



***Session 2: Revolution
Parts 4&5***

Focus: In the 1700s Europe experienced an intellectual movement called the Age of Enlightenment. During this time, leading thinkers started relying more on science than religion, which advanced the understanding of the Rights of Man as well as natural world. This thinking created a conflict between liberal democracy (all men are created equal) and an economy dependent on having men as property. This was when the concept of race was adopted into the culture from the scientific community. Race became the social construct used to explain unequal economic, health, and political status - outcomes stemming from racial differences rather than policies. (adapted from Four Hundred Souls)

Tonight we discuss the Revolutionary Period, those years both before and after the War and the framing of the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. This is a time of great conflict, not only between the Colonies and the King but also the battle between the ideal of a liberal democracy and reality of the economic impact that full implementation of those ideals would have.

Gathering Prayer: Holy One who is known to us by many names and in many ways, we give thanks for the blessings that we have in our lives. You know the thoughts of our hearts; hear our prayers. Be present now as we enter a time of thought and discussion.

Sentences on the Subject: *The history we've been given recalls Stono—one of the bloodiest uprisings of enslaved people in the history of the land that would become America—as a cautionary tale, the story of the dangers of allowing Black men and women to dream of liberty.*

About 250 years have passed since David George received the call to preach good news to all people. But the tension between the Chapel he grew up knowing and the chapel he helped to build is still central in American life. Though slavery officially ended after the Civil War, the Christianity that blessed white supremacy did not go away. It doubled down on the Lost Cause, endorsed racial terrorism during the Redemption era, blessed the leaders of Jim Crow, and continues to endorse racist policies as traditional values under the guise of a “religious right.” As a Christian minister myself, I understand why, for my entire ministry, the number of people who choose not to affiliate with any religious tradition has doubled each decade. An increasingly diverse America is tired of the old slaveholder religion.

It was in some ways harder to be a free man. Now—no mistake—the ideals of the American Revolution, the words of the Declaration, had triggered the fall of slavery in the northern states. Although unable to endure the hypocrisy of slavery, most northern white citizens could not bring themselves to be social equals. Accordingly, they did all they could to squelch opportunity for free American Africans. I felt for those newly freed. Few whites would make loans to buy homes. Those who did, mostly abolitionist Quakers, were tight in reviewing and granting them. It was hard to get jobs. It was hard just to live. We even found it hard to be dead—we were not allowed to own cemeteries in which to bury our deceased.

Article IV of the Constitution protected their assets, enslaved people. In 1793 Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which deemed it a federal crime to aid any fugitive from slavery.....Act was one of the first federal laws to provide universal protection for slave owners against loss of property in enslaved people. It codified anti-Blackness and white supremacy because it signaled that a white person's claim to stolen property was inherently more important than a Black person's right to freedom and liberty. It verified that the United States was a nation divided, one that established freedom with whiteness and servitude with Blackness.

In Wallace, Louisiana, at the far edge of the Whitney Plantation, between the wooden white fence demarcating ownership of the land and the red brick path leading you through it, is a plot of earth where the dark heads of fifty-five Black men sit on metal stakes, robust silver beams that push their necks toward the sky. The heads are not real. They are ceramic renderings of a violent past, but from a distance the human likeness is so unsettling that you need to get closer just to be sure. In the warmer months, gnats and flies swarm around them, while wasps begin nesting on the underside of their open necks. The bugs hum together around the decapitated figurines like an army of small drones. The area beneath the rows of heads is an interspersing of brown and red mulch, creating the illusion that the land beneath these skulls is, similar to the faces, covered in dry blood. Each of the faces is nameless, with the exception of the ten that rest at the front. Mathurin. Cook. Gilbert. Amar. Lindor. Joseph. Dagobert. Komina. Hippolite. Charles. These were the leaders of the largest slave rebellion in American history. These were the people who decided that enough was enough.

Below is some “food for thought”, a few probes that might kick start a conversation. Read over them and pick one (or more, or none) to discuss. Remember to hold space for others to share and share only what you feel comfortable sharing.

Probe 1. In one regard, race is a social construct which has been used to separate people into the privileged and the undeserving. In another, it is a badge, “all those who ‘have suffered a long disaster and have one long memory’ are forced to wear” (W.E. B. DuBois) How does a society eliminate the social construct, remediate the disaster, yet honor the badge?

Probe 2. MLK asserted that “one of the most shameful tragedies of our nation is that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is the probably most segregated hour in America”. Why might this be the case? Would a POC be comfortable in your church? Would you regularly attend an historically Black or Hispanic church?

Probe 3. According to the Harvard Business Review, codeswitching involves adjusting one’s style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others. Consider some economic and social barriers were in place (and many that still stand) for “free African Americans”?

Probe 4. Like the *1619 Project* and *Critical Race Theory*, 400 Souls seeks to reframe our country's history by shifting a focus onto the role of slavery and Black Americans. Have these stories shifted your thinking on The Enlightenment and Revolutionary Period? How? What stories or examples can you share?

Commission: *Hold on to what is good. Love deeply. Honor others. Stay excited about life and your faith. Be joyful. Be patient. If you pray, have faith. Share with people who are in need. Welcome others into your homes. Be loving to those who hurt you. Be present; be in the moment. Be gentle, even with those with whom you disagree. Be humble. Be a friend of people who aren't considered important. Do the right thing. If possible, live in peace with everyone. And remember, no matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey- you are welcome here.*