

Charlotte District E-Pistle

July 4, 2005

The ideals of this nation are a noble dream, but far from an accomplished reality. Even the hand that wrote the line asserting that, “*all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...*,” refrained from freeing the slaves who guaranteed his position of prominence among the gentry of this bold new nation. Collectively we become a more authentic and hopeful people when we acknowledge the frailties of our past, confess our sins as a nation, and seek restitution by virtue of our allegiance to the aspirations of an American Revolution that is an ever-evolving narrative.

The son of a Methodist preacher has attempted to do just that in his haunting account, *Blood Done Sign My Name*. The title comes from a paradoxical blues lament that became a gospel song which Timothy Tyson recalls from his childhood. In this gripping volume, Timothy tells the story of his courageous father, Vernon Tyson, who pastored the Oxford UMC during a time of violent conflagration in that town in 1970. The author is now a professor of African American history at the University of Wisconsin. But he tells the story of his father’s ministry in the context of the forgotten narrative of this state’s violent history of oppression and bigotry.

The book embodies the wisdom of that oft-quoted line by William Faulkner in *Requiem for a Nun*: “The past is never dead—it isn’t even the past.” I learned more about the inconsistencies of my own ministry and my denomination by reading this book than I could accomplish through months of analysis and introspection. Thus, I think that it is important that we clergy colleagues talk with each other about our memories of the disparity and injustice of the past. Through a clear perception of our past as a faith community shaped by cultural expectations and racial bigotry, we can begin to discover a unity that values diversity.

On Tuesday, November 15, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Tim Tyson will lead a Day Apart for our annual Elder’s Retreat. The event will take place at Christ UMC in Hickory—a central and accessible location. You can register for this event through Duke Divinity School. But, whether or not you attend the retreat, read this captivating book and let’s discuss it in the context of a racially diverse clergy fellowship here in the Charlotte District. The Fourth of July takes on a whole new meaning when we are liberated from the guilt and burden of the past by the blood of Jesus that has signed our name.

Grace and peace,

George