

Hello, This is Pastor Matt Woods, Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in New Albany, Indiana and this is the weekly update on June 1, 2020

“I Don’t Have the Words But I Can’t Stay Silent”

These are the words that were posted on Instagram by our friend, Bob Lenz up in Wisconsin. Images of George Floyd’s death in Minneapolis have brought about a wide range of emotions all over the country. I just don’t have the words to define what I see in the death of George Floyd nor do I have the words to define the destruction that has followed by angry protestors. To be honest I have been thinking about this a lot in the last few days. It is heart-breaking to see the loss of life and the damage that has come as a result. No matter what angle this has all has been looked at I can’t seem to find anything constructive about any of it. Once again when I am faced with what I don’t know I turn to what I do know—that which is written in the Word of God. This is what I offer for us today.

God Values All Human Life and Does Not Show Favoritism

First, God values all human life and does not distinguish human beings the way that the sinful nature does. God so loved the world means that if you are human being on this planet God loves you in Jesus. We all remember Acts 10. Peter is sent to a Gentile man named Cornelius. Normally, Jews would not associate with Gentiles but the Lord commanded Peter to go. In the end Peter learns from the Lord an important truth about people different then ourselves and therefore makes a very bold statement for his day in Acts 10:34. “Now I truly understand that God does not show favoritism.” Favoritism takes many forms but God forbids them all.

James 2 is very clear that favoritism is inconsistent with God’s character, inconsistent with the Gospel, and completely out of line with our faith in Jesus. Verse 8-9 tells us, ⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.” To show favoritism is to oppose the Lord and commit sin. Any act of favoritism means someone is going to mistreated. Any act of favoritism places self above God. Favoritism is opposed to grace, makes forgiveness much harder, and sows division.

In contrast Jesus encourages us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus encourages us to use our authority and our God-given gifts for the benefit of others—to those much has been given much will be expected (Luke 12:48). We are to speak up for the weak and remain humble. This is in fact what Jesus does for us on the cross. Jesus Himself prayed for the Gentile Roman soldiers even as they were nailing Him to the cross when He prayed, “Father, Forgiven them.”

What’s more we have a view of heaven in John’s vision in Revelation 7 that should inspire us to remember we are all welcome into the kingdom. Remember what John saw. ⁹ 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.” Not only are there countless people but we are still culturally different and welcomed that way for all eternity. The People in heaven retain their cultural diversity. God loves all the variety. Heaven is not monochrome.

In Your Anger Do Not Sin

Secondly, Ephesians 4:25-27 to speak truthfully. But it also says, ²⁶ ‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a

foothold.” Recent days, remind me that sinful human beings cannot handle anger. Anger too quickly turns to rage like a spark in a dry forest. I can’t see anything positive in anger. Too much anger ruins relationships, erodes trust, wears people out, and is, as we have seen in the riots very destructive. Anger comes too easy to the sinful nature.

The hard work for Christians is spelled out in Ephesians 4:31-32: “³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

In and through angry frustration a man has died unnecessarily and people’s lives are being ruined by destruction of property and theft in protest. Perhaps the destruction of property and theft are simply opportunistic. If that is true then I am even more sad at the loss of George Floyd. In any case one does not correct the other. Jesus did not come to destroy people or property but to save us and redeem His creation in the cross and the Resurrection. The grace of God in fact destroyed Jesus on the cross for our sin. His life was lost so that we may have life in full measure.

Slow Down

Finally, I go back to James 1:19. “¹⁹ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

James encourages us to slow down. Be slow to speak—you might put your foot in your mouth and have to wash it down in humility. You may cause someone to be angry unnecessarily by your lack of understanding. I know I have. I have had others try to talk to me before and I was so riled up that I just wouldn’t listen only later to find out that I really didn’t understand what was really going on? Be slow to speak. Listen first to all that is going on. Also, be slow to become angry. As we already have said anger usually doesn’t take us anywhere positive. Slowing things down within ourselves allows our pulse to slow, our tempers to calm, and gives our thinking time to catch up to our emotions. When we are calmed down then an intelligent conversation has a better chance.

Use Your Words to Build Up

Lastly, use your words very carefully. Again James 3 reminds us that our words are very powerful. Proverbs 18:21 tell us that the “tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” If we are to be salt and light our words should be flavored with grace. It is wise to watch what we say. Words are best when they build up and encourage. If the Gospel is upon our lips then all the troubles that plague our culture with division have a greater chance at finding healing as well as wise justice. I certainly pray for such things. May the Lord bless us in and through the Holy Spirit to be wise, listening, impartial, and loving in a time when all we hear is anger, division, and destruction. I can’t think of a better moment to be the Church or to apply God’s love.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look on You with His Favor and give you His peace. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods

John 3:30