

Redoubling Our Love for One Another

Over the past few weeks, we have seen many protests occurring across the country, triggered by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Unfortunately, some of those protests have turned into violence and riots. It is heartbreaking to see the pain, frustration, and anger pouring forth from these and other events. We know the pain is felt deeply by some members of our congregation. And we know we are all hurt by it. The unfortunate truth is racial prejudice exists in the world, and some of our own members may have experienced it even within the Lord's church. It's hard to know how to help, but we must start somewhere, because "the love of Christ compels us" (II Corinthians 5:14).

We live in a fallen, imperfect world. Prejudices have been present among mankind in every corner of the world for as long as man has lived. The world is, after all, Satan's turf. Ethnic prejudice is a recurring issue in the Bible, including the New Testament. When Jesus shocked the disciples by speaking to a Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, He was sharing a lesson about prejudice. Christians of Jewish heritage continually wrestled with prejudice against Christians who were born Gentiles. The apostle Peter himself fought against such prejudice. In Galatians 2, Paul confronted Peter for failing to associate with Gentile Christians when in the presence of Jewish Christians. Just like Peter, we bring our personal baggage to our Christian walk and often struggle to overcome it.

We have good reason to be very proud of our nation. Yet, that pride should not blind us from recognizing our individual and collective imperfections. A first step in healing many of the divisions and pains that afflict us is to empathize. Each of us needs to strive to sensitively understand the situation of others. In doing this, Jesus is our example. He is the most empathetic person ever to have walked on this planet. He understands our challenges. He understands what we suffer. All of us need to work without ceasing at being more empathetic, just like Jesus. Our Savior took time to know those He met, including those who were outcast by society. Better understanding another person always benefits all concerned.

Diverse perspectives and different strengths are a great blessing to our congregation, just as different parts of the body are necessary for the function of the overall body. We believe it is both Christ-like and of great benefit to take the time to understand other viewpoints. Our church family is a shelter to all in a sea of turmoil, and a hospital for those wounded by this world. We are a body that nurtures and cares for one another physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Discrimination or bigotry of any kind is hurtful. We are all equally God's children and heirs, through Christ. He does not see skin color, or ancestry, or any of the other "superficial" things that man uses to separate and divide. Instead, He sees our hearts, our character. We should do likewise. Let us all continue in love for one another, as true brothers and sisters. Reach out to help those who are hurting or are struggling. That also means looking beyond our brothers and sisters in Christ, and being a light to

our community. Doing so will make us a stronger and more resilient congregation, and a greater tool for God to use for good in this world.

To that end, we strive to be like Christ, and this means:

- We oppose discrimination in any form, by shining our light for Christ on all people regardless of age, gender, skin color, or socio-economic status. (Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11)
- We mourn the death, hatred, and violence in this world, which is from Satan. (Romans 12:15)
- We value diversity in our congregation. (I Timothy 2:4, I Corinthians 12:14-20)
- We strive to be Christ-like by showing love and respect for all brothers and sisters. (Romans 10:12, John 13:35)
- We do our best to be God's instrument for the Kingdom in this world, striving to follow scriptural principles and doing what is right, even when it is hard to do so. (Matthew 7:12, II Corinthians 5: 20)

Our prayerful request is for all to join us in redoubling our efforts to live these principles. Let's show our commitment to serve and love God, by serving and loving each other and our fellow man as Jesus did, supporting those who are struggling (Galatians 6:2). We know that some people have been especially hurt by prejudice and may require much time and effort to heal. It will take more than words to accomplish the changes we desire, but violence and hatred is not the answer. We can only improve when we can hear and understand the hurt of others and respond to that hurt with love. We are continuously working to help everyone navigate the rough waters we all are currently experiencing. If you are hurting, we want to hear and understand your concerns. Please reach out to us, so that we can heal together. Help us shine the light of Christ for all to see.

- Your Shepherds