

Ten strategies for preaching about racism in mostly white churches

by [Carolyn B. Helsel](#) in the [January 2, 2019](#) issue

Read the main article, "[Ten myths white people believe about racism.](#)"

1. Consider your own motivation for preaching about racism, moving beyond guilt. Root your preaching in gratitude for the grace of God and the gifts of relationships.
2. Remember that your listeners come from different perspectives when it comes to defining *racism* and members bring their own stories of how they have seen racism play out.
3. Schedule time outside of the preaching event for congregants to share their stories and the emotions that emerge when talking about racism.
4. Invite listeners to notice their emotions in response to these conversations, help them to name those emotions, and encourage self-care.
5. Connect the experiences of personal emotions to the larger social patterns of racial identity development, reminding listeners that guilt and shame are not the final goal.
6. Share the stories of role models—both people of color and white people—who have worked against racism throughout history and today, broadening your listeners' repertoire of racial justice icons beyond Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks.
7. Name racism as sin through different metaphors to help listeners understand racism as more than individual acts. Describe how racism estranges us from one another and from God, and name how the sin of racism perpetuates a bondage to sin where white people act out of habituated responses that can harm persons of color despite individuals' intentions.
8. Point to theological reasons for faith and hope. If we acknowledge the sin that continues to have power over us, we can also proclaim the good news of faith about the power of God's love over sin and death and Christ's power to break down the dividing wall and free us from our captivity to sin.

9. Get your congregation engaged in building relationships with another faith group or organization working against racism, moving into interreligious or intercongregational partnerships to address a specific problem in your community.

10. Practice self-care throughout the process of working against racism, noticing any tendencies to look for reassurance from people of color that you are doing this right or count among the “good” white people. Instead, spend time continuing to read and listen to the voices of others in gratitude. Remember that we do this work not to justify ourselves but because the grace of God has invited us to the table for these conversations.

This article is adapted from Carolyn B. Helsel's forthcoming book, [Preaching about Racism: A Guide for Faith Leaders](#), just published by Chalice Press. Used by permission.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “Ten strategies for preaching about racism in mostly white churches.”