

Caste -- The Origins of our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson

Week 8 – Part Seven: Awakening; Chapters 30-31, The Radicalization of the Dominant Caste, Epilogue: A World Without Caste

This document includes passages and prompts for reflection and discussion.

- 1) On page 362 Wilkerson writes, “The caste system had a way of policing the behavior of everyone in its wake to keep everyone in their assigned place.” After reading this book how has your understanding changed in regards to the comparison that the author points out between the Caste system in India and our system of oppression in this country?
- 2) Chapter 31 describes an experience that the author had in relation to having to be vulnerable to someone else and dependent upon them for their expertise. The author eased the difficult situation by connecting with the plumber on an experience that they both could relate to. How important is relationship building as we begin to dismantle systems of oppression and racism? What ways have you thought about how to build relationships with someone who doesn’t look like you?
- 3) The Radicalization of the Dominant Caste: The author describes a situation where racism was apparent. What thoughts, ideas or feelings arose when you read this statement on page 368? “Part of me resented that she could go ballistic and get away with it when I might not even be believed. It was a caste privilege to go off in the restaurant the way she did.”
- 4) On page 379 we read, “The separation of the races is not a disease of the colored people, but a disease of the white people” How has the understanding of this phrase increased because of your reading of “Caste”?
- 5) On page 380 we read “A caste system persists in part because we, each and every one of us, allow it to exist—in large and small ways, in our everyday actions, in how we elevate or demean, embrace or exclude, on the basis of the meaning attached to people’s physical traits”. As you ponder this, what thoughts, feelings, and reactions come up for you?
- 6) Also on page 380: “Once awakened, we then have a choice. We can be born to the dominant caste but choose not to dominate. We can be born to a subordinated caste but resist the box others force upon us. And all of us can sharpen our powers of discernment to see past the external and to value the character of a person rather than demean those who are already marginalized or worship those born to false pedestals.”
 - a) Now that you have read this book, what have you learned about the history of racism in this country?
 - b) What type of actions can you see yourself taking as you now have been awakened?
 - c) What type of actions or responses can we take as a religious community to begin to dismantle systems of oppression and racism in this community of Bloomington?