



The Ask

March 13, 2019

Rachel Yates

He paused before saying, “Ooh, this is a tough one.” Daniel Moore Jr. was the last panelist to make his “ask” of the audience, and he was thoughtful about what to request. “Hmm, what do I want this audience to do?”

On Saturday the Wisconsin Council of Churches hosted speaker and author Austin Channing Brown to discuss her book, *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness.* After her address, the WCC facilitated a panel discussion of black leaders from the Madison area. Daniel Moore Jr. was one of them.

If you follow University of Wisconsin football, you might remember him as a Badger defensive tackle from 2008-12. He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from UW. Now, he serves as a chaplain at the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center and Dane County Jail, a calling he didn’t anticipate in college.

The other panelists were invited to make their “asks” of the audience. They represented several outstanding organizations pursuing racial justice or development opportunities for African Americans. In turn, each explained to the predominantly white audience how they could contribute financially or volunteer. Finally the facilitator came to Pastor Moore.

He could have been slow to respond because he wasn’t affiliated with an organization that could easily receive donations for his ministry. But, I sensed he was struggling to respond at a deeper level. We waited.

Finally Pastor Moore answered, “I would ask the audience to stop being afraid of black men.”

Pastor Moore explained that as a large black man (6’2” and over 200 pounds), people are afraid of him. It was valued while he played football for our entertainment. Now, he must take care to walk in a non-threatening way; he must keep his hair cut neatly; and he adopts a manner of speaking that is comfortable for white people though unnatural to him. He spoke passionately about the hurt of being feared by people who’ve never met him.

“Fear is false evidence appearing real,” Pastor Moore reminded us. The false evidence is that all black men are dangerous, drug addicts, criminals, and poor parents. This evidence is presented in our news coverage and a continuing narrative that looks for support. As a result, fear is stoked.

Yes, there are black men who fit that mold, just as there are white men who fit that mold. We need to make common sense decisions to avoid the risk of harm from both. The difference is that we often start with the assumption that black men fit the mold, until they prove otherwise by the way they walk, how they groom themselves, and how they speak.

Pastor Moore’s “ask” won’t let me go. Unlike the others, it won’t be fixed simply by donations and time spent volunteering, though that helps. Perhaps it starts by recognizing the false evidence – the narrative – that is repeatedly told about black men. Where do we see and hear it? How often? Are commentaries about “black on black crime” balanced with similar instances of “white on white crime”? Why don’t we learn about outstanding black men who are contributing to their communities?

It’s a start. We don’t have time to dawdle in our “exploration of the subject,” however. While we educate ourselves, young black men like Pastor Moore – made in the image of God -- are facing destructive and often deadly discrimination. The “ask” is not just Pastor’s Moore’s. It is Christ’s.