

FROM PASTOR MICHAEL:

In recent weeks we have seen a lot devastating news during an already difficult season of life. I spoke to our church about this just two weeks ago. Yet it seems more bad news keeps coming. Many of us have seen the heart-breaking images, videos, and stories emerge from the lives of amazing people like Christian Cooper as he calmly faced blatant racism while in Central Park or the disgusting and unnecessary deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and most recently George Floyd. In these cases we see hatred, racism, abuse of power, and complete disregard for people who are created in the image of God. There was no trial before a jury of peers, only lawless exhibition of power. **JUSTICE MUST BE SERVED!**

And like many of you, I have been confronted with a range of emotions that I'm not sure how to process. I feel angry, raw, broken, discouraged, tired and even defeated. At the same time, I know that I will never be able to fully understand the depth of hurt and pain that I have watched some of my brothers and sisters face unless my daughters one day experience racism and hate because of their race. However, I know my heart breaks because my brothers and sisters' hearts break. I am weeping with my brothers and sisters who are weeping. In addition, my heart also breaks because justice continues to be ignored in so many of these cases and this has gone on for generations. We must "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with [our] God."

These recent events have served to remind me of a few realities. One, as long as there is sin, there will also be a **WAR** we have to fight to see justice served. We have to be willing to fight this battle as long as we have breath in our lungs. Racism, hatred, and bigotry will always exist. At the same time, we must guard against generalizations and stereotypes. Just because there are bad people doing terrible things, there are still **A LOT OF GREAT PEOPLE** who are black, white, and brown who are both civilians and police officers.

Second, we have to fight this battle **TOGETHER**. There are a lot of people that have ideas on how to fight against this level of hatred. Unfortunately, almost all of these plans are still segregated in nature. I hear some say "our black community has to unite," or "white people need to be more woke." While these are both good things, I believe they are not the best. It is time for us to lock arms across racial, cultural, and socioeconomic divides to fight this together. **WE WILL ALWAYS FAIL** if we try to fight division with division. However, **UNITED** we will be able to work towards burying this hatred all while supporting each other when we feel too tired or defeated... and we will!

Third, this will require **A LOT** of dialogue, love, compassion, and **PATIENCE** with each other. We are all bringing different experiences and baggage to the table. We are all coming with different levels of knowledge, understanding, and maturity. But if we are willing to believe at the end of the day we are all fighting for the same outcome even when we make mistakes along the way, we can make a difference today and for the generation to follow. We must be "quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger." Listening should be the reflex, not words or anger.

Finally, the personal resolutions and collective ideas of fighting against injustice and hatred rarely seem to ever get past the talking stage. I am thankful for the community I have in my church and the way we are actively fighting back against systemic racism and hatred. I hope to lock arms with other brothers and sisters in our community and our city in this effort to fight back against injustice, racism, and hatred. My questions are these: Who will join us in this fight? Who is willing to walk with us and help us do it better? Who will lock arms with us in this war that will rage on till Jesus makes all things new?

WILL YOU?