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Dear Church Family,

Warm pastoral greetings! My spirit has been grieving for days over the tragic death of George Floyd, for the incomprehensible pain it has caused his family and our nation. I continue to pray for God's comfort and care for the Floyd family. I have been intentionally slow to speak, being prayerful, and waiting upon the LORD.

Like so many, watching the video stirs up all kinds of emotions. The devaluing of human life is deeply disturbing and troubling. Each life is precious and valuable to GOD. The core message of the gospel is proof – "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

In Psalm 139:13-17, David writes about the value of human life, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book, they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!"

I know those reading this letter believe every person is wonderfully created by God, are in His thoughts, and are priceless in our Heavenly Father's eyes.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth...'" (Genesis 1:26-28).

Every human being is made in the image and likeness of God – every life! The Bible says, "God is love" (I John 4:8). Since we have been made in His image and likeness, we have the potential in our DNA to love each other, regardless of the color of someone's skin.

In God's plan, the Bible is clear that there is **NO PLACE** for racism, bigotry, nor hatred. Each person you interact with today, each one you pass on the road or in the store, every single man, woman, and child is a unique creation of God. He loves them and you with a divine everlasting love so strong we cannot possibly comprehend it. I John 4:20 says, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

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While our rebellion and our sin create a divide between us and the ONE who created us, and therefore, a division between us and others—God has a plan to heal the divide and draw us back to Him. That plan was and is Jesus Christ, who heals and changes our hearts **and gives us the ability to love God and others**. “In Christ,” the middle wall of partition has been broken down between God and us, and between us and others. There is no Jew, no Gentile, no black, white, yellow, or red. However, until we come to recognize JESUS as the Prince of Peace and receive His love in our hearts, the racial tensions we are experiencing will increase and intensify.

Reading the Bible from the call of Abraham to the Samaritan woman at the well, you will find out how the God of Israel has shown Himself to be the God of all tribes and nations.

In Revelation 7:9-10, John is given a vision of the throne of God, writing, “Behold, a great multitude which no one could number, **of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Racial hatred and discrimination are more than just glaring social injustices. They are also a direct affront to God and an insult to the entire human race. Racism runs directly counter to everything the Gospel represents. Jesus died on the cross to redeem men and women of every race, color, and ethnic background. His resurrection affirms the infinite value of all people, regardless of nationality and race.

The LORD “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that **any** should perish but that **all** should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Is prejudice and discrimination still a force in American culture? To what extent do our laws help or hinder the quest for a just society? How does our faith in God and the Bible inform our understanding of these issues? Does the way we discuss theology and communicate our faith bring us closer to or farther from racial unity?

These are important and often somewhat uncomfortable questions for us to be asking. But regardless, to talk through these issues in the context of Christianity – in a spirit of humility, unconditional love, and respect – is critically important and beneficial. The apostle Paul wrote, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4).

Rather than telling Christians to ignore the discrimination against Gentiles, the apostle Paul addressed it head on: “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him” (Romans 10:12).

It is time for the “body of Christ” to unite – to rise and shine and be the healing influence in the world we are meant to be. The need becomes the call. Politicians cannot resolve the racial tension gripping our nation, for racism and hatred are issues of the heart. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers...” (Matthew 5:9).

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The Church is called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit – to be peacemakers. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Summarizing what Martin Luther King Jr. once said, ***when it came to issues of justice, the church was often the taillight rather than the headlight in society.*** By that, he meant that the church often followed along after changes in the racial status quo were already taking place in different arenas, from politics to entertainment to corporations, and that is what we often see throughout U.S. history.

Racial and ethnic hatred is a sin, and the church needs to label it as such, being a strong voice of influence, leading out front (in the forefront) and not from behind. Jesus told His disciples to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39); and in reply to the question “Who is my neighbor?” He responded with a pointed parable about a good Samaritan, a member of a despised race (Luke 10:25-37).

I respect and support a person’s first amendment right to peacefully protest on behalf of George Floyd’s honor and memory with the hope of addressing and making progress toward resolving race tensions. I pray for their safety and for their voices to be heard. But the ***lawlessness*** that we are experiencing in cities around our nation and right here in Rochester, is EVIL, and has no place. These destructive actions are demonically influenced. These violent riots drown out the peaceful voices who are hurting and longing for healing.

Precious church family, **LOVING GOD** and **LOVING PEOPLE** are always right. Only the supernatural love of God can change hearts in a lasting way and replace hatred and indifference with heaven’s love and compassion.

In my spirit, I have sensed that the devil and his demonic forces are going to try to divide Christians. This is not the first time I have expressed this, PLEASE be on guard. He is using the coronavirus to divide, and now the racism tensions.

One of Jesus’ final prayers for us was that we would be one (John 17:22). He prayed this at the Last Supper just before He went out to suffer and die for us. As such, Jesus highlights that a chief aspect of His work on the Cross is to overcome the divisions intensified by Satan. Some argue that the Greek root of the word “diabolical” (diabolein) means to cut, tear, or divide.

The devil’s work of division starts within each one of us as we experience many contrary drives – some noble and creative, and some sinful and destructive. So often, we struggle within and feel torn apart, much as Paul describes in Romans chapter 7:18-19: “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” This is the work of the devil, to divide us within. And as Paul lays out in Romans 8, the chief work of the Lord is to establish within us the unity of soul and body, in accordance with the unity of His truth.

And of course, the devil’s attack against our inner unity, spills out into many divisions among us externally. So many things help drive this division, and the devil surely taps into them all: anger, past hurts, resentments, fears, misunderstandings, selfishness, mistrust, pride, and arrogance. There is also the impatience that we so easily develop regarding those who do not agree with us (have a different opinion).

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Paul writes, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Much love and care,

Pastor Pat