

**6.7.20**

**A Plea for the Church and the Nation:**

**Always Seek to Do Good to One Another and to All 1 Thessalonians 5.12-15**

**Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

I am 55 years old, and we are living in some of the most challenging days I've seen in my adult life. I don't remember 1968, when there were days of grief, riots, and civil unrest after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered April 4<sup>th</sup> in Memphis. There was more grief and more hopes were dashed after Bobby Kennedy was murdered barely two months later, on June 6<sup>th</sup> while running for the Democratic nomination for president. There were protests about the war in Vietnam and more violence in Chicago during the Democratic convention. There was a lot to cope with as those of you who lived through it can recall. Now we also have a pandemic which makes 2020 feel like a combination of 1968 and 1918, and hurricane season has begun now. God help us.

Our nation is in deep turmoil and we can't pass over the need to lament and grieve. We need to lament and grieve that more than 110,000 of our fellow citizens have lost their lives to the COVID-19 virus. For each person who died there are family and friends who are grieving the loss of a unique and irreplaceable person. Each person is created in the image of God and no two people are alike. Every life has value, worth, and significance.

We also need to lament and grieve the white supremacy and racism that have permeated and influenced American culture for over 400 years that have contributed to the recent deaths of black people like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. Each of them was also unique and irreplaceable. We need to lament and grieve, and we also need to ask ourselves what we are going to do. What can we do to love our neighbors and demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit? What can we do to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel of love and justice and concern for the poor and those on the margins? What can we do to be better neighbors and citizens and to be part of the solution not part of the problem? Former NFL player Ben Watson wrote this week (CAPITALS are his), *"At its core, RACISM is a SPIRITUAL problem perpetuated by human BELIEF, human ACTIONS and human SILENCE."* There is no middle ground to

stand on. Either we are part of the solution in building a better nation with greater equality and justice for all, or we are part of the problem.

Months ago, I planned to preach today on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 which describes **five clear things** we're to do as Christians that, if we do them, would help our relationships, our church, and our nation. Paul exhorts the church:

12 But we **appeal** to you, brothers and sisters, to **respect those** who labor among you, and **have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you**; 13 **esteem them** very highly in love because of their work. **Be at peace among yourselves**. 14 And we **urge** you, beloved, to **admonish** the idlers, **encourage** the fainthearted, **help** the weak, **be patient** with all of them. 15 **See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all**.

The first thing we're told in this scripture, is **1. Be Respectful 5:12-13** – I feel a little self-conscious telling you to respect the spiritual leaders within your community of faith when I'm one of them. Paul says respect, honor and love your spiritual leaders because we *"have charge of you in the Lord."* I take with the utmost seriousness that you have trusted me to be your pastor for 25 years and that I have *"charge of you in the Lord."* As your spiritual shepherd I'm accountable to God for how I teach, preach, and lead this congregation. It's an overwhelming responsibility. Paul knows part of what makes it difficult to be a spiritual leader is the hard task of having to "admonish" people.

To admonish means, ***"to warn or reprimand someone firmly, or to advise or urge earnestly."*** Paul is admonishing the Thessalonians and us in these verses. I feel the need to admonish myself for not doing more to condemn racism and to work against it in my life. When people are killed like George Floyd, I think of my nephew Gabriel. I think of ministry colleagues like Wesley, Joan, Earl, and Bernie. I think of friends I played sports with in high school like Bruce and Darrell and players we've hosted for the Brewster Whitecaps like Byron, Jordan, and Marty. I think of their parents and the fears and the anger they live with all the time. It makes me sad and mad at the same time. Because I'm a white man I have never had to deal with the same pressures and scrutiny that my friends have lived with every day.

What Paul says is owed to spiritual leaders, is owed to everyone – **Be Respectful**. Treat every person with respect, dignity, value, and worth. The ministry of Jesus and the teaching of the New Testament are seeking to move humanity toward unity and inclusion in the Spirit – there are so many stories of breaking down dividing walls between men and women, Jews and Samaritans, Jews and Gentiles, we have stories of Roman soldiers who demonstrate saving faith, hospitality, and welcome. Ephesians 2:14 tells us Christ, *“is our peace, who has made the two groups one and **has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,**”* Christ has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, between different groups of people. **Be respectful to and of all** is a step we all can take.

**Be Peaceful 5:13** *Be at peace among yourselves.* This phrase connects with the previous one – if we don’t respect the spiritual leaders in our church – pastors as well as lay leaders, there likely won’t be a sense of peace in a congregation. The opposite of being respectful and honoring people is to treat people with contempt or suspicion. This is harmful in churches, communities, and our nation. Whether in a church or any organization, leaders set a tone and communicate a message about what is acceptable and normative and what is not. As a spiritual leader I try to set a tone of love for God and neighbor and serving others in the Spirit of Christ while living out the fruit of the Spirit. I believe that’s what we’re called to do as Christians. Christians shouldn’t treat any person or any group of people with contempt or suspicion. This is something we need to work on as individuals and as a nation. People more frequently are suspicious and contemptuous of people they see as different than themselves; whether that difference has to do with physical appearance, where someone is from, or what someone believes which is why we need the Spirit of Christ to direct our relationships.

We’re called to be **respectful and peaceful**. The third thing Paul says is **Be Helpful 5:14**, *“And we urge you, beloved, to **admonish** the idlers, **encourage** the fainthearted, **help** the weak, **be patient** with all of them.”* This sounds like one of the simplest things in the world, but what a difference it would make if every Christian’s attitude was shaped by the desire to be helpful to others in practical ways. Paul details four ways of helping – **admonishing the idlers** to get back in the game and be

intentional and focused as Christ followers. **Encouraging** those who are faint of heart and ready to quit or give up. **Helping the weak** – supporting them, giving assistance to those who need it in whatever form. **Be patient** with all of them. How are you doing at being patient with people; especial the idle, fainthearted, or weak? What if we used “**Is this helpful?**” as a filter for our speech and our behavior? If it’s not helpful, is it worth it? Is it necessary? Why are we doing it or saying it? **Be Respectful, Be Peaceful, Be Helpful**, the fourth thing Paul says is

**Be Merciful 5:15, See that none of you repays evil for evil.** The murder of George Floyd was evil. This wasn’t a split-second error of judgment in the dark of night. This was an agonizing 8:46 in broad daylight by a police officer who knew he was being filmed on top of an unarmed man whose hands were bound behind his back begging for his life while the other officers did nothing to intervene.

It’s okay to hold two thoughts in our head at once. It’s okay to say I support the vast majority of police who serve and protect their communities like the many fine officers I know and, also to say that police who commit criminal acts should be removed and prosecuted. As Chatham Police Chief Mark Pawlina said, *“The difference with this one is it was so egregious that it just called for chiefs to speak out. There is not a police officer I’ve talked to, whether it be here or anywhere else...that was not shocked by the incident in Minneapolis.”* Brewster Police Chief Heath Eldredge said, *“I was horrified by what I saw. It’s not what we train our officers to do.”* Good police officers need to hold their fellow officers accountable. That would increase the respect and trust of the police in the eyes of all the people they serve.

It’s okay to say I support the peaceful, nonviolent protests to bring about change and to understand people are justifiably angry and enraged by brutality, and at the same time to say that I’m against the assaulters, looters, arsonists, and projectile-throwers engaging in violent and illegal behavior. It’s wrong, however, to portray those rogue actors as the driving force behind the protests. Most protestors are rightly and peacefully demanding that the nation follow the words that are on display on the front of the US Supreme Court building: **“Equal Justice Under Law.”**

A 1967 speech by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Stanford University has been referenced by numerous people in the last week. In the "Other America" speech, King emphasized his support for nonviolent tactics in the *"struggle for freedom and justice"* and expressed his disapproval for riots, referring to them as *"socially destructive."* Here is part of the speech. *"Certain conditions continue to exist in our society, which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has **failed to hear? It has failed to hear** that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. **It has failed to hear** that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And **it has failed to hear** that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo **than about justice, equality and humanity.** And so in a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. **Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention.**"*

The acclaimed African-American writer James Baldwin said in 1968, *"The reason that Black people are in the streets has to do with the lives they are forced to lead in this country. And they are forced to lead these lives **by the indifference and the apathy** and a certain kind of ignorance, a very willful ignorance, on the part of their co-citizens."*

It is incredibly sad that we've learned so little and that we haven't made more progress in the last 50 years. Nelson Mandela said, *"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, **and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love**, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."*

I pray that our country would finally confess our original and continuing sin of racism and repent - and change our mind, our whole way of seeing and living, and turn to justice and truth. **Be respectful, be peaceful, be helpful, be merciful and fifth,**

**Be Good 5:15 always seek to do good to one another and to all.**

I'm grateful for the **Signs of Hope** I've seen in recent days.

Most people condemn the actions of charged ex-officer Derek Chauvin.

Most people criticize arson and looting while supporting peaceful protest.

All feel great sympathy and heartache for George Floyd and his family.

Some photos I saw were signs of hope to me of people **seeking to do good to one another and to all.**

**In Louisville**, young African American men formed a wall to protect a white officer who got separated from his fellow officers.

<https://thegrio.com/2020/05/31/louisville-men-police-officer-protest/>

[In Santa Cruz, California, Police Chief Andy Mills took a knee with the protestors.](#)

<https://www.santacruzsentinel.com/2020/05/30/photo-santa-cruz-police-chief-andy-mills-takes-a-knee-during-protest/>

[Demonstrators & Police Chiefs from Miami Dade County knelt and said a prayer following the death of George Floyd.](#)

<https://twitter.com/FranklinWSVN/status/1266863303978074112/photo/1>

In Flint, Michigan, Johnie Franklin, a lifelong Flint resident and organizer said, *“This is historic. The whole city is out here. Look at this. This is bigger than any one of us. This is for **Ahmaud Arbery. This is for Breonna (Taylor). This is for George Floyd.** This is for anyone who was ever silenced. This is for all of us. We just wanted to be heard. We wanted to have a conversation ... and after today, I know we’ve been heard.”* After more than two hours, the march was led to the Flint Township Police Department, where protesters were met with a line of Flint Township officers and Genesee County Sheriff’s deputies wearing riot gear and holding batons.

Protesters initially sat down to show their peace, and after conversations began between police and protesters, common ground was found. High-fives, hugs, and fist bumps were exchanged. **Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson** took his helmet off and put his baton on the ground as a sign of peace. Swanson and other Flint-area police officers ultimately joined the march. *“This is the way it’s supposed to*

*be — the police working with the community,” Sheriff Swanson said. “When we see injustice, we call it out on the police side and on the community side. All we had to do was talk to them, and now we’re walking with them. ... The cops in this community, we condemn what happened. That guy (Chauvin) is not one of us.”*

Here is a brief clip from this experience in Flint. (we used the first 58 seconds of this video clip): <https://nbc25news.com/news/local/justice-for-george-floyd-protest-in-flint-twp>

***“See that none of you repays evil for evil. Always seek to do good to one another and to all.”*** We need empathy. We need to listen to people who don’t look like us. We need to care about each other. Even those we disagree with and we need to stop demonizing one another. Carlos A. Rodriguez wrote, ***“I see no color” is not the goal. I see your color and I honor you. I value your input. I will be educated about your lived experiences. I will work against the racism that harms you. You are beautiful. Tell me how to do better. That’s the goal.”***

Brian Flores, Head Coach of the Miami Dolphins stated, *“My message to them and anyone else who wants to listen is that **honesty, transparency, and empathy** go a long way in bringing people together and making change. I hope that the tragedies of the last few weeks will open our hearts and minds to a better way of communicating and hopefully create that change.”*

In Fargo, North Dakota, A police officer was holding hands with protest organizers and a sign ‘We are one race... The HUMAN race.’

<https://twitter.com/BaileyHurleyVNL/status/1266819813508349954/photo/1>

Some are posting on Social media. Some are protesting in the streets. Some are donating silently. Some are educating themselves. Some are having tough conversations with family and friends. A revolution has many lanes – be kind to yourself and to others who are traveling in the same direction. And keep your foot on the gas.

Each of us can choose to **be respectful, be peaceful, be helpful, be merciful, be good, share love, and advocate for justice!**

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. How are you coping with the stress of living in these uncertain days? What are you doing to keep yourself spiritually grounded?
2. Of the five things Paul encourages us to do in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15: be respectful, be peaceful, be helpful, be merciful (do not return evil for evil), be good (to one another and to all) – which of these do you find the easiest to do? Which of these is the most difficult? Try to reflect on what you find challenging about living these out.
3. Do you have any friends of a different race or ethnic group? If so, how can you learn more about their lived experience? If not, pray for God to open a door to begin a friendship with someone who doesn't look like you and listen to them share about their life.
4. What have you seen, read, or heard over the last two weeks that you found the most upsetting? Why was it so disturbing?
5. What have you seen, read, or heard over the last two weeks that was to you a sign of hope? Why was it encouraging?
6. What steps can you take to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God so that your community becomes a place where love and justice are increasing?

### **Bibliography**

Below is a Bibliography of resources about racism and I challenge everyone who is a part of Brewster Baptist Church to pick one of them they have not yet read and to read it. If everyone in a small group took up that challenge and then shared what the book was about and what they learned that could be powerful. Having people from our church share from their personal experience would be meaningful as well.

### **Bibliography**

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption by Bryan Stevenson, 2014.

How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi

"So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo



The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America

by Richard Rothstein

"White By Law" by Ian Haney López

"Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice" by Paul Kivel.

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism by Robin DiAngelo and Michael Eric Dyson

The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin 1963.

Montage of a Dream Deferred by Langston Hughes 1954.

The Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison, 1952.

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston, 1937

**Here is a link to an extensive list of Racial Justice Resources with a focus on blacks and whites from the Nauset Interfaith Association:**

<https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/504448b2-d0c5-4508-97dc-a260e4b9ab90/downloads/Resources%20Racial%20Justice%20Bibliography.pdf?ver=1562418995221>

**For Books for children** – go to this link: [https://www.embracerace.org/resources/26-childrens-books-to-support-conversations-on-race-racism-resistance?fbclid=IwAR04nXNAgy4\\_V62ApAIEMusZXxnzi2Dx9TEScmUYnWWWh5xrRipvygjoqlUg](https://www.embracerace.org/resources/26-childrens-books-to-support-conversations-on-race-racism-resistance?fbclid=IwAR04nXNAgy4_V62ApAIEMusZXxnzi2Dx9TEScmUYnWWWh5xrRipvygjoqlUg)