed when you are Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired.

This work produces all of this as some point in the process. Channel your angry voice, don't silence it. Have accountability partners, not accomplices for your anger.