



a gospel-centered anglican church in new york city

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A pastoral letter to Jesus' blood-bought church June 2, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters – you who have been bought and reconciled to each other by the blood of Jesus,

The events of the past few months have been tragic and painful in so many ways. The destruction, uncertainty, and confusion surrounding COVID-19 has consumed so much of our time, energy, and emotions. This disease has upended so much and taken so many lives prematurely. And now this past week, our time, energy, and emotions have been consumed by another disease, one that has plagued humanity since the Fall: racism. This disease, too, has upended so much in the last few days, taken lives prematurely, and subsequently led to violence and deepening hatreds.

Not only has NYC been placed on an unprecedented lockdown since March, but last night (and perhaps for several nights to come) it has now also been put under a largely unprecedented curfew. And it's not only in the past week that racism has once again reared its ugly head in an explicit way in America for all the world to see, but even at the beginning of the COVID crisis, racist attitudes and actions towards Asian-Americans were all too prevalent. Some even in our own church community were on the receiving end of those racist actions. Some of our brothers and sisters are still fearful to venture too far outdoors because of what they experienced, for fear that racist hatred or even violence might be directed their way.

Thus, I'm writing you here today with a sad and heavy heart – a heart that's grieving with and for all those who are grieving, fearful, and frustrated right now. *And* I'm writing with a plea to Jesus' church that Jesus' blood-bought people will always be clear and articulate about the fact that racism isn't only a social issue, it's also a sin issue. The heart that believes one race is more valuable than another is a sinful heart – and that specific sin is called racism. And the behavior that treats one race as more valuable than another is a sinful behavior – and that specific sin is called racism.

Therefore, while we may take different approaches and respond in different ways to the sin of the past week – for example, some of us will see a wisdom and need to peacefully protest, others of us won't; some of us will believe one certain political action should be taken, others of us will support a different course of action. But where Jesus' true church will stand in unity is to identify racism as a sin, together to repent of that sin in our own hearts and behaviors, and to stand together against that sin in whatever form or expression it may be found.

But, even more than that, Jesus' true church will eagerly and faithfully proclaim the good news of Jesus as the only solution to the sin of racism. It's Jesus' death on the cross – His blood for us – that reconciles us not just to God but to others who are very different from us. Think of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. I often use this letter in our membership classes to explain the power of the gospel and the beauty of Jesus' blood-bought people, the church. For in Ephesians 2:13-14 the Apostle Paul speaks to the deep ethnic hatred between Jews and Greeks and applies the gospel, saying, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." (My own head and heart were deeply impacted by this reality when I read a book to which Tim Keller had given the foreword – John Piper's, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian*. So writes Piper, "Only Jesus can bring the bloodlines of race into the single bloodline of the cross and give us peace.")

Just as the gospel was the only solution to the ethnic hatred of Paul's day, so it is the only solution to the racism of our day. And it's particularly in the church where the power and beauty of the gospel should be seen – where what ultimately defines us is not the 'bloodlines' we were born with, but the stunning reality that we have been bought and reconciled by the blood of Jesus. So declares the glorious truth of Revelation 5:9, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals," sing the four living creatures and twenty-four elders to Jesus, "for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."

That's why racism has long been and continues to be one of the great enemies of the gospel. But because of Jesus' blood on the cross, the gospel has already won. In faithful church communities of diverse yet unified people, it continues to win. And on the final day of judgment, it will win.

With that in mind, in these tragic times of disease in all its forms, let's pray, let's repent, let's work, let's love, and let's share the good news of Jesus with others.

With grief and hope,
Keith