



Resisting the Single Story in the Church

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My Holy Week musings about change and transformation included thoughts about the change of season—from winter to spring—and encompassed familiar themes of lilies and new life emerging after the winter. Except, I was in South America, where the season was changing from summer to fall. I adjusted my thinking on these familiar and well-used Easter themes associated with the coming of spring and signs of new life we use during Easter. I noted for the first time the assumptions in these references and the ways in which the experiences of millions were excluded in the narratives used, even in hymns sung around the world. Inherent in the assumptions was a privileging of a particular part of the world and the experiences of a particular people.

There is diversity among us that is reflected in various ways, including religion, age, gender, race, sexual identification, heritage, culture, and geography. The history of the UCC is one that fosters great pride in the “firsts” accomplished by this denomination and their rootedness in justice. And yet, we have more work to do in honoring our commitments to seek a just world for all.

My experience was a reminder that colonization and its legacies of discrimination and marginalization of people wear many masks. Efforts to decolonize the church must address the multiplicity of diversities present yet excluded among us. These efforts must also bring truth to overturning years of devaluing and decrying the differences we experience in others. Easter imagery is one of many remnants of colonization present in the church. Our commitments to decolonize the church must be grounded in the truth of where the images of our hymnody and symbols associated with our spiritual truths come from and why these images persist. These commitments must be willing to eradicate these symbols and include the multiply layered stories in our churches and communities.

Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warned of [The Danger of a Single Story](#), noting that hearing only one story about another person or country heightens the risk of misunderstanding. We live with the danger of a single story—limitations to our thinking amplified by being closed to the experiences of others. The single story produces and reinforces stereotypes. A single story is always present among us as an obstacle to the justice we seek in the world. We must be willing to hear the stories of those who are around us and expand our consciousness, emancipating ourselves from mental slavery.

Colonization and patriarchy are the products of single stories, as are the myriad social ills we see in the world around us which place people on the margins of society and trample their human rights and dignity. Adichie notes: “The consequence of a single story is this: It robs people of their dignity.”

My Easter reflection was impacted by the countries I visited, places where the changes of the season were different from where I currently live. Easter for me is no longer only about the change in season from winter to spring. The transformation present in the season is also about spring changing to summer, and as a child of the Caribbean I was reminded that Easter in Jamaica was experienced in the context of no obvious season change. Easter was about the changes in the flora, the shifts in the breezes, the presence of rain. I was reminded there is more than one way to experience the joys of living and more symbols besides those of the global north that speak to the power of the resurrection, the possibilities of transformation, and the joy of God’s love.

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