



The Neighborhood

United Church of Christ

“We’re All Here!”

Witnessing to the Power of Love in The Carceral States of America.

A Study and Worship Series for Epiphany, 2023 in The Neighborhood.

This series explores the phenomena policing and of incarceration in the Bible and in the modern world.

Our study is guided by Mariame Kaba’s 2021 book, *We Do This ‘Til We Free Us, Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*. Kaba identifies the importance of imagination when we see a need to act but have difficulty choosing what to do

First, when we set about trying to transform society, we must remember that we ourselves will need to transform. Our imagination of what a different world can be is limited. We are deeply entangled in the very systems we are organizing to change. White supremacy, misogyny, ableism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia exist everywhere. We have all so thoroughly internalized these logics of oppression that if oppression were to end tomorrow, we would be likely to reproduce previous structures. Being intentionally in relation to one another, a part of a community, helps not only to imagine new worlds, but to imagine ourselves differently. (page 4)

When people, especially white people, consider a world without the police, they envision a society as violent as our current one, merely without law enforcement – and they shudder. As a society, we have become so indoctrinated with the idea that we solve problems by policing and caging people that many cannot imagine anything other than prisons and the police as solutions to violence and harm. (page 17)

In prayer, in worship, and in study, we’ll imagine ways to bring the power of grace and forgiveness to the practices of punishment and incarceration.

1) Sunday, January 8 The Church Was Born In Prison

We begin with Paul, the “prisoner for Christ,” who spent a significant portion of his life incarcerated by the Roman Empire. Why did Paul spend so much time in prisons? How did Paul use incarceration as a vehicle for spreading the good news about Jesus?

Key Scripture: “We’re all here!” Acts 16:16-34

Paul and Silas choose incarceration as a path to liberation for all.

Excerpt from *We Do This Until We Free Us, Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* by Mariame Kaba.

From Part 1: “So You’re Thinking about Becoming and Abolitionist.”

Some people may ask, “Does this mean I can never call the cops if my life is in serious danger?” Abolition does not center that question. Instead, abolition challenges us to ask, “Why do we have no other well-resourced options?” and pushes us to creatively consider how we can grow, build, and try other avenues to reduce harm.

Share & Shine

798 Washington Street • Bath, Maine 04530

207.443.2187 • www.faithinbath.org



The Neighborhood

United Church of Christ

Repeated attempts to improve the sole option offered by the state, despite how consistently corrupt and injurious it has proven itself, will neither reduce nor address the harm that actually required the call. We need more effective options for the greatest number of people.

Let's begin our abolitionist journey not with the question, "What do we have now, and how can we make it better?" Instead, let's ask, "What can we imagine for ourselves and our world?" When we do that, boundless possibilities of a more just world await us. (page 3)

2) Sunday, January 15

Key Scripture: "Now they discharge us in secret? Certainly not!" Acts 16:25-40
Only reconciliation and truth-telling will turn the key.

Also on this Sunday, we'll recognize Martin Luther King Day with an original Readers' Theatre play, "One Drop," by Phyllis Blackstone.

Excerpt from *We Do This Until We Free Us, Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* by Mariame Kaba:

Congressional Democrats want to make it easier to identify and prosecute police misconduct. Joe Biden wants to give police departments \$300 million. But efforts to solve police violence through such liberal reforms have failed for nearly a century. Enough. We can't reform the police. The only way to diminish police violence is to reduce contact between the public and the police.

There is not a single era in the history of the United States in which the police were not a force of violence against Black people. Policing in the south emerged from the slave patrols in the 1700s and 1800s that caught and returned runaway slaves. In the north, the first municipal police departments in the mid-1800s helped quash labor strikes and riots against the rich. Everywhere, police have suppressed marginalized populations to protect the status quo.

So, when you see a police officer pressing his knee into a Black man's neck until he dies, that's the logical result of policing in America. When a police officer brutalizes a Black man, he is doing what he sees as his job. (page 14)

3) Sunday, January 22 Spiritual Gifts Meet Petty Officials

Why were Paul and Silas beaten and incarcerated? They were disrupting the money-making!

Key Scripture: Acts 16:16-24 "...when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas..."

Excerpt from *We Do This Until We Free Us, Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* by Mariame Kaba:

"...an abolition politic interrogates the root causes of violence that are masked by the carceral state... Liberation under oppression is unthinkable by design. SO an abolition politic insists that we imagine and organize beyond the constraints of normal, beyond mass incarceration, which is an entire system of harassment, violence, and surveillance that keeps oppressive gender, class, and racial hierarchies in place. Our charge is to make imagining liberation under oppression completely thinkable, to really push ourselves to think beyond the normal, to address the root cause of people's suffering.

Share & Shine



The Neighborhood

United Church of Christ

4) Sunday, January 29

Key Scripture: "You almost persuaded me to become a Christian." Acts 26: 19-32

Paul's systematic case for discipleship

5) Sunday, February 5

Key Scripture: "Do you persist in your integrity? Curse God and die." Job 2:1-10

The evolution of grace: Our struggle to release the punishing god.

6) Sunday, February 12

Key Scripture: "Leave your gift at the altar and go. First be reconciled to your sister or brother."

Judgment and reconciliation in holy courtrooms.

7) Sunday, February 19

Key Scripture: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:14-30

The attempted lynching of Jesus, and his mysterious deliverance.

Share & Shine

798 Washington Street • Bath, Maine 04530

207.443.2187 • www.faithinbath.org