

I61 Church Statement on Recent Events

July 2020

Hello. Pastor Joel Arcadipane from I61 Church here. We are all living in a time in history that will not soon be forgotten. Not only have we come face to face with a pandemic of epic proportions, but we have all been shaken by the recent events concerning race and police brutality that has shined a light on an longtime evil that has lived in America since before its foundations were laid. I want to take a few minutes of your time to express what I believe to be God's heart about all of the recent developments in our nation in regards to "race" as well as police brutality.

While I am a white pastor and have not even begun to see or experience all that my brothers and sisters of African descent have gone through in the battle against racism it is my quest to educate myself more and grow in empathy and compassion for their plight. After much prayer and thought on the matter, I have some direction from the Lord that I would like to share concerning these issues.

Racism and Bigotry of any kind are evil. This rule extends beyond the lines of Christianity and goes to humanity. Even if you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, the basic tenets of humanity are dignity and equality. This dignity and equality, regardless of race, gender, color, ethnicity, religion, cultural background extend from infancy to death and if you are a Christian, it extends from conception to death.

It has been pointed out by many other statesmen that racism is not something people always identify with but that there is an underlying, sometime unknown or unrealized, bias that exists among many. It is now beyond time to wake up to these biases and racism and reprogram the way we see people of different color, ethnicity, etc.

In the church, hatred and judgement of any kind is not compatible with scripture and is not acceptable in the body of Christ.

1 John 2:11 says,

"But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them."

John 7:24 says,

"Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

Instead, scriptures tell us repeatedly to love one another.

John 13:34 says

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Jesus loved beyond borders. He loved the sinner and the saint. He loved the Jew and the Gentile. He loved and showed compassion to everyone, regardless of what anyone else thought of them or what the customs of that day were.

We live in America – the land of the free and home of the brave! Yet, there are people in our country who are not free...and they are scared. As Americans and Christians, it is our duty to fight for those who need to be fought for. It's not that they cannot fight for themselves. Many of them have been fighting this battle for decades and lifetimes but they still do not have victory! We then need to fight with them to help make the "Land of the free and home of the brave" a reality to every person that lives in this great Nation!

You may notice above that I put the term "race" in quotes. I did this for a specific reason. In scripture, the term "race" is very rarely found, let alone used. That is a very divisive term, as it separates us into categories that God never intended for us to walk in. As such, the Bible, in Acts 17:24-26, does quantify this by confirming that we are all of 1 blood. We are all descendants of Adam and Eve from the very beginning. There is 1 root for all of us. We are not divided up into small sub-sects to God. As a matter of fact, our job is to make earth look like Heaven does. In Heaven there is no race and no injustice. In Heaven there is a kaleidoscope of color, with all being equal and valuable to God.

Colossians 3:10b-11 says,

"according to the image of the One who created him- 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all"

We need to get a better, truer picture of Heaven in our hearts and minds so that we can bring Heaven to earth.

As Christians, we must do better. As Americans, we must do better. Which of us would disqualify a brother or sister from their family because they think differently? Is not freedom of thought and belief allowed? Many would like to think that they are open-minded and willing to accept those who are different from them, but we deceive ourselves. Why? How does this happen? It's a matter of being comfortable. Changing is uncomfortable so we justify our thoughts and actions in milliseconds so that we don't have to come face to face with the truth of what is actually happening in our minds. We push aside any bias that may arise so we can move on with our day and not be bothered by how the decisions we make can and do affect the lives and end results to those around us.

We all look at ourselves and say, "absolutely not. NOT ME!" Yet, for centuries we have treated many of the people in our family, including our black brothers and sisters as second class or beneath us. This ought not to be happening within us. While I cannot correct the world around me (although I can certainly help change it), I am first speaking to the family that bears the name of Jesus. While we say that we are not racist in any way, I challenge you to cross the line to make an intentional effort to get to know our black brothers and sisters and build relationships with them. This often does not happen in the name of busyness. We live in a culture where

everyone is running non-stop. So, for decades and centuries this growing, volatile issue has been festering and is now blowing up. We must do better!

The church should have long ago stepped into this evil and brought the light and love of Jesus that would have scattered the darkness. We may not eradicate racism, but if our black brothers and sisters felt defended by the majority and protected, would there be such a cry as there is right now?

Could those taking a stand for dignity and equality for all extend to those in law enforcement? Too many times we have seen the videos of innocent black men being abused and killed by those paid to defend them and keep them safe. I would like to mention here, that more than that I have seen beautiful videos of policemen being overly loving and generous towards many of all different colors. I have family and friends in law enforcement and know that there are far more “good cops” than there are “bad cops”. That being said, there is zero tolerance or place for racism or police brutality in our law enforcement. I believe there does need to be more education, training, evaluation, and reform in our police departments. The videos I have seen of black men dying in front of me by the hands of a police officer(s) for no reason is appalling, horrific, angering, and heart breaking. So, what can we do? How can I help bring about change? How can you help bring about change in a place where it seems we have no voice? There is a number of things that you can do.

1. Peaceful protest. Our country is founded on the principle of being able to have your voice hear. But do it peacefully and lawfully.
2. Write your congressmen.
3. Write your police departments.
4. Write to your county executive
5. PRAY
6. Lobby – get in there and push for reform
7. Call a community-wide meeting with politicians and police to discuss the issues and possible solutions

Take the time to write down your feelings and thoughts on these matters. Do your research. Talk to a police officer and ask them how they are trained. Talk with them and ask them if they have ideas of what can be done to bring about change. And do it all in a respectful and thoughtful manner. You do have a voice. It is up to you to use it in a way that will bring about change.

If you see a common thread through all of what I am writing, it is being intentional in our relationships. Real change in these issues will not happen without up close and personal action. Change starts with you. It is time to get uncomfortable and reach across the aisle. It is time to get more educated.

Two videos that I strongly recommend watching (which were recommended to me and I found extremely eye-opening and helpful) are:

- Racial Reconciliation from Pastor Michael Todd of Transformational Church – a multi-ethnic church in Tulsa, OK
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tEdZeRRJ7A&feature=youtu.be>

- Race in America by Phil Vischer of Veggie Tales
<https://www.facebook.com/PhilVischer/videos/2611898429058130>

Jesus was moved with compassion towards all those who were hurting. So much so, that He moved towards them to change their situation, as opposed to running from them because He was afraid of what it might look like. We need to be so much more like Jesus.

It is time, as a church, to make God's family whole again. We do not have to agree on everything with everyone as to how things should look or how to move forward, but we ought to wrestle with our thoughts in order to work together to bring God's love and authority to this long, unanswered issue.

WE are a moral majority for a reason. It is time to make it happen. Our black brothers and sister in Christ and fellow Americans are still waiting for us to move.

Here are my suggestions:

1. Be intentional in building relationships with people of color. You have no idea of the rich blessing and wisdom you will receive from these friendships.
2. Invest your life into it.
3. Learn to grow in empathy and compassion for their experiences and reality.
4. Ask God to give you a vision for how you can bring change.
5. Do it! Do not wait for another loss of life. Be the change now!!!