

**RADICAL FAITH****Luke 6:20-38**

**INTRO:** We cannot get away from the news story from the end of May: in the City of Minneapolis an African American man named George Floyd died in a police incident. He did not pull a gun, he didn't even seem violent. Death is more often than not needless, and for George, it was especially so. A police officer effectively strangled him by kneeling on his neck for almost 10 minutes. It is pretty certain the officer had no intention of killing Floyd, but, because of his carelessness, Floyd tortuously died.

You know the story, since it has been relentlessly replayed over the ensuing two and half months. It was instantly portrayed as a racist incident and it was, to a certain extent. It was shameful and horrendous and protest was a natural result because injustice needs to be addressed and remedied. But, as so often happens, the protests spilled over into violence and destruction. It became an excuse for wanton mayhem. This, in turn, gave detractors of the protests an excuse to dismiss the need for valid change in society.

For two months I have watched and listened. I have watched the increasing disintegration of society by the accompanying dissolution of civility and common sense.

I have also listened to and read sermons that decried racism and at the same time stood against violence in the name of stopping systemic racism and injustice.

I've heard the arguments for black lives matter, and I have heard the arguments for all lives matter. I have also heard very little in the way of explanation for what this all means. There has been a lot of noise and little actual communication. There has been a lot of posturing and very little dialogue.

I have not preached on it specifically because I don't believe in hopping on bandwagons. I have never allowed culture to influence my preaching because I believe it is the preacher's Spirit-led calling to instead preach to influence culture. And I do not want you to miss the fact that it is led by the Holy Spirit. To that end I endeavor to address the culture we live in each and every sermon I bring to you.

One way I have determined to do that is my present series from First Corinthians which I began at the beginning of July. Over that time I've frequently pointed out that Corinth was a city that in many ways reflects the culture of present-day North America and Western society. Corinth was an exceedingly sinful place and by looking at how Paul addresses issues there, we can know how to live in and impact our own society which is similarly sinful, for Christ. Even though Paul was writing to Christ Followers over 2000 years ago, he is uncannily adept at addressing our modern culture with its inconsistencies.

But I have felt pressure to address the current presenting issue of racism. This is not because I have had anyone from ABC calling for it. It's been more or less self-imposed – or should say, self-inflicted. It turns out that I was being more influenced by culture than I wanted to admit. I thought since other preachers and church leaders were, I should too. But there was something in my spirit that was resisting it.

My wrestling with this increased over the past weeks, even when I was on vacation.

I finally determined that I must preach a sermon, and I would step away from my series on First Corinthians for a week or two and do so. The problem persisted though. As I returned from vacation last week and continued in prayer and research I still had no peace in my spirit until the Holy Spirit spoke to me in his still small voice on Wednesday and indicated several things:

Racism is not the point.

Black lives matter is not the point.

All lives matter is not the point.

The world can make laws and policies dealing with racism and violence and law and order, but they will never amount to anything without a moral basis. That is where Christ Followers come in.

I know it sounds simplistic, but the issue is sin. Sin cannot be legislated away. Sinful people do what sinful people do. They sin.

So what do Christ followers do? They do what Christ would do. And in order to do what Christ would do we need a radical faith. Not a Republican faith or Democrat faith, and not a liberal faith or a conservative faith. All of these are influenced and even driven by the world. We need a faith that is modeled by the Word of God and the life of Christ. In my sister's words, "*We need to go and find our bracelets that asked 'What Would Jesus Do?'*" because that is what it comes down to.

The Gospels are full of what Jesus said and did. One helpful place that addresses the godly life is The Sermon on the Mount which is found in Matthew 5-7. Luke also has a more compact version of it in Luke 6 and I'm going to read part of it to you and then refer to it as I talk about having a radical faith in a society torn apart by racism, hate, seething anger, and needless political strife.

**(Read Luke 6:2-36)**

**Jesus turns the thinking of society on its head**

- Jesus isn't telling us that poverty is a virtue and wealth is a sin. In short, he is saying that the world's neat little boxes aren't neat or simple.
- What is blessed is what we strive to avoid, but Jesus is saying that being poor doesn't have to be poor in spirit and that hunger will not prevent satisfaction and the world's opinion of us does not change God's truth about us. The world might exclude us, but God has received us with open arms.
- What we strive for is what brings woe. Wealth is good, but more often than not it brings idolatry. The same can be said seeking after worldly pleasure and happiness which prevents us from finding true joy. And seeking after human approval will fall flat, but God's love is eternal.
- In Matthew's Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells his listeners to . . . *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*, Matthew 6:33a. And speaking of listening . . .

**We need to listen to Jesus**

- We know this, right? But do we really believe it? I fear that many people who call themselves Christians listen to their gut rather than what Jesus says. And worse, they listen to what their news source of choice or the internet tells them to believe. In Luke 6:27 Jesus says, "*But to you who are listening . . .*" Peterson paraphrases the verse in a more pointed fashion, "*To you who are ready for the truth, I say this....*" Luke 6:27a (The Message). Are you ready to listen? Are you ready for the truth? You need to be because it's a tall order. It's not easy and it is NOT natural. In vv 27-31 Jesus lays it out:
  - We must love our enemies
  - Goodness is the response for hate
  - Blessing and prayer is the response for curses and abuse
  - Offer peace in response to violence
  - Getting is out, and giving is in
  - Do for others what you would have them do for you. (The Golden Rule). It's such a no-brainer, and yet so infinitely difficult to actually do.
- So, let me ask you again, are you listening?
- You see . . .

**Love really IS the answer**

- Jesus brought a completely new concept of love called ἀγάπη. Agape is a Greek word but it is a uniquely Christian concept. English is the language in which commerce is done. Airline pilots communicate with control towers in English. The other day I asked Pablo why his English is better than mine and he told me that he has been learning English since he was in elementary school. Much of the world is at least bi-lingual – with people speaking their native tongue and also English. That the way it is in our day, but in New Testament times, Greek was the language everyone spoke. People spoke their native language such as Hebrew or Latin or Persian etc., and then they also knew Greek. This is why the New Testament, in its original form, was Greek. And Greek has perhaps a half-dozen words for love, and the most familiar ones are :
  - Eros, which is romantic, passionate love from which we get the word erotic, which of course brings to mind, physical and sexual love.
  - Philea which is the kind of love we have for our friends. It is intimate and authentic.
  - Storge is the kind of love we have for our family members. It's a natural, unconditional love. Maybe you've heard about it, but an example of this happened last month in Cheyenne, Wyoming when 6 year Bridger Walker stepped in between his four year old sister and a German Shepherd who was charging her. The dog attacked Bridger and shredded his face and it took 90 stitches and a two hour

surgery to repair it. Bridger said “If someone had to die, I thought it should be me.”. That’s storage at its best, and, really, it’s an example of . . .

- Agápe which is the kind of love Jesus brought to humanity. You see, it’s the kind of love God has for us. It’s unconditional, it’s unbidden, it’s even unnecessary. But Jesus went to the Cross for humanity, because he *so loved the world*. John 3:16. And this is the very word Jesus uses here when he says in verse 27 and then again in verse 35 to “*Love your enemies...*”
- Loving our enemies is just not natural. It is actually counter-intuitive. Our natural response is to react in the opposite way and to lash and hate. But, radical faith requires doing what Jesus would do and loving instead. Love, really is the answer.
- This is why you cannot be a racist and Christian at the same time. That is why Christ Followers need to examine their hearts and lives and see if there are any vestiges of racism there and repent of it. That is why, if we believe that all lives matter, then we had better stand up for those lives when we see discrimination in action whether it is covert or overt. Love demands it.
- Let me say something else here as we see the presidential campaign heating up. Love demands that if we are a Republican we need to love EVERY Democrat. And love demands that if we are a Democrat, we need to love EVERY Republican. And love demands that we need to love EVERY Communist. And love demands we need to love EVERY liberal and every conservative, and every abortionist, and every NRA member, and every anti-gun activist, and every ANTIFA member, and every dictator, and the list goes on and on and on. Christ Followers don’t get a choice – we must love – love is the only choice. Politics in America has become so polarizing and hateful and that is why it is so important that we Christ Followers participate in the political process with the love of Jesus and the counsel of the Holy Spirit. Make the way you go in the world better by the sweetness of the agape love that goes before you.
- Finally . . .

**Be merciful just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)**

- Mercy is just so much easier than hate and judging. Let me read the last verses of our text again. “*Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*” Luke 6:37-38.
- Let me put it this way: Love lavishly, forgive blindly, and give generously and mercy will grow in your life and overflow into your world. It’s the least you can do. It’s what your Father did for you when he sent Jesus. He loves you this much.

**Conclusion:** This talk didn’t cover it all. It’s far from adequate. I could say so much more about the anger that is spilling over about simply wearing masks a dealing with the madness that has come with the COVID crisis – but my point works just as well with that too.

As Christ Followers we are called to BE JESUS to a world shattered with hate and bitter anger. Instead of succumbing to the attitudes and practices of this world we are called to a different way – the way of love, mercy, forgiveness, joy, and hope. We can’t change the world – that’s not our job. Our job is to change our own world by influencing it with Jesus who lives in our hearts and drives our thoughts and actions. This is called radical faith and it’s what the world needs. Amen.