

WE BELIEVE THERE IS HOPE FOR A BETTER WORLD

Listen, Learn, Act

As persons called to love one another as God has loved us, we proclaim our commitment to speak with one voice against acts of racism and systematic racism. We stand with those who are targets of racist ideologies and actions. As Christ followers, God compels us to exorcize the sins of injustice, racism in church and society and within ourselves as individuals and households.

Before we move to close today, I wanted to follow up with you regarding the Faith and Race message from June 7th 2020 entitled Engage. To more fully explain to you how we wish to engage as a faith community and respond to the important topics of race, justice, and the possibility for all to flourish as Americans, Pastor Liz and I wanted to share with you our hopes today.

Some of you have been frustrated that we have not addressed this topic forcefully enough over the last several weeks, we understand this frustration and apologize for what seems like a lukewarm response, we ask for your grace. We are working to create long term strategies for equipping of the people so that this is not just a momentary response but rather an opportunity for long term change in us and from us for the world around us.

Some of you are frustrated that we have already said too much, and even now you may feel exasperated that we are again taking the time in worship to address this issue. I want to caution that to remain silent on topics of injustice that deeply affect many in our congregation and the communities we live in, is to risk the perception of indifference. And consequently, to misrepresent the message of Jesus. It is God's word that tells us to mourn with those who mourn, it tells us to love mercy, to act justly and to love our neighbors as Christ has loved us. So then to ignore the desperate cry of so many would be to ignore the call of scripture. We are simply people who long to love our God and love our neighbors, therefore we want to engage this conversation in a meaningful loving way.

We hear the pain of our black and brown brothers and sisters and the ethic of love outlined in the new testament demands that we stand alongside people who are in pain. The Bible also calls us to speak against injustice where we see it, and these injustices have been happening in our midst for far too long. The question we want to answer is this, how will we equip ourselves to be able to be followers of Jesus in a world marked by strong division. How will we be a people of hope, and unity and grace, and greater justice in a world that is crying out for these things?

We are going to need to remember that there are many things that may serve to divide us, but we know that our deeper identity, the identity found when we bow to the Cross of Christ, is what unites us with our brother or sister who holds a different perspective. We must allow our worldviews to be shaped by our faith heritage and the scripture, rather than the other way around. Our allegiance should never be to the right or left but from above.

With all that said, here are some brief statements, convictions, and values, for what we are for and what we are against. These should not be foreign to you since each week we affirm these

convictions in various ways, through the creeds of our church, the stories we share, and the music we sing.

We affirm the inherent dignity, worth, value and potential that is placed in every image bearer of the divine, this image-bearing is present and precious in every human being; regardless of race ethnicity gender, age, immigration status, tribe, tongue or nationality. Part of what it means to love god is to love all the image bearers that he created.

We therefore reject any agenda or effort to destroy that image in any person, whether through racial injustice and prejudice, or other forms of murder, cruelty and subjugation, we stand opposed to racism in all of its form, we reject white supremacy, and stand against any system that supports it in any form. We also recognize that while many of the civil rights movement in American history has been explicitly Christian, the church has often been complicit in the creation and the maintenance of these very systems. Our desire is to be a courageous church who would stand boldly against such evil and seek redemption where this brokenness exists.

We affirm that God grants civil authority and their civil servants ideally for human flourishing and for the peaceful advance of his gospel wherever possible. The scriptures teach us that God grants measured authority and responsibility for agents of the state to uphold good and restrict evil. We therefore recognize our law enforcement officers and first responders as bearers of that responsibility. We want to join them in their stated desire to serve and protect, even though elements of that system make that desire difficult or at times impossible. We recognize the vulnerability and the dignity of those in our body who serve in those roles. Therefore, we reject any efforts to destroy those image bearers and at the same time we desire our policing to be fair and just and devoid of any type of brutality and corruption.

So here is how we would like you to engage with us we want to be a congregation that listens, learns, and acts. We are setting up opportunities to listen. It begins with our Cohort conversations next month where we will listen to stories from within our own congregation. We are compiling all types of resources for you and your family to learn and explore, and we are organizing action plans for you to join with others to make a difference in our community.

Check back often as we seek to do what our Lord taught us to pray for to seek God's kingdom first. We believe there is hope for a better world and that that hope is found in the promise of God's kingdom and our call to be agents of change. Thank you for your faithful support for Bethany and for the mission and vision to multiply blessings across our congregation, community and beyond.

Pastor Jon Bustard and Pastor Liz Dieseth Pearl