



I read an article this week titled, “Why White Pastors Need to Start Preaching on Race.” The author said, “For most evangelical white pastors, racial reconciliation hasn’t been a primary emphasis on their teaching.” I agree with that. At our staff meeting this week not one hand went up that said that they remember hearing a sermon on race. Of course we can all recall that the subject has surfaced as we have studied scripture, but they couldn’t recall a specific sermon on race. Why? Is it because white Christians don’t feel the sting of prejudice? Not that all white evangelicals are insensitive; it just may be that they are not in the proximity to racial injustice.

My prior church in the Upper Midwest was 90% white. I remember at one of our leadership meetings we talked about the minority populations moving into our community and that we had better get ahead and figure out how to connect with this new ministry opportunity. It was a stimulating conversation, but it all began with something someone said that I don’t think he meant as a joke. He said, “We already are multi-ethnic here pastor.” Why would you say that, I asked, we are 90% white? He thought for a second and said, “Well, we have both Norwegians and Swedes in our church. And after 150 years we are finally starting to get along.”

We all laughed but it triggered in us an uncomfortable discussion on race and the church, and coming to grips with our own subtle racist thoughts. We were confronted with our own passive racism to want what we want when we want it, and that we are convinced our Eurocentric way of doing the church was the right way. Don’t get me wrong, we were all in for helping churches made up of other ethnicities and supporting them, but we were very comfortable with our heritage and our homogeneous congregation. Here is the thing: Our comfortable position could not be defended by Scripture, and we knew it. Sure, this Scandinavian congregation could continue the way it was; I guess we had that freedom, but was it God’s desire to display something more through us? Here is a scripture that I have been leaning on as I prepared our talk today. *“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).

So how do we define racism? Racism is a belief that distinguishes by quality or value one race above another. Racism includes the social exclusion, or judgment upon, or the segregating of, an individual group based on racial differences, which always includes physical appearance and genetic structure that is hereditary and unchangeable. It comes out in propaganda that asserts the superiority of one race over another. It seeks to maintain a

supposed purity of a race. It comes out in prejudice. Prejudice is a preconceived and unreasonable judgment or opinion marked by suspicion, fear, or hatred. It comes out as racial dominance. Any activity by individuals or institutions that treat human beings in an inequitable manner because of color.

Here are some things we can agree on: Racism is a sin. Racism denies the gospel. It involves a failure to love as Christ has loved. Paul rebukes Peter for his prejudice when he separated himself and would not eat with Gentiles. Peter needed to learn that the Gospel he accepted had transcended any national, cultural, historical, economic, language or racial barrier put up on earth.

Racism is idolatry. Racism finds its strongest identity and security to be grounded in a person’s race, or heritage, or culture, or earthly family. A Christian’s identity is to be found in God alone, the creator, redeemer and sanctifier who says all people of every race are created of equal and great value in God’s image.

Racism is murder. The sixth commandment is “you shall not kill.” To hate your brother is in violation of this commandment. Even if we don’t literally kill, when we commit our thoughts to anger, hatred, revenge we are as if we are committing murder according to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. But we also violate when we refuse to have thoughts of love and compassion and generosity toward those different from us.

Racism corrupts the doctrine of creation. God created men and women in His image, in the image of God He created them. Since all human beings are descendants of the one race of Adam there is only one human race in God’s mind. So for us to view one race as superior to another is to deny the doctrine of creation.

Racism minimizes the total and widespread effect of the fall on all humanity. One group of people didn’t fall farther than any other. Remember back from Romans, “There is no difference,” Paul says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

We are not here to argue against natural associations we have with other people like us such as our friends, co-workers, or neighbors. I remember back in the 80’s and 90’s we started new churches based on reaching certain ethnic groups. We thought that churches would be healthier if they were formed with people only like themselves. It was a strategy used to plant churches. It wasn’t wrong to have white congregations, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and African American, or Arab congregations. But looking back it wasn’t all that right either. Something was missing. Looking back, I think it had the danger of being an excuse to remain segregated as the church. It could have been

allowing a passive racism to be ignored that should have been surfaced and dealt with.

There is a wonderful quote from John Hope Franklin in his book, *The Color Line*. "There is nothing inherently wrong with being aware of color as long as it is seen as making distinctions in a pleasant, superficial and unimportant manner. It is only when character is attached to color when ability is measured by color, and when privilege is tied to color, and a whole galaxy of factors that spell the difference between success and failure in our society are attached to color – it is only when such considerations are attached to color that it becomes a deadly, dreadful, denigrating factor among us all."

I had never heard the term White Privilege until two years ago. I didn't understand the term. Then a white brother at CPC gave me an article on White Privilege. It started out by saying white guys are going to be confused about this. Well, I was confused so I guess I was a normal white guy. But as I read further the article made me uncomfortable. As I read further I felt offended. What do you mean I'm privileged? My white dad and my wife's white dad worked their tails off. Both were abandoned by their fathers. Both with all their flaws kept their own families intact. Both had their problems, but they overcame and provided. They were successful not because of their color but because of their hard work and their faith. Both came to know the Lord and they knew God's grace in their lives.

But as I read further I began to see that I was oblivious to my own whiteness. And I was oblivious to how my whiteness can intrude on my understanding of people of color, and how they can perceive the world quite differently than I do. In my world....

- I have never been turned down from a job because of my race.
- If I choose to move, I can be pretty sure that I can rent or purchase housing in an area that I can afford in which I would want to live, and my neighbors would be pleasant and welcoming to me.
- I can turn on the TV or go to my news sites and see people of my race widely represented.
- I can use checks, credit cards, or cash, and get a loan and not count on my skin color to work against me in the appearance of financial reliability.
- I can walk alone in my neighborhood, or shop alone and pretty well be assured that I won't be followed or harassed.
- If a traffic cop pulls me over, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
- I can easily buy posters, greeting cards, postcards, dolls and toys for my children featuring people of my race well represented.

The classic book most of my generation read in school, our whiter schools anyway, was Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The protagonist Atticus Finch states, "You never really understand a

person until you consider things from his point of view.... Until you climb in his skin and walk around in it."

Why do our secular educational institutions embrace Darwin, a known racist? I remember a text book from junior high that showed evolutionary theory from monkey to man. It showed each of six figures getting progressively more upright and progressively more white skinned. It was totally racist propaganda coming off as science. It was implied that the lighter the skin the more superior. So what role does the church play in this subject of race?

We don't have time to be thorough this morning, but we must acknowledge that the church has done some wonderful things over its history to combat racism. We have great respect for William Wilberforce who single-handedly took on the racist slave trade in the 18th century and eventually led to slavery becoming illegal in the British Empire. American abolitionists were heroes to call for Emancipation and led the fight to defeat slavery in the 19th century. In the 20th century we are continually inspired by the words and actions of Martin Luther King and the peaceful civil movement that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

When our President was elected I heard hopeful news from commentators announcing that we may now have become a post-racial country. We know that the United States is not a post-racial country. And the church has been little help on this. 11:00 am on Sunday mornings remains the most segregated hour of the week.

In my research I learned that a very well known Christian denomination as late as 1845 was saying that missionaries can own slaves. And it wasn't until 150 years later in 1995 that a public repentance was issued for that sin of racism. Why as late as 1968 in a well-known Christian denomination, only 11% of their churches allowed non-whites to be members? I want to be careful here because the issue of race, especially in our context, is not only a black and white issue. There is a long history of antagonism between African American communities and Latino communities and Asian communities and White communities and Arab communities. In particular there is antagonism between White and Asian communities that isn't talked about broadly in the church.

In 2013 an open letter to the Christian Evangelical church, signed by a wide array of Asian-American scholars and prominent Asian Christian voices, complained of numerous racially offensive incidents in evangelical circles. They write, "We have imagined and hoped for such a different future for the church, one in which racial harmony would not be an illusion, but a tangible reality. However, as a number of incidents in recent years demonstrate, the evangelical church is still far from understanding what it truly means to be an agent of racial reconciliation. In particular, the Asian American segment of the church continues to be misunderstood, misrepresented, and misjudged. We write this letter to collectively assert that which continues to trouble us about the church's treatment of Asian Americans and Asian culture, and to ask the church to make a more concerted effort to

both understand and address the concern of its Asian American brothers and sisters."

So why did God allow races to form? The Bible teaches that the human race comes from Adam and Eve. Back in the garden there was no such thing as race separation. Humanity remained one race in Adam. Then in Genesis 10 we read about the flood and after the flood Noah's sons went out again to populate the earth. After the flood we were still one race in Noah. But soon after we read of clans and the concept of nations forming. They still spoke one language. But since all humanity was corrupted by sin, an ugly pride and self-worship began to grow and they went to erect a tower in honor of themselves and what they can accomplish without God in their lives.

In Genesis chapter 11, God confused their language so they wouldn't unite against Him and that tower became known as the Tower of Babel. God cursed them with a confusion of language that led them to further separate as nations and races. And under this curse at Babel, because of their sin of pride, the sin of racism took root. Then in Genesis chapter 12, God promised Abraham that he would restore his blessing on all nations through his descendant. He tested Abraham's faith by having Abraham almost sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah, as a foreshadowing of what Christ's future sacrifice would do to reconcile people to God and to one another. Racial reconciliation can only happen through Jesus Christ. It is God's wisdom to redeem his people from their sins through his grace to forgive, redeem and restore a new race in Christ.

Let's look at our passage this morning. It's a beautiful picture from the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 11-22. In the first century, most everyone who read this letter would know the reality that people were living separated from God and alienated from each other.

When Paul wrote this, the most significant wall of separation was the one that separated Jews from Gentiles. They wouldn't even eat together. There was a real wall in Jerusalem that surrounded the Jewish Temple. It was about 4 feet high made of stone. It divided the outer court of the Temple, known as the court of Gentiles, from the inner court. A number of gates were placed on that wall. At each gate there was a posted sign warning in Greek and Latin that no foreigner may enter. Anyone caught doing so could be punished with death. You may be asking why are we talking about the temple? We are because it helps us to understand what it means to be viewed as lessor and be discriminated against. These people who were excluded were just like us. They were us!

### **What We Once Were: Alienated from God**

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and

**foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world (verses 11-12).**

Whether we believe it or not, this was all of our condition. Separated instead of integrated, excluded instead of included, and foreigners instead of friends. No matter what the color of our skin, we can all recall wanting to be part of a group and were left out. We don't get picked or invited. We remember those that excluded us and we maybe saw their pride, their ignorance, their self-importance, their feelings of superiority, and in reality their sin.

There are a lot of things that the bible tells us to forget, like wrongs others do to us, but not this. Paul is saying, remember there was a wall there. You were Christ-less, homeless, friendless, hopeless and racist. Why is this so important to remember? Because it's only if we remember the pain of exclusion we'll we be able to appreciate the grace of God to include us, and that will motivate us to include others who are in Christ.

### **What He's Done: Breaking Down the Wall**

**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ (v. 13).**

How were we brought near? It happened by being "in Christ Jesus" and "by the Blood of Christ." The idea is that the breaking down of the wall was through a violent and sacrificial act. God paid a price to bring us out of separation.

**For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (verses 14-18).**

God not only reconciled us to him, but also reconciled us to one another. This means that salvation is more than just believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. Salvation also means union and reconciliation with one another including those of different races. Christians are now a new race of men and women because they are in Christ. And this new race becomes a new society, a place to belong.

### **What We've Become: A New Society**

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too

**are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (verses 19-22).**

We already heard about the old temple. This new temple is different. The foundation is the Apostles and the Prophets who gave us the written Word of God. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the strong foundation. What unites us is that we are being built together as a new temple that continues to grow larger and more beautiful as we are joined together in this new place as a new race where God lives. This new race comes from the wisdom of God, not from the sinful heart of man.

If people are going to know God the place they will see him is in the church. The only way for our society to become racially reconciled through the church is when the church lives like the church is supposed to live. That is why we must rebuke racism in every form in the church so we will truly be the visible new race and God will be glorified as the one who truly reconciles us with one another.

There is absolutely no room for subtle racism and indifference in the church because it keeps the church from being the church. Remember, we were one race in the first Adam, but now we are re-united as one race in the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who fought and died to make this happen for the glory of God.

Will we be one race in the future? As Jerome read to us this morning. *"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'"* (Rev. 7:7-9).

Do you see where we are headed? Right now today we are to be a picture of Revelation chapter 7 in our world, set free from the things that divide us and separate us so the world can see the wisdom of God to use his church to bring real reconciliation. So to bring this home, we need to ask ourselves this question: What can we do to help tear down walls of hostility so that the world sees a more diverse and united church to display the wisdom of God here on earth?

**Preach the Gospel.** CPC is a pretty ethnically diverse church. But ethnic diversity is not racial reconciliation. How do we become reconciled to God and to one another? How are we set free from our prejudice? It's taking into our heart the sheer power of the gospel that dismantles barriers. It's by coming to the foot of the cross. It's receiving God's love and acceptance and then loving and accepting those who are not like you but have become your brother or sister because of Christ.

**Prayer and self-examination.** May God give us the courage to look inside our own hearts and repent of that subtle prejudice and racism that grip us. When God reveals truth about our racism we are to simply take responsibility for our own racism and humble ourselves and confess our sin. God may then lead you to ask another for forgiveness and reconcile. Let God lead you. He will.

I guess we can all sit back and conclude that we are post-racial, that there is no prejudice or racism in us. We are free to do that but I want to challenge you to really examine your heart and come clean. Maybe you are just limping along performing outwardly and trying to look like a unified and reconciled Christian but inside your heart may be hardening, you may be thinking condescendingly toward those who are different from you. This sin can be subtle. Maybe you are catching yourself staring at those who are not like you when they are not looking. Maybe you find yourself bitter, telling yourself under your breath that those not like you changed your world for the worse.

I guess we can go on quietly practicing our subtle racism and under our breath thank God that we are not like them, whoever **them** is. We are free to walk out today and not change a thing. But I believe with all my heart that the gospel compels us to change. Our broken world, which has no clue how to deal with racism, compels us. Our unity in Christ compels us. Eternity compels us. And Revelation chapter 7 calls us. If we're not willing to take on this labor of love and bring reconciliation to the world, our generation, our kids, will have to wait until Revelation 7 to actually see reconciliation. And our generation will miss out on seeing the manifold wisdom of God displayed in the church.

If we are going to be a part of making this right on earth, it's going to cost us something. There are some of us here this morning that have been sitting on our hands regarding this scourge of racism. We have been given eyes and ears from the Lord to recognize racism and we have plugged and covered our eyes and God is gently saying to you, "lovingly confront this sin when you see it and then tell them what I did to change your heart."

We may have a modern-day William Wilberforce or Harriet Tubman or Martin Luther King Jr. right here this morning. Each of us, "right now" through our union with Christ, has become instruments to reveal the manifold wisdom of God. I pray that every one of us will be found to be faithful instruments to demonstrate God's glory to bring this beauty of our racial diversity into a beautiful racial unity and into beautiful reconciliation. And you know why? So God will be glorified and so the world may see.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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