

June 4, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the wave of protests that have occurred in the aftermath demand our attention. I write to you to briefly express my thoughts and feelings and suggest some possible responses.

It is important to state clearly that racism, racial bias, discrimination, and segregation are antithetical to the gospel, unacceptable in the life of the church, and should be unacceptable in the life of our nation. Jesus and his gospel of love, mercy and forgiveness is for everyone; there are no divisions in the Kingdom of God. In Ephesians Paul writes “For Jesus is our peace; in his flesh **he has made us into one** and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” (Ephesians 2:13). Paul is specifically referring to the division between Jew and Gentile, but by extension he is referring to all people and all times. One of the most ancient baptismal creeds is found in Galatians 3:27-28 “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male or female; **for you are all one in Christ.**” Our Christian identity makes all other distinctions irrelevant. To allow a condition to exist where people are treated differently and afforded different opportunities and privileges simply by their ethnicity or skin color is to accept a world that is at odds with God’s intention and vision for the Kingdom. If we are to pray with integrity “thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”, we must actively work for equality in all arenas of life.

While we may be stunned and even appalled by the level of anger and destruction expressed in some of the protests, we should not be surprised. When one group of people is consistently mistreated, abused, denied equal access to education, justice, economic opportunity despite years, decades, of peaceful attempts to bring about change, there comes a point when frustration turns to rage. The brutal and incomprehensible death of George Floyd was and is an affront to all of us. In light of the fact that this was not an isolated incident but another in a long line of similar violent incidents (not to mention the thousands of non-violent indignities visited upon people of color), this was a match on a powder keg. As Christians we do not condone violence, looting or indiscriminate destruction, and believe that those doing these things should be held responsible. But even more so, those who would violate any other human being’s rights and life must be stopped and held accountable, and steps must be taken to prevent such acts.

So how do we respond? What do we do? To do nothing does not feel like a faithful option to me. I would suggest several things:

1) **Pray.** We must turn to God with prayers asking for forgiveness and peace.

2) **Become educated.** In order to better understand why this is happening we should be informed. We have created a list of books, podcasts and movies; both Christian and secular, to help us understand the history, depth and power of racism and discrimination in our country. You can find this list [here](#). You may not agree with everything in these resources but it is important that we love the Lord with all of heart, soul and mind. Being open to new ideas and perspectives is a first critical step if healing is to take place.

3) **Reach out across the lines.** We all have in our circle of contacts people of a different race. Reach out and ask about their impressions and listen with compassion.

4) **Reach out to men and women in the police force.** These are brave and heroic people who in some circles are being vilified by the actions of a few. Please make sure you reach out and let them know you are praying and are concerned for them.

5) **Find meaningful ways to engage in addressing the problems and working for solutions.** APC will be putting together a task force to explore how we can create more opportunities for our congregation to work across racial and socio-economic lines to forge deeper and meaningful relationships and be a small part of the healing that God desires for all of His children. But don't wait for us. Get involved. Respond in whatever way God is calling you to respond. Attend some of the peaceful gatherings that are being planned around the area including one here in Allentown this **Sunday, June 7 at 11am** beginning in our parking lot (more information to come). Write letters to those in power insisting on systemic changes to our criminal justice system. Volunteer with organizations working on these deep and complex issues. Find a way that makes sense to you to be part of the solution. Enoch Smith Jr., our Director of Worship and Music, responded by creating a powerful piece of music. You can watch and listen [here](#).

We have an opportunity to address an issue that has plagued us for far too long. Let us work together to create a world based upon the vision of the Kingdom; to settle for anything less is wrong.

Growing In Christ,

Stephen