**Mountain View Community Church**

**A reasoned response to racism**

Racism reminds us of ugly images and evil actions taken by one person or a group of people on another person or group. There has never been a place for prejudice or racism to exist anywhere in God’s church. The Apostle Paul addressed the issue repeatedly. One such instance is found in the letter to the Colossian church:

Colossians 3:5-14 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

God has identified the problem and in His all-knowing and all-wise character also provided the only real solution to hatred and violence resulting from racism. There are a number of aspects to racism we should take a moment to consider.

**This is not about politics; it is about people**

When we become aware of racism, we must remember that such acts are about real people. This would be a good time to lay aside politics, which seem to be a distraction rather than of benefit and focus on people. It does not matter who you voted for in the last election, it does not matter if you are a democrat or republican or libertarian, racism is wrong. The hatred and violence in any racial incident have no place in our churches or in our nation.

We serve a God who delights in the dignity and worth of all people. The Bible envisions a unified church “*from every nation, tribe, people and language*” (Revelation 7:9). Peter writes to churches everywhere in 1 Peter:

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light* (1 Peter 2:9).

That “chosen race” that Peter writes about is not an ethnic group. It is the Church. Our primary identity is not our nationality, our gender, our ethnic background, or our politics, but Jesus Christ.

**We should not be shocked; we, however, must be grieved**

For some people, it is hard to believe that flagrant racism could exist today, but both the bible and global history remind us of the depth of human sin. We should not be shocked, but we should be grieved; grieved enough to join in God’s healing and renewing work in our world. This collective grief should drive us to prayer and to action.

**Racism is not about “them,”; it includes “us”**

It is much easier to recognize the sin in others than in ourselves. Outrageous acts perpetrated against any person are evil. Such acts become obvious when placed against the backdrop of racism. Outrageous hate-filled language and crimes are relatively easy to identify as evil. Harder to identify are the more subtle forms of prejudice that exist in ourselves. Focusing on obvious forms of racism could inadvertently cause us to ignore our own prejudices. We see people engaged in racist behaviors on the news and we believe that, compared to them, we are not racists.

Before we engage in self-congratulations for being good people, we need to do some ruthless self-examination. Ask yourself these questions and resolve to be honest in your assessment. Do I ever make judgements or assumptions based on skin color? Do my friendship circles include people different than me? Do I ever contribute to stereotypes and division? Have I been active in reconciliation? This would be an excellent time to pray the prayer of David from Psalm 139:

*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* (Psalm 139:23-24).

If we hope to bring lasting change, it must start with us as individuals. Jesus was clear that we are called to first examine ourselves before claiming the “moral high ground” and condemning others:

*3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.* Matthew 7:3-5

**God calls us to not be reactive; instead, we are called by God to be redemptive**

We cannot depart form the character of God and react with misdirected rage. Instead we are called to respond with resolute redemption. As people debate proper responses to racism, we must first condemn racism and bigotry. We must call it for what it is: sin! Racial injustice is incompatible with the promise of the gospel. But posting strong words on your Facebook page or standing on a street corner holding a sign is not enough.

We must do the hard work of confessing, forgiving, and peacemaking. We must be intentional about extending invitations and sharing meals with people. We must do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly. We must pray that the sin of racism be purged from our own thinking. We must model the love of God to everyone and share the redemptive person of Jesus. We must pray for leaders everywhere to experience the wisdom and reconciliation that God calls everyone to.

What are some practical steps we can take as individuals and churches to address the problem of racism? Below are some Biblical responses:

* Proclaim the reconciliation of God to all people through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ
* Address areas of prejudice within our own circle of relationships
* Confront, with truth and grace, any evidence of racism you encounter in yourself or others
* Engage in civic discourse and action (e.g. conversations, voting, ballot measures) that align with the revealed will of God
* Above all, pray for individuals, leaders, governments, and organizations engaged with the problem of racism. Pray for wisdom, grace, justice, and reconciliation.

The Apostle Paul, a member of a persecuted minority himself, by the inspiration of God’s Spirit calls us to the highest response possible, *“over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”*

Blessings,

Pastor’s Eric and Jason