**Revelation in a Time of *Survival*: Spirituality and Sustainability. A Zoom Series from Spiritual Leaders of the Greater Boston Area on Climate Change and the** **Pandemic.**

**Session Two: “Black Intersectionality and Spirituality Concerning Climate/Pandemic”**

* **Kevin Peterson (fresh with an honorary doctorate), Executive Director of The New Democracy Coalition; and**
* **Vernon Walker, Communities Responding to Extreme Weather, Program Manager**

Tonight, we begin with session two in our series. We will deal with Black intersectionality and spirituality concerning climate change and the pandemic. We're privileged to have Kevin Peterson fresh with an honorary doctorate in public policy. Dr. Peterson is Executive Director of the New Democracy Coalition, among other things. Joining us in this call will be Vernon Walker who is the Program Manager for CREW, Communities Responding to Extreme Weather.

Climate change and sustainability is not my primary purview which is race and politics and I hope you don't mind me speaking to the race and politics and how Howard Thurman brought an important dimension of interfaith spirituality to the topic.

Indeed, the topic of this series is a weighty, weighty, weighty matter that causes us to truly draw upon tremendous spiritual and theological resources. In a metaphorical sense the times we live in require us to look heavenly. To look up. To engage a vision from the Almighty less we all perish.

Indeed, the spiritual texts that emerged that texts that emerged from the green Abrahamic faith traditions encourage us in ways that seek to preserve our relationship with the Almighty – and with each other.

In the Second Chronicles, chapter seven verse 14 we hear the ancient wisdom of the prophets of Israel: “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

It is within this theologically profound context that we ought to think about the capacity of the Christian church and interfaith communities and how to address the various crises and challenges such as covid-19 in the enduring realities of racial animus in the United States. In doing such we have certain to find in these challenges, the moral and spiritual conditions stated so clearly in Second Chronicles, “if my people will humble themselves and pray that I will heal their land.” The question must be asked what sin in our nation could be more egregiously president than the sin of racism. On every level this inquiry should lead us to think more deeply about the work of the church in the form of the body of Christ and this ecclesial mission.

Of bringing healing to the world. It should also prompt us to, to, to think more deeply about the role of the Interfaith community in terms of addressing the condition of our common humanity.

And more than this, we might do well by seeking the vision and spiritual insight of the Reverend Dr. Howard Thurman who spoke of a certain kind of theistic universalism inherent in all faiths and religious perspectives. It is Thurman whom I wish to highlight within this brief presentation because his insights on interracial worship in interfaith collaboration should be deemed highly salient.

I think for a moment, we should think about the reality of the nature of sin, the sin of racism in our nation. Over the recent spring and summer, we have witnessed much about the raw anti- black racism in our country. The police murder of George Floyd in Minnesota and the apparent vigilante murder of a mob of Albury in Georgia, the death of saying to blend in a Texas jail, the police murder Briana Taylor in Kentucky. All of these are emblematic and illustrate the systematic racism in our country.

But beyond the racism are reflected the statistics of how blacks are treated by law enforcement and offer more insidious expressions of racism. Blacks are more likely to die of chronic disease in the country and whites’ family net worth is 10 times higher than the net worth of black families in this country. Blacks are less likely to graduate from college, you're less likely to own homes than whites. Blacks are last hired first fired within our community. Racial disparities even expressed in the spread of covert 19 and our society we compared to white, black contract black have contracted the virus and die of it and higher numbers than whites.

A tragic reality for American blacks is even seen as more profound when we consider that before there was covid-19 there was 1619. That was the year when blacks were brought to the American shores and to the to the Virginia vicinity of Jamestown where the sin of slavery was inaugurated in the so-called New World.

Before there was covid-19 there was Jamestown which began the 200 years of protected racial animus against black Americans. They ate their agency compromised by chains, whips and toil for no pay. Before there was covid-19 there was 1619 which became a pivotal foundation and justification for rape of black women help out forest one place plantations.

The suppression of literacy access for blacks, electoral disenfranchisement, economic suppression of black families after reconstruction. 100 years of lynching. And Jim Crow and racial segregation due to the sin of racism has been profound, so much so it invariably leads us back to the biblical lesson that presents the moral and spiritual condition. “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves then will heal their land.” All of this in the most circular way to remind us of how Thurman's enormous legacy as a World Christian and ecumenical leader is at work comprise and shape the ministry; that conveys the capacity of the church and the efficacy of interfaith engagement as an answer to experiencing spirituality and sustainability.

# Even when our backs were against the wall of systemic racism, even when our backs were against the wall going to covid-19, we glean this hope that Howard Thurman seems to carry in his Christian endeavor, *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life*, which is the edited volume of Thurman's work by Dr. Walter Fluker. With Thurman the cause of the church is a bold experience, an experiment and the genius of democratic living within the framework of religious faith.

Thurman was gifted with understanding the church and interfaith spirituality with a resting clarity within his autobiography. The title with head and heart Thurman says I affirm my need for growing understanding of all men as sons of God, and I seek after a vital experience of God as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth and other great religious spirits, whose fellowship with God was the foundation of that fellowship with man. It is with this magnificent insight displayed by Thurman that we can affirm revelation in the time of survival.

We can assert the universality of spirituality and it's the staying power, but only when we acknowledge, lament, and repent of our waywardness and our hubris, our selfishness and our lack of regard for our neighbor our faithful listeners and our feeble acknowledgement of the Almighty.

Only if we do these things can we find the healing in our land, which is our interracial harmony, the healing of our land, which is brotherly love and sisterly affection. The healing of our land, which is the social contract established in ancient and true attitudes of justice.

“If my people are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and will heal their land.” If we are to find revelation in the time of survival it is grounded in the righteousness of the divine. And then that cause we list them in our common origin common theme, our collective call towards tentative sanctification as a part of achieving God's will, or God's will and his way in the kingdom of Earth.

I'd like to end my comments with just one more insight from Thurman, in his book *Disciplines of the Spirit* (1963), he writes these words, the discipline of growth becomes the discipline of the Spirit. If we should wonder how this may apply to interfaith engagement as a way of addressing the seemingly insurmountable challenges of our society, which includes climate change and which includes systemic racism and which includes the covid-19 pandemic, it might it be a wise thing for the various divine faith traditions to unite in a commitment of growing towards each other for the purposes of addressing the needs of the poor, to discipline ourselves spiritually as bodies of faith is such formations and in the interest of spiritual development so as to foster a common care for each other, might not that be in our best interest to toil in the interfaith work and expresses a certain searching concern with the least of these. This is a revelation in the time of survival.

Thanks.

Thank you, Kevin. That was profound

Thank you.

The African American a

Little

The African American community in the United States has been uniquely prepared for times like these,

The struggle.

Persecution

Last lack of freedom.

The ability of African Americans to hold their heads high

And lead the country we trust in a healthy spirituality in times like this.

While we wait for burning Walker to show up. Maybe we can begin questions at this point or begin a conversation with Kevin

About the spirituality of the African American community.

Around it is it is in its interface sensitivities.

And Howard Thurman.

Are there any questions anybody would like to begin with, or reflections you'd like to share

Tom Wintle: I think i think that often we don't hear enough about the resiliency of black people in the history of this country and how they've dealt with all the horrible things have happened to them.

And that's something we need to learn about now. I think both and creation care and dealing with the virus.

It would be interesting. Kevin is

Right in Toms River and

We were able to list.

A number of items.

That character characterize African American spirituality like

I didn't get the end of it.

Like resilience perseverance.

Yes.

I mean, it's just part of the the legacy and in the tradition.

Which

In some ways sort of

Work to work as a function against the the the oppression, you know, the black church is born in the fields outside of the year of the master and outside of the the

The official plantation.

To have them grow over the last four years into many great down denominations, like the nomination speaks to how the churches and institutions responded and how a firm was particularly interested and unique to the extent that

Kevin Peterson: He saw part of the the mission was to engage other faith communities.

So to move out of this isolation, in some ways, and so he was very conscious and and CO founding a church in San Francisco. That was interdenominational and part and integration.

It's it's it's it's that sort of vision and resilience that would, that that we owe to to how how it Thurman is very, very, very important.

How is Howard Thurman criticized his own day

Well, I think, I think he was he was criticized for not being a

A

thoroughbred social gospel activists in the tradition of

Martin Luther King, for example, or Adam clicking pile over adversity and Baptist Church in New York City.

But he was very conscious of that not being his role. It was very focused on

seeking opportunities to

To heal the divide

So to speak, by reaching out in engaging

In interfaith that interracial worship. That was his particular strategy and he's so underrated within the black

Social Gospel tradition, I think. He stands in that tradition, but in a very unique way.

That speaks to a special vision that he had. And in a way, speaks to the, the, you know, the issue of how do we

All survive.

In a nation, how we use religion in and interfaith engagement as a way to to foster

This level of sub level.

Of your questions, please, Danny. Yes.

Demie Stathoplos: Yeah, Kevin Hi. I was curious how you think about two things that

Demie Stathoplos: I've thought about is an anti racist activist, which is that

Demie Stathoplos: The spiritual underpinnings of how the fear and greed that has driven the white community to keep essentially the knee on the neck of the black community in the United States over these

Demie Stathoplos: More than 200 years now and how what what do you see as the spiritual

Demie Stathoplos: Opening for healing that healing there.

Kevin Peterson: You know, it's a profound question. I mentioned at the beginning of it at the edge as we were introducing ourselves. My, my particular faith perspective is rooted in the black tenant Pentecostal church

Kevin Peterson: With the match addition there is a there is

Kevin Peterson: Significant focus on not only the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy ghosts, but also on the on the powers and principalities that that rule the earth.

Kevin Peterson: Races racism is is is is

Kevin Peterson: A spiritual power

Kevin Peterson: Something like that. Think it's a collision. I think inclination, but I think it's more significant than that.

Kevin Peterson: Is saying that I'm not suggesting that every white person does sort of possessed by the evil spirit and evil spirit of racism.

Kevin Peterson: But they are in some ways influenced by this spiritual power that that hovers over the covers over this nation. And in some ways, the only way I think we release it. And the only

Kevin Peterson: Periods. I think we've been successful is when we've invoked the Holy Spirit.

Kevin Peterson: The Abolitionist Movement was propelled by

Kevin Peterson: Those who had enduring faith.

Kevin Peterson: And hope in in and any any equality, a band, but more profoundly and, more recently, we see that the civil rights movement was propelled by by people of faith.

Kevin Peterson: Dr. King and many others. So athlete and only by

Invoking

Kevin Peterson: Releasing spirits.

Kevin Peterson: Over the nation do we make begin to make movements now.

Kevin Peterson: It's a complicated answer because then you also have to you have to foster or or promote engagement between white communities and black communities.

Kevin Peterson: So that there's dialogue and so that there's openings for repent and repair and reconciliation. So this dialogue has to happen. But ultimately I think, you know, racism is is a is a is a Kevin Peterson: Is a reflection of spiritual oppression.

Kevin Peterson: Was your second one. Oh yeah, I think I got both of them right

Demie Stathoplos: Yeah, fear, fear and greed are I mean fear greed and disconnection was what I talked about in my, in my talk is is being the things that needed healing you know that people needed to release.

Kevin Peterson: Yeah.

Kevin Peterson: I'll have to think about that little a little more. I think the fear greed fear greed and what was the other one.

Demie Stathoplos: Connection.

Demie Stathoplos: And disconnect disconnect. Yeah, yeah.

Kevin Peterson: Yeah right, this disconnection.

Kevin Peterson: With regard to race them. I think they are elements.

Kevin Peterson: Of racism, which is a more profound element.

Kevin Peterson: And I think only through through understanding racism as a spiritual a form of spiritual impression. Do you get to

Kevin Peterson: Engaging those elements of disconnection and fear and greed.

Kevin Peterson: I think

Kevin Peterson: I think the those elements.

Kevin Peterson: were produced over time through the institution of slavery and Democrats and and Jim Crow oppression.

Kevin Peterson: As elements of

Kevin Peterson: The larger and more more significant reality of racism is a spiritual form.

Gunnthor: Might want to to show it. I was thinking about what do you last remark. So then I start to think about the Mac guilty, the image of God in our yes in us.

Gunnthor: And the question of human dignity and well and you mentioned to universality of of you to ality yes and also the pressure of these critical times

Gunnthor: might bear up, sir. Give us the possibility options to grow together us faith communities in Utah respect that's actually valuable start our survival journey by simply

Gunnthor: Trying to develop our humility for survival and really confessing our sins and the evil that go and be to follow whatever we are doing, which is evil breaking the rules of

Gunnthor: The Divine laws.

Gunnthor: And this is a question also not simply about the sense and evil of individuals, but also question of socially will corporate evil.

Kevin Peterson: Unless you

Gunnthor: Have the structure structure.

Gunnthor: What do when I'm looking at the

Gunnthor: American society from a different angle, compared with with the welfare societies in in Scandinavia.

Gunnthor: I'm simply very disappointed seeing all this disruption.

Gunnthor: And it is it is showing there's some kind of a

Gunnthor: Structure to our evil in the society.

Gunnthor: The greedy capitalism is going to simply amok. And really, somehow, you have to find more just this in your search social structure.

Gunnthor: And simply that's my impression and I can you confess on individual basis and also on by to base that I saw. I saw society as a nation as as people and and and really look into the structure of the society to to find what there is to be improved.

Gunnthor: If you

Gunnthor: Understand what I'm trying to express

Kevin Peterson: I think so.

Kevin Peterson: Yes, structural in systemic

Kevin Peterson: racism exists profoundly and the United States In the United States is propagated across the, across the globe, and over time.

I cannot disconnect

Kevin Peterson: What's called structural racism with as I mentioned a little, little earlier.

Kevin Peterson: demonic oppression.

So in some ways is it's it's

Kevin Peterson: It's my commentary is based on how do we deal with

Kevin Peterson: You know, spiritual evil that expresses itself in the form of racism through structural oppression.

Kevin Peterson: That impacts individual and fosters and four minutes that

Interpersonal evil.

We have tried in this in this country for for so long to only deal with the

Or to deal with racism, mostly through

interpersonal relations and and seeking and and through attempts to change the political system.

That might been has been inadequate.

Kevin Peterson: I think only by engaging the spirit.

Kevin Peterson: You know, the Holy Ghost third person done the Trinity. Right.

Do we, do we find

A release in terms of in terms of

Kevin Peterson: Releasing the structure which is released as the the activity which releases the interpersonal oppression that

Kevin Peterson: Way to avoid blacks, but for the most part. Now there's other types of racism but

to this degree. I'm talking about them white and black racism.

Is that helpful.

Gunnthor: Yeah, essentially was truly and I'm listening to get tagged to do to what you're telling me, and so you describe your side very seldom be in the US, but so I have not experienced

Personally, but you're telling

Sarah Mausner: Stories simply look

Kevin Peterson: Okay, well, I really do you know when when Paul says that we

We wrestle against powers and principalities.

Being a person of the book, I take that

Literally

And

Racism to the expressive of people have spiritual

Kevin Peterson: Oppression. That is demonic

Kevin Peterson: In origin.

Gunnthor: Kind of

being conquered

Amy Tighe, MA: You Kevin I

Could see

Amy Tighe, MA: This idea of racism is a form of spiritual oppression. I've been in my mind contracting it with a quote I heard from a spiritual teacher

Who says madness is anger in a stuck place so madness and sanity, which I think the kind of racism that you're talking about in the demonic part the agenda is indeed for me madness is anger in a stuck place.

Yes. What

Source are

The kind of anger that's creating this. You know what I mean, like,

Kevin Peterson: Will be the source, you know, and I'm speaking from a Christian perspective so

Amy Tighe, MA: You know, the kind of anger.

Kevin Peterson: Is the demonic force that

opposes God's goodness

Amy Tighe, MA: That's the main the madness is the

Kevin Peterson: Message that no that's

Kevin Peterson: That's the source of the madness.

I've never used it like this, but the madness, I think, is is is a reflection of my mind not dissimilar from the fear, the greed and the dislocation.

Kevin Peterson: That Demi, I think, was was speaking about

Kevin Peterson: Um, so you know that you know Pentecostals and and black Christians, for the most part of PR people of the book.

Kevin Peterson: So we really

Embrace and interpret

Reality from that perspective. So when they talk about, well, what about Paul and how is it principalities.

That are attempting to destroy God's creation racism is is is one of the nested interpretation, but we where we are.

We're in the world that is that is

Corrupted also right we understand that from the myth of the freedom of the fall

Since that time, the world has been corrupted. And, and, and from that time on, we've been in a process where where where where God is eventually redeeming

Reality from the corruption, the oppression of and the manipulation ofKevin Peterson: Demonic and spiritual forces that oppose the goodness of God.

So racism is a is a is a

Is a is a form of that evil, but so is

Massage me right

Kevin Peterson: So is

Rampant forms of capitalism.

That exploit and and destroy people

So, so it's

We wrestle against the evil forces in the world.

And they're in, they're different. And they're different incarnations races in one when that

When that thing.

Kevin Peterson: That that I focused on

Kevin Peterson: That helpful and

Okay, thanks. But, but, yeah, it's a form of madness. Yes, it's a form of madness. If you talk about if you if you can't do play meditate on the on the

On the biblical passages which which talk about the separation of Satan from God. It's a certain madness to want to leave the press the one leave the presence of God and and the madness of the dynamic demonic presence presence in the world has produced all kinds of

Forms of of evil.

Sarah Mausner: And if you think about it. I mean, when you're talking about madness.

Kevin Peterson: Sarah. Sarah miss you so much.

Sarah Mausner: And we haven't seen each other in like a million years.

Sarah Mausner: At least a million years.

Kevin Peterson: That's right. So it's good to see you.

Sarah Mausner: It's good to see you. So, you know, I, when you talk about nine is what did the sort of the essence of madness is to live in such a way that you're destroying destroying God's creation.

Sarah Mausner: And I remember, you know, years and years ago when when I was doing a lot of thinking around the relationship between violence in the black community and environmental

Sarah Mausner: Yes, that

There's that that if you think historically that the exploitation of Africans predated the exploitation of the earth in terms of the burning of fossil fuels and that you know i mean that that's

When you go back to it. It's like

Sarah Mausner: How did, how was the original economy powered, it was powered on the backs of Africans who were brought here to labor and then

Sarah Mausner: How was it powered past that it was, you know, reaching into the earth and taking out fossil fuels and burning them.

Sarah Mausner: So, you know, but I guess what I've been thinking about a lot in the last couple of weeks, particularly well in the last couple months.

Sarah Mausner: But, particularly in the last couple weeks is what where we are in terms of protest and what the limitations of protest are. I mean, you know, rewind, your brain to pre pandemic and the, the, the name on everybody's lips was Gretchen Berg.

And she she kind of hijacked the media in a way and debt, but in definitely um, her, her mode was protest that she refused to go to school refused to talk, she just sat there and it was like this whirlwind of activity.

And, and, you know, there have been climate marches and so forth. And now, more recently, since George Floyd. And since these other murders. Um, there's this the there are these protests, but

I just, I guess we're just, to me, we're in a moment whether whether, whether it's

What's being done to the planet or what's historically and continues to be done to black people. It's like there's limitations to protest. So I'm saying in terms of really transforming things. So I'm saying, Okay, how do we move from protest to empowerment and

Obviously, everything you do about democracy is about empowerment. But then the next question is, what could be the role of communities of faith in helping us move beyond protest to empowerment

I'm just throwing it out.

Kevin Peterson: No, no, it's it's a it's it's a profound question.

You know,

Paul also tells us in in the New Testament at the faith without works is dead, so it's it's a matter of faith and that's

Kevin Peterson: Right. Why, why, why was engaging

The importance.

Kevin Peterson: The salience of the Spirit.

But then we got to act on those things.

Right.

So, so the beauty.

The beauty of the Civil Rights Movement was that it was generated and and the successes were the result of both spiritual engagement and then acting in the public square in terms of a cheat attempts of achieving really, really what what what concerns me a little about

The Black Lives Matters movement and that may not be correct, is that it seems the lack of moral and spiritual center.

Kevin Peterson: Seems to, it seems to me, and

Kevin Peterson: I wonder if it will be successful if it's if it's if it

Kevin Peterson: Indeed lacks a spiritual center.

Kevin Peterson: That is grant that is grounded.

In

Engaging in powers that we do not see

Rodney Petersen: To take your concerns about spirituality and spiritual power.

And turn the Governor Walker, who's unable to join us now.

Rodney Petersen: Brian. We've heard a lot about interfaith spirituality and African American spirituality, as Kevin has led the charge

Rodney Petersen: Take us into areas of intersectionality

The complicated directions spirituality pose into

First

Vernon: Alright, so I want to apologize for being grossly late. I'm currently in Philadelphia and visit some family and I'll be back in

But any rate I am peacock happy to be with you all, and

Vernon: I think in terms of spirituality intersection ality I certainly that guys to work at the community. So I'm with the communities responding to extreme weather program. I'm a program manager and certainly that guides are

A lot about discussions that when we do have intersection ality but in terms of

Vernon: When we look at the intersection ality of injustices. They are all interlocking you know you have poverty, you have racism militarism climate DEF CON ecological devastation of climate injustice, there's an interlocking a level that binds all these together and and the

The theme that binds all these interlocking evils together.

Vernon: Is the result of the same effects and disproportionately affects marginalized and low income communities to disproportionately hurts marginalized and low income folks.

Vernon: And makes it harder for them for those who live in communities of color.

Vernon: To combat these evils, because we're dealing with systemic racism and the like.

Vernon: So I think maybe to answer your question, Dr. Peterson, I think that

The, the black church has done an interesting job historically and looking at how these evils connect

I'm sure. Dr. Peterson. The other Dr. P is and Dr. Kevin pietersen Dr. Peterson may have a elaborated on it a little bit. But if you look at what doing the civil rights era of the black church. You saw that folks were wrestling, not only with a spiritual wrestling spiritual warfare and that the fetus and was talking about the old enough to be

Vernon: We see that they were fighting also economical justice and fighting against racism and I think that's the charge that the churches is dead is confronting the church nowadays.

Vernon: That we're still wrestling with economical injustice. We're still wrestling with climate and justice. We're still wrestling.

With racism and poverty and economical instability and society, particularly America says American society that steeped in capitalism.

For getting those who, on the margin and and and obviously, that's the antithesis of the gospel because the gospel includes lifting and empowering. Those who are on the margins, but certainly kept capitalism is the antithesis of the gospel because the the gospel.

Vernon: Includes spiritual restoration and spiritual wholeness. But, as well as physical wholeness, because when we look at the life of Jesus. He not only

Talked about spiritual things, and communicated in parables, but he also he also he opened blinded eyes he unstuck deaf ears. He raised the dead.

He healed the sick. He ministered to those on the margins. He ministered to those who are marginalized or press depress suppress etc. So I certainly think

That there is a model that the black shirts historically has engaged in. And I think that we need to contemporary engage in as well.

Vernon: With how do we look at these answer, said the intersection in justices and. But how do we band together people who do climate justice work and people who do racial justice work and people who do voting rights, justice work, etc. How do we band together.

And the Spirit of love and solidarity and unity.

And help create a more just world just an equitable world help create a more both the hub create the Beloved Community and that's the challenge I think that

That is be fronting our standard is that'd be false. The challenge that's in front of us and we certainly have a lot of wrestling to do, but I'll put a pin right there.

Do you feel that addresses your question a little sis Dr. Peterson Robbie Peterson.

Petersen: Yes. You've done a terrific job, there's usually do.