

# “A Richer Reading”

E-votional by Leah Fowler

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Last Sunday, McCormick Theological Seminary president and professor Frank Yamada taught an engaging Adult Education class about culture and its shaping of our ways of interpreting the bible. We all read the bible through our own interpretive lens. I have the lens shaped by the following identities:

Woman

White

Southern

Protestant

American

English-speaking

Lesbian

These aspects of who I am have given me a particular way of reading the bible. Sometimes they have clashed against each other; for instance, being from the Bible Belt *and* reading scripture as a lesbian has required some stretching; but I cannot remove myself from the deep love and reverence I have for the bible that I get from my Southern roots, nor can I take for face value the (very) few passages in the bible that deal with homosexuality.

Frank Yamada reminds us that while we bring to the biblical text a richness that is uniquely ours when we read through our own particular cultural lens, we get an even deeper richness when we consider interpretations that come from other cultures and ethnicities.

In preparing for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—in which our church will be bringing dozens of members, including youth, to a rally in Austin for justice—I have been reflecting on the prophecy of Reverend King. I have also been checking out some biblical interpretation from African-American perspectives. As Frank Yamada told our class, if Black interpretations of the bible had focused solely on a European, enlightenment perspective that looks from a historical-critical analysis, perhaps they would not have had the imagination to project the powerful story of Exodus onto their own stories of slavery and the struggle for liberation. In interpreting from their own experiences, they put God in the role as their liberator, which had an important implicit message: the master is not God.

James Cone, the father of Black Liberation Theology in the US, has recently published a book called *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Cone draws a parallel from Jesus' experience on the cross to the lynching, suffering and oppression of African Americans in our country's history. You can see an artful but chilling video bringing these ideas together, to the tune of Nina Simone's *Strange Fruit*, at this website: <http://youtu.be/t5QC4CNqTWs> .

Cone argues that if we want to find Jesus today, we must look to those places of acute suffering—such as the lynching tree—to see where Jesus is fully present. While the days of lynching are (arguably) over, we still face and create suffering that is acutely experienced amongst racial lines. Some of the issues we will address at the King rally are legacies of our racist past: unequal funding in education, and mass incarceration of non-violent offenders that tears families apart, and creates an ongoing cycle for people when they are released and cannot find jobs due to their records. Gov. Pat Quinn will be at the rally, and we hope our voices for justice will continue in the tradition of liberation we see in the bible as well as in prophets like Reverend King.

***We pray for:*** Laura Lydigsen and Shanti Kulkarni, who gave birth to Ruth Daya Kulkarni on 1/8, Will Stitzel who is recovering from illness and injury, and Sue and Steve Saliny following the death of Steve's mother last week. We pray for our own community and neighbors struggling with racial and economic inequalities, and pray that we might be agents for justice in our communities and the world.