

AN ENCOURAGING WORD FOR TROUBLING TIMES #131 (by Rev. Dr. Alice Wolfe, 10/21/20)

“Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Your Sin”

I am thankful but sad that I learned about and have begun reading (listening to) James W. Loewen’s book, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. A sundown town is an entire community (town, suburb, community, or county) that was for many decades (and some still linger today) all “white” on purpose—and nearly all of them were NOT in the southern/Confederate states. The term “sundown” town came from the phrase, “Nigg**, don’t let the sun go down on you in this town!” The whites in the community officially or unofficially kept out or ran off African Americans by threatening them, lynching them, burning down their houses, not letting them buy houses, and various other disturbing means (that I don’t care to repeat). According to Loewen, the United States has had thousands of sundown towns (and approximately 143 listed in Ohio). I am horrified that these practices have happened, and some are still occurring in our nation today.

What I find even more horrifying (if that is possible), is that someone borrowed from the Bible the phrase “don’t let the sun go down” and twisted it and used it for evil means. In Ephesians 4:26-27 (NRSV), Paul wrote,

“Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.”

Paul is clear, when we get angry, we should not let the sun go down on our anger. If we do, we make room for the devil and allow him to get a foothold in our lives, which leads us to sin against God and others (who were created in the image of God as much as we are). The sundown towns have done the exact opposite of what God intends for us. By holding onto their anger and prejudice, many have refused to treat African Americans (and people of other ethnic backgrounds) as human beings; they have tortured and persecuted them for many generations—and IT MUST STOP.

We cannot let the sun go down on our sin (personally and/or collectively as a nation). We cannot let Satan have any bigger of a foothold than he already has. If we do, other countries will speak of us as we have spoken of the Nazis in Germany. My dear friends, I beg you: Please don’t let the sun go down on your/our sin. Let us ask forgiveness from God and those we’ve discriminated against, and let us resolve to do something about it!

But what can you or I do? We’re just one or two people... We may be small, but we serve an awesome and all-mighty God—and nothing is impossible with him!! In *Sundown Towns*, Loewen noted many examples where one person made a difference—in preventing towns from becoming sundown towns or in prompting them to do so. One person can still make a difference today—and think what can happen if we all work together! We can’t do everything, but we can do something. We can educate ourselves of the evils of racism in America so we better understand them and know how to respond. We can stand up for the rights of people of all ethnic backgrounds. We can kindly interrupt racism when we see or hear it. We can set a good example of loving all our neighbors. We can teach our children and others how God loves all of us, and how God calls us to love all our neighbors as ourselves. We can work to change rules and laws that discriminate against people. By the grace and power of God, we can work together to make our communities and nation places where people of all ethnic backgrounds are welcomed and loved. We can..., but will we...? I didn’t know anything about these sundown towns prior to reading this book, but now that I am aware of them, I can’t do nothing; I can’t remain silent. I cannot let the sun go down on our sins. Can you?

PRAYER:

Loving God, you created us all in your image. You sacrificed your only Son, Jesus, so that through him all people might be forgiven of their sins and restored in their relationship with you and with each other. You poured out your Holy Spirit on all believers that they may be empowered to be ministers of reconciliation and peace. Forgive us (as individuals and as a nation) for all our sins! Forgive us for the

times we've treated others as anything less than your beautiful creation... Forgive us for our sins of racism, prejudice, and hatred toward others that nailed Jesus to the cross... Forgive us for not being the ministers of reconciliation and peace you have called us to be... Remove our sins from us as far as the east is from the west! Remove the foothold Satan has on our nation! Please give us your wisdom, guidance, courage, and Holy Spirit power to face the evils of this world... Help me know one thing I can do today to not let the sun go down on our sins! In the almighty name of Jesus, we pray. Amen!