



Legacy

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Ann Gibbs

The Karnak Temple Complex is located in Luxor, Egypt. There, great pillars etched with hieroglyphs tell the story of Egypt's past, recalling the feats of the pharaohs and all they built and conquered. Walking through it is like walking through a forest of history, head craning to look up to the tops. There is another forest in Montgomery, Alabama where the pillars don't rise up from the ground but hang overhead. These too tell a story of a nation's past, but one many of us would rather not tell.

These hanging pillars are part of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and they speak to the history of racial violence and lynching in the United States. There are around 800 pillars at the memorial, each representing not a person but the record of a county, some of which have multiple pillars with multiple columns of names. The dates are surprising to those who think this is part of our distant past, many dates are commensurate with the childhood of my parents as well as my grandparents; I even saw one dated 2000. These include children, women, and men; none of whom received a trial; many of whom stood accused of nothing but the color of their skin. The locations are also surprising, they include Maryland, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan and other Northern States, a shock to northerners who think this is only a part of Southern history.

Through the Community Remembrance Project, an effort of the Equal Justice Initiative, communities and towns throughout the country have begun to take steps towards reconciliation by publicly addressing the past and putting up memorials to the victims. This recognizes that we cannot speak of peace while ignoring harm done and choosing to limit the history we tell, a fact that came home to me as I visited the Memorial and the Legacy Museum with a group of Presbyterian mid-council leaders just before Easter.

In preparation for the trip, we read William Yoo's book *What Kind of Christianity: A History of Slavery and Anti-Black Racism in the Presbyterian Church*. And for those who love our denomination and have long lauded certain Presbyterian heroes, it was gut-wrenching to acknowledge the role Presbyterian Christians and our church had in our nation's history of racism and violence. It's not the story we like to tell about ourselves. Perhaps even harder still is to determine where we go from here.

How can acknowledging our past (the good, the bad, and the truly ugly) help us to move forward?

What does raw, radical honesty about the realities that impact our present look like in a church that historically prefers the comfortable lies and half truths? Or, as William Yoo stated, "idolizes unity over the well-fare of the people" referring to our penchant to "agreeing to disagree" or do nothing in times when people's lives and welfare are on the line rather than taking a stand that might cause division in the church. I do not have concrete answers to these questions. I only know that denial effects only more brokenness and guilt effects self-pity rather than actual change. And I keep coming back to what I learned from our Peacemaker, Rev. Julie Kandema, last fall about the efforts of the church in Rwanda in the face of genocide there. It began with confession and moved into acts of relationship building and community restoration. That seems an excellent place to start.

To learn more about the Equal Justice Initiative, the museum and memorial, and their many efforts, visit: <https://eji.org/>.