

## Midweek Message

*“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”*

(Galatians 3:26-29 ESV)

I believe that one of the most beautiful evidences of our redemption is revealed in the unity that’s found in the Church of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This unity, empowered by God, is something the world of unbelievers will never experience as long as they remain in rebellion against God. I’m sure we’re all aware of the protests that have been continuing since the death of George Floyd at the hands of some police who used unnecessary force to restrain him. We’re also quite aware of the riots, the vandalism, the stealing from stores, and the continuing violence in many cities. Then there are the calls from many in our country, and even in our world, about defunding police departments and the need for change regarding what’s been called “racial injustice” which I do believe happens in a fallen world. When it comes to racial injustice, what people are crying for is desperately needed. However, their fix for the problem falls short of what’s actually creating the issue.

You see, **firstly**, there’s a problem that causes racial injustice. As I mentioned in the sermon this past Sunday, there’s nothing that can be done externally that will completely remove racism and bring about genuine reconciliation because it doesn’t get to the depth of the problem. Although there are certain actions that do help diminish the outward practices of racial injustice, such as laws that forbid discrimination and others that hold people accountable for it, especially in the workplace, the truth is they don’t change the inward motivations that cause it. I want you to understand that I’m all for the creation of just and moral laws, in keeping with Scripture, that help lessen the effects of discrimination because we are a fallen humanity and greatly under the influence of our sinfulness. Even though people can make an effort to change their actions and attitudes, as God’s image, though tarnished, is still part of our being, it doesn’t completely resolve the issue. As believers in Jesus, we should know that the real issue that brings out such anger and hatred is really found in our hearts. Do you remember what Jesus told us? He said:

*“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”*

(Mark 7:21-23 ESV)

Although the influences of culture can certainly effect the manner in which these evils within us are manifested outwardly from us, especially toward those who are different than us, the truth of the matter is that the real problem lies within us. When we act in ways that discriminate against others we are, in effect, only revealing what’s already within us. Jesus has told us in Matthew 12:33-37:

*“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* (ESV)

If our hearts are good, then good comes out. However, since our hearts, in their normal condition, are bad, then all that can come out is bad. As the prophet Isaiah tells us: *“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment”* (Isaiah 64:6 ESV). Even our attempts at doing good fall far short of what God requires from us. What people need are new hearts, new life within, so that we can bear the good fruit of treating others with dignity.

You see, **secondly**, there's a power that cures racial injustice. The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, in speaking the Word from God, tells us:

*“And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”*

(Ezekiel 11:19-20 ESV)

Ezekiel was speaking primarily to Israel who had a bad habit of turning away from God even though He had brought them out of Egypt and Had promised that He would be their God and they His beloved people. In this prophecy we see that God is the One who will resolve the issue of rebellion against Himself by the transformation of our hearts. The writer to the Hebrews reiterates this wonderful truth when he says:

*“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*

(Hebrews 8:10 ESV)

It's this new heart, this new life, that's fully empowered by the Holy Spirit who lives within us that we can now overcome our sinful tendencies. As Jesus tells us in John's gospel: *“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’* (John 3:7 ESV). You see, that's why Jesus came into this world, God incarnate, so that He might take upon Himself the sins of all who'll come in genuine repentance and true faith in Him. When that becomes a reality in our lives the Apostle Paul tells us:

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”*

(2 Corinthians 5:17-19 ESV)

You see, true reconciliation of people from all walks of life can only occur through the power of God's grace as expressed through the cross because only in the cross is the barrier of sin and its influence removed which is what causes discrimination in all its forms.

And that brings us to the last point in that **finally**, there's a practice that curtails racial injustice. This is where we, as God's redeemed people, can actually have an impact for the good of all, whether in regard to those who are believers or even for those who are not believers. When it comes to living life as God's people, there's no room for personal discrimination of any kind, and that's especially true of life in the church. We can easily see this in Paul's letter to the Colossians where he writes:

*“But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”*

(Colossians 3:8-11 ESV)

Scripture has so much more than could easily be covered in one simple message. However, the bottom line is that all people are to be treated with dignity and respect regardless of race, social status, or gender. As I said in the sermon Sunday, I'm so thankful that at Highlands everyone is loved and treated properly. I'm so thankful we're a multi-generation, multi-ethnic family, because in being such, we who've experienced new life in Jesus are the one's who must lead the way so the world can see the difference God's grace makes.

***Pastor Mark***