

Date: June 21, 2020

Series: Communion

Title: *Coming to the Table as ONE*

Preacher: Mark Adams

Scripture: Revelation 7:9

Thank you, Bill! It was wonderful to sing together, even though it was done virtually. In two weeks, if the Lord wills, we will gather HERE in this Sanctuary. On July 5, even though we won't be able to sing aloud, yet the "amen" will "sound from His people again" in this room!

When I was a kid my parents bought us an above ground pool and put it in our backyard. It was only about 3 feet deep, but we enjoyed spending many hot summer days in its waters. Our pool was round and one thing my three siblings and I would do for fun was get on the sides and all walk/run as fast as we could in one direction, pushing the water ahead of us, until we had a strong current going. Then we'd lay on our backs and let the flow of the water carry us like a liquid merry-go-round. Other times, instead of "going with the flow" we'd see who could walk against the current longest without being swept off their feet. My little sister never won that game, she was just too small to go against the flow.

Of course, going against the flow is a cliché and it's a hard thing to do especially when those of us who try are in the minority, when like my sister, we are small against the current. But, as Christians, we are called to do exactly that. As Paul puts it, we are not to **"conform to the patterns [or the flow] of this world."** (Romans 12:2)

There are an increasing number of ways as Christians we are to go against the flow of our culture but this morning as we share communion, I want to focus on one. My text is Revelation 7:9 where John says, **"I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and the Lamb."** John saw Heaven filled with not with one race—but with all races—reflective of the fact that God loves ALL people. Sadly, as current events show, that's not the way it is in our world. Many protests show that, for too many people in our culture, all races are not loved, not valued equally. But as John tells us in Revelation, that's not what our Lord wants it to be like in His church. No, this is to be a place where we live out the lyrics to the children's song, *"Red, brown, yellow, black, and white, they are ALL precious in His sight."*

This is the clear teaching of God's Word. For example, Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:15, Jesus build His church by breaking down racial barriers like the ones that separated the Jews and the Gentiles—to: **". . .make the two into one NEW man, thus establishing peace. . .reconciling them both into one body to God through the cross."**

And this really was a counter-cultural, go against the flow kind of deal in Paul's day. To show you what I mean, take a close look at that word, "new."

In Greek there are two predominant words for "new:" "neos" and "kinos." "Neos" refers to something that is new as it relates to TIME. If we spoke Greek, we'd use "neos" to refer to the latest version of a face mask, one with special filters and valves, or a cool emblem that makes it look like you're smiling when you wear it. But Paul doesn't use the word "neos" here. No, he uses the word "kinos," which speaks of something new as it relates to KIND, a totally new invention.

Let me put it this way. While "neos" may be the latest version of a facemask, "kinos" is the Model-T of face masks, the first one to roll off the assembly line. So, when Paul says Christ died to create one new man, this coming together of Jew and Gentile, it's the idea of "kinos," the idea of invention. In other words, Christ died to create something the world had never seen. Jews and Gentiles, and other people groups who have been

opposed to each other, coming together, doing life with one another, sharing meals together, serving and worshipping Jesus together, friends of all races who are closer than a brother or sister.

This new paradigm is one way we as a church go against the flow. While the world around us going the wrong way when it comes to race relations, we must be going the right way. I'm thankful for the fact that as I've looked out at this congregation for the past 30 years, I've seen our membership become more like John's picture of Heaven. We've become more and more diverse and that's a WONDERFUL thing. But, how do we keep that "current" going? How do we strengthen it in spite of the events that threaten it? I believe that a key factor is our obedience to the Bible's command to **"bear one another's burdens."** (Galatians 6:2)

In a healthy church if one member has financial issues, all members help. If one member grieves, all grieve with him or her. If one member suffers, all suffer. Well, as you know, people of color are suffering because of recent repeated events that underscore the racial injustice that continues to plague our nation. So, to be a healthy church, a Biblical, HEAVEN-reflecting church, that goes against the flow, we all have to learn how to help bear this particular burden. We can't come as ONE to the LORD'S table until we do so. What does bearing this burden involve?

(1) First, we must acknowledge the PROBLEM.

As CC Day put it in our discussion a couple weeks back, there are no slaves or slave owners living in the U.S. today. The institution of slavery in America went away with the civil war, but we still have a problem because the attitudes, the prejudices, that fostered slavery remained, took root, and grew such that it became systemic in our culture. Judge Day reminded us that this is why we have had to pass laws against things like refusing a job or a home or a certain school to someone because of the color of their skin. Systemic racism is what led to segregated schools. Remember what Marilyn Jordan shared in her testimony about her school always having used books, hand-me-downs from the white schools?

Well, this systemic problem led to poorer schools which led to poorer school performances which has led to lower income jobs for people of color. We can't ignore that and go against the flow as a church. We have to acknowledge the problem.

Phil Vischer, the guy creator of *Veggie Tales* recently wrote a blog entitled, *"Being White Has Benefitted Me."* In it he gives his perspective on this systemic evil. He says that his family owns a home and then he asks, *"What does this have to do with racial injustice? EVERYTHING. Way back in the 1930's the federal government decided that white families should be encouraged to buy homes and black families should not. 70 years of policies like this led to a profoundly inequitable America.*

Today the average black household has 60% of the income of the average white household and less than 20% of the household wealth. Why? Because the #1 form of intergenerational household wealth in America is home ownership. Home ownership allows kids to go to college with home equity. It allows wealth to be passed through generations. It provides an economic backstop against calamity. And this is what we have done to black families over the past 70 years. We've prevented them from building the backstop to survive calamity that home ownership provided. Did I work hard? Yes, but not unusually hard. Not nearly as hard as many of my brown and black neighbors, who hold down multiple jobs just to pay rent. Were we Vischers above average intelligence? I suppose so. But so are many people who struggle to find opportunity in America.

So, what made the difference? We were white. And there it is.

So, when I see people of color protesting injustice or living in poverty and I feel the urge to say, 'Well, if you just worked harder you could do what I did.' When I say that---it's a lie. We built a system to favor ourselves. And it worked amazingly well. Every generation of my family has benefited from the color of my skin. Every generation. This injustice didn't stop with the Emancipation Proclamation. It didn't stop with Brown v Board of Education. It didn't stop when Barack Obama was elected president. And it still hasn't stopped today."

Do you see the problem more clearly now?

As I've told you in the past, both Daniel and Nehemiah acknowledged that Israel had a problem. They knew that nation was suffering because of the sins of earlier generations. Today, in our society, we have a problem; people are suffering the consequences of sins that were committed in the past. And it is incumbent on us to recognize the CURRENT impact of the sin of our ancestors and acknowledge it. Admitting the problem helps healing to begin. It helps connections to strengthen. It helps relationships to become REAL.

Here's a second way to help bear this burden such that we continue to go against the flow.

(2) We have to acknowledge the PAIN.

We need to understand that people we know—right here in this church—HAVE hurt and STILL hurt from the sinful actions of racism. And the best way to do that is to humbly ask to hear their stories. Two weeks ago seven Redlanders allowed us to do that. CC Day, Gale and Toiya Goodlow, DeShawn Germain, Marilyn Jordan, Lee and Erika Thompson all shared their experience with racism. Their testimonies are still on our website. Some of you may have missed them because the written intro is so long, so go back and watch. Listen to them. Hear what they have gone through. Learn how it affected their lives.

If you've already seen them, look at them again. We need to hear about the pain our spiritual family members have endured and still endure. This hearing helps break down barriers and form close bonds. It helps us feel empathy—the kind of empathy that heals relational wounds.

Remember, as fellow Christians, we are part of a body made up of many different body parts and as it says in 1st Corinthians 12:26, ***"If one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it"*** We need to hear the stories of our brothers and sisters so we can suffer with them.

In 2016 the city of Philadelphia acknowledged the pain they had caused Jackie Robinson. In 1947, when Jackie, the first African American player in pro baseball, stepped to the plate against Philadelphia Phillies they heaped abuse on him. Ben Chapman, the Phillies manager, repeatedly taunted Robinson with racial slurs. They told Robinson to go back to the cotton fields. Robinson later said that day was the closest he came to cracking and retaliating. Well, 69 years later, the City Council of Philadelphia finally offered an official apology. A *The New York Times* article reported:

"The apology comes as Major League Baseball, on Friday, celebrates the 69th anniversary of Robinson's first game with the Dodgers with its Jackie Robinson Day, initiated in 2004. Every major league player wears Robinson's No. 42, an annual sight in baseball. What is different this year is the apology from the City of Philadelphia for the manner in which the Phillies treated Robinson when he began his career."

I wonder if some of us need to acknowledge the pain of our brothers and sisters of color, apologizing for our insensitivity or for hurtful things we have said or done?

So, to bear this burden we need to acknowledge the problem; we have to acknowledge the pain; and finally, to preserve our unity as we go against the flow,

(3) We must acknowledge the PRICE God paid to forgive us ALL.

Coming to this table reminds us of the price that was paid to wash away our sin.

My son Daniel and my daughter-in-law Ashley have a foster son. Jermaine is 17 and he's been a part of the Adams family for about a year. I confess, it makes me feel especially old when a 17 year-old calls me

“Granddad.” In getting to know Jermaine I have learned he collects Air Jordan shoes. Jermaine tells me they are very pricey, a pair can cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars.

I had no idea.

I have learned that when Jordan was playing, every pair of shoes he wore was noticed. Nike would make limited editions of that pair of shoes and they are still very expensive among collectors. For example, this the Air Jordan XVII, sells for \$11,267. It was released in 2002 to mark the return of the basketball legend, after a short retirement. Michael Jordan wore a pair like this while playing for the Washington Wizards. If you have a pair, you have a valuable set of footwear!

Of course, Air Jordans are even MORE valuable if Jordan actually wore them. An example is the Air Jordan 12 Flu Game shoe. Jordan wore a pair like this in the 1997 NBA finals against the Utah Jazz. The Jazz were winning and even though Jordan had the flu, he found the strength to get off the bench and lead his team to victory, scoring 15 points. I believe Jordan gave the pair he wore that night to one of the Bull’s ball boys. That young man sold the pair in 2011 for \$104,000.

The principle here is the more something costs—the more it is worth. The more you are willing to PAY for something, the greater its value. Well, God set the worth of every single human being at the price of the life of His only Son. Nothing has ever been—or ever will be—bought for a higher price. On the cross, God showed how immeasurably valuable all people are. The perspective of calvary shows us that it is sinful to discriminate because to be a Christian is to assign infinite worth to every person.

We come in UNION to this table, come as equals, because the ground is level at the cross. When we SHARE this meal we remember the value God sets on people, ALL people, the fact that *“red, brown, yellow, black, and white, they are indeed PRECIOUS in His sight.”*

Before we remember Jesus’ sacrifice let us first follow the guidance of 1st Corinthians 10:27 where it says we must, ***“examine ourselves before we eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*** Let’s bow our heads and admit our sin to God—our need for Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. This would be a good time for us to ask ourselves if we prejudge others because of their skin color—a time to ask God to help us see if we esteem ourselves better than others, if there are steps we need to take to strengthen our connections with others by helping bear burdens.

PRAYER

COMMUNION