

Welcome

Open with Redlining Video: [[Adam Ruins the Suburbs Video](#)]

Message

For the month of September, we're exploring Race in America. This is a complicated, fraught issue, and it's one that, if we want to take it seriously, doesn't flow immediately from Scripture. We're framing race as more than just individual prejudice. Race is a social category created in the sixteenth century to justify the exploitation of one group over another.

This is why talking about Race and the Bible can be so tricky. The category of Race didn't exist in Biblical times. That's not to say people weren't prejudiced or bigoted - we'll see in today's Scripture they were. They just didn't divide people along lines of Race. So of course, the Bible doesn't talk about race (in the same way the Bible doesn't talk about communism or capitalism, or cell phones and internet). These are all ideas and technologies that were invented centuries after the canon of Scripture was closed.

But of course that *doesn't* mean Christians can't be wise about Race. Just like we can be wise about economics and modern technology.

We're explore systematic racism. Since systems are hard for us to get our minds around, we're going to lean on the work of Andy Crouch, who writes about the nature of institutions in his excellent book *Playing God*. Andy identifies four aspects of institutions that help us understand how systems function.

So to help us out, we're going to think about the institution of football. Andy invites us to consider **1. Artefacts**, **2. Arenas**, **3. Rules** and **4. Roles**. The Artefacts are the physical things that make up the game - the football, uniforms, whistles, mouthguards, logos, etc. The arenas are pretty obvious - stadiums, tv channels, things like that, where the where the institution is performed. Rules are also pretty straightforward - these are the things your team never breaks and the other team always does. Kidding, but rules are what makes football intelligible, right? It's more than the shape of the ball that separates football from soccer or rugby. And finally, the rules create roles - quarterbacks, ends, receivers, the line. But also coaches, referees, fans, owners. All have *roles* in the institution that is American football.

During this series, we're exploring each of these four components of American institutions and ask: how has each been formed by the category of Race? Because Race is an inherently oppressive category (remember, it was created to justify some humans owning other humans), we're going to explore what it looks like for us as a people of faith to engage these components as a people formed by God for justice for all.

We began last week with artefacts. We saw that the physical components of our culture tell a story, and God expects us to be thoughtful and intentional about the KIND of story we're telling.

Today, we're talking about arenas - the spaces in which we live and operate. When it comes to American spaces, we can talk about several different things, from our work spaces to our worship spaces. But since we're in Rowlett, and Rowlett is a suburb of Dallas, I want to talk about the space of Suburbs.

You may not have realized it before that video we opened with, but suburbs like Rowlett are a racialized space. They have a particular, specific racial history. Learning that for the first time is brutal, isn't it? And I know what you're thinking... okay maybe that happens in SOME places. But here?

[Dallas Redline Map] Here's the actual redline map of Dallas from [DATE?!]. Like... the real one. That actually disenfranchised Black and Latin citizens of Dallas. And in the wake of these maps, we can chart the suburban sprawl.

Take two of the earliest suburbs - Garland and Mesquite. In 1950, Mesquite was 1700 people. Garland was 10,000. By 1980, Garland had swelled to 140,000, while Mesquite grew to over 100,000 by 1990. That's astronomical growth.

Plano saw similar growth. In 1970, it was still only 1800 people, but was 72,000 only 10 years later.

And what about Rowlett? Well in 1952, when it was incorporated, we boasted a whopping 250 citizens. After Lake Ray Hubbard was finished in 1973, we swelled to 1600. By 2000, we were up to 44,500. Since then, thanks in large part to the addition of the tollway and the DART station, Rowlett is over 70,000 and still growing. We've been one of the top 10 fastest growing cities in the country.

And if you're paying attention, you recognize the same sort of growth now happening in the next ring of towns, as cities like Wylie and Forney are now experiencing similar kinds of growth trends.

It's not a coincidence that this new growth is White first, followed by non-White. Rowlett, for instance, in 2010 was 72% White. Today, we're only 55% White and that percentage is still falling as our city diversifies. The same has already happened in cities like Garland and Mesquite.

That suburbs have been - and in many places continue to be - overwhelmingly White isn't an accident. These communities were created to be White through a combination of policy-making at the local, state and federal level (like redlining) and work by banks and realtors to keep certain neighborhoods and communities as White as possible.

We live in a community built for Whiteness. This is one *arena* that has been shaped by America's racialized history.

But here comes the big question: how do we as a people of faith respond to this?

I can't imagine too many of us here are *excited* to learn about these laws and policies. Once we know the reality of redlining, I think we're all quick to vote against the sorts of policies and laws that contribute to racial profiling.

And that's good. But... is that all? Surely not. How does this impact our day-to-day reality? And again, what is our particularly Jesus-shaped, faith-filled response?

There's no redlining in the Bible, after all.

Arenas are a question of *space*. Who owns the space? Who gets to decide who is welcome? These are questions followers of Jesus know well. These are questions of *hospitality*. And the Bible speaks about hospitality more than nearly any other topic.

[Scripture Slide] Turn with me to Luke 7. I want us to explore a provocative story in the life of Jesus, one that shows just how radical his notions of hospitality are. Then I want to step back into our day and weave this notion of hospitality into our questions about a faith-filled response to redlining.

This is still early in Jesus' ministry, and he's cultivated a reputation as something of a partier. The religious leaders have taken to calling him a glutton and a drunk because he spends his time feasting with the wrong people - sinners.

This section of Luke's gospel finds Jesus in the middle of a number of controversies about his ministry. He finds himself here invited to feast with a Pharisee. During the meal, a 'sinful woman' - one of the people Jesus normally ate with - interrupted them. This wasn't actually that strange. Feasts were intentionally held in view of the public, so everyone could see who was at your table.

Look at how Jesus is shown hospitality by the Pharisee, Simon. And watch how Jesus takes over the space.

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you..."

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Simon, do you see this woman?"

"When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

"I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." -- Luke 7:36-48

The first interesting note is that Simon apparently didn't offer Jesus basic hospitality. In the larger context of Luke's gospel, it seems as though the religious leaders want to send him a message: by associating with the 'wrong people', he's in danger of losing his credibility. Being put 'out', so to speak. This lack of hospitality seems to have been a warning to Jesus from the religious leaders.

Then there's this woman, apparently fairly well-known in town for her 'many sins'. Needless to say, she didn't even get invited to Simon's banquet - though she's *exactly* the sort of person Jesus usually ate with. Remember - there's no redlining in the Bible, but we see a similar sort of impulse here.

Jesus comes to this town where both Simon the Pharisee and this sinful woman live. Under normal circumstances, Jesus would attend the sort of feast where this woman would be present. But Simon invites Jesus to another feast, on the other side of town. A feast created to excluded women like this one.

Obviously, this impulse to exclude isn't based on race - remember, we hadn't invented race as a social category yet. Exclusion here is based on perceived religiosity. And Jesus, being a religious teacher, is expected to attend the right feast, with the right people.

But note that Jesus doesn't take the bait. When this woman begins washing his feet, he basically *takes over* the space. Simon is the host. He's supposed to be the one in charge of who's welcome and who's not. But Jesus publicly rebukes him. He calls out Simon's rude slight of Jesus - not offering to wash his feet - and praises the woman as the one who is truly religious.

Jesus flips the whole party on its head, revealing that the woman is the one included (her sins are forgiven!) and suddenly Simon finds himself on the outside.

And it all comes down to that question Jesus asked: "**Simon, do you see this woman?**"

My friend Jose Humphreys pointed me to this story. I was struggling to figure out how to talk about American arenas with regard to race and faith. Jose's book is called *Seeing Jesus in East Harlem: What happens when the Church shows up and stays put*. It's a book that's all about our faithful presence in racialized arenas.

I called Jose to tell him what I was working on and he and I kicked this all back and forth for a while until he finally said, "You know what this is all really about is how we see other people. Do we see them as threats to our place, or as neighbors, brothers and sisters?"

That's when this all clicked for me. Redlining is all about controlling who's allowed in certain spaces. Keeping those regarded as dangerous, criminal, less human OUT. It's the same impulse we see in Simon in this story.

And Jose said, "What is profound about Jesus is how he navigates the spaces he's in. He's always mindful." Who's there? Who's not? Who's welcome? Who's excluded?

For Jose, this is a question about whether we're really following Jesus. In his book, he writes, "**How do we even perceive those we are called to serve and love? How does my growth and personal devotion to Christ translate into me seeing divers others with the eyes of Christ?**" -- Jose Humphreys, *Seeing Jesus in East Harlem*

Friends, our cities are changing. In the last ten years, the demographics of Rowlett have shifted substantially, to the point that our city is only slightly over half White. And I'm sure many of you, like me, have heard the redlining impulse from some in our community. Those who don't want ministries like Life Message in their neighborhoods. Those who hate that we have a DART station because of the kinds of persons who can now access our city. Deeply-seated prejudices are coming to light, and it's possible they're emerging even from within our own spirits.

We might find ourselves, like Simon, scandalized at the kinds of people showing up in our spaces.

In that case, we need to learn from this Jesus to takes over our spaces and reminds us that all we have is from him. The Jesus who welcomes all, makes space for all, celebrates all.

The Redlining impulse is anti-Christ. It is the fundamental opposite of a person formed in the image of Jesus.

Jesus calls us to be intention in the spaces we navigate. To see people the way Jesus sees them. Not as threats to be excluded, but as neighbors to be welcomed.

Communion + Examen

[**Communion Slide**] The table is an arena for our faith. It's a space Jesus created for us. And everyone is welcomed here, from sinful women to pious Pharisees. The only requirement is that you receive your seat from Jesus himself.

1. Asdf
2. Asdf
3. Asdf

4. Asd

Assignment + Blessing

Contemplative Neighborhood Walk

Shop Local!