

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 39 – Dianne English – The Ties That Bind

What's in The Ground

And now a personal word,

When I asked Dianne English what she knew for certain, she closed her eyes and paused for what seemed a long time. I sat across from her. I could see a wave of emotion come over her as her eyes remained closed and she became tearful. Then she answered in almost a whisper. She knew for certain that she was a child of God. That she had never been abandoned. That most days she was loved.

I think of the work that Dianne has devoted nearly her entire adult life doing: the daily, often exhausting work of racial reconciliation and knitting the ties that bind. What does it take to do that work? To stay at it through moments of crisis and when the community is tired of the conversation? To raise the question of inclusion and equity in board rooms and workshops and public meetings, when people at the table no longer want to hear it? To speak about systems and structures that seem beyond the ability of any one person to change. Looking at Dianne across the table as her eyes remain closed, I saw a person both weary and resolute, someone who has been tested but who knows she is embraced. She knows she does not walk alone. Dianne is a person of faith. And it takes faith to heal our wounds.

Dianne spoke of what's in the ground. How years of segregation and injustice became the color of law. How explicit government policies ensured the separation of black and white persons. How discriminatory policies have had a devastating effect on our community. It is all in the ground. In low interracial trust. In our misunderstanding of motives. In our miscommunication across difference.

How do we get it out of the ground? We get it out of the ground by digging it up. By reaching our hands into the earth. By tilling the soil. Unpleasant things are stirred when we do, but unless we do, we cannot plant new seeds that will sprout, plants that will grow, flowers that will bloom.

There are these houses I drive by on Sharon Road. They have perfectly manicured lawns. The lawns are regimented. Uniform. Disciplined. Evenly cut blades of grass announce the status quo. Interrupting these houses is a small home with a wild garden. It is a sight to behold: rocks, leaf cups, violets, myrtles, dandelions, and daisies. The garden is an explosion of nature, twisting and turning, filled with the sound of birds and

pollinating bees. It must drive the owners of the manicured lawns nuts. I smile every time I drive by.

Dianne English interrupts our manicured sensibilities. She asks questions that disturb the status quo. She does so with confidence in things hoped for and with love of things unseen.

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