

Minding the Racial Gap

Series: Minding the Gap
October 30, 2016 – Jimmy Reyes

Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

2 Corinthians 5:17-19 (NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Living a life with the goal of reconciling others to God and each other involves...

1. _____ at the similarities and differences in your fellow human being.

Galatians 3:26-29 (NIV)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

2. _____ with empathy to the other person's heart and experiences.

Proverbs 18:13 (NLT)

Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.

3. _____ with humility in the midst of tensions and confusions.

Romans 12:16-18 (NIV)

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

4. _____ each other while seeking unity in the new kingdom reality.

Revelations 7:9-10 (NIV)

After this 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 before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Minding the Racial Gap

A few years ago my wife Ali and I took two very significant trips in the same year. During the spring of 2008 we traveled to Europe and were in London for a few days. We loved the culture, the architecture, the food not as much after being in Paris, but loved how clean the city felt, the accents (well they might say we are the ones with the accent), and of course the London tube, which is the underground public transit system. You have to understand I was born in Los Angeles, and in my childhood we didn't have any subways or metro trains. The only public transportation we had was the RTD buses (which in those days stood for the rough, tough and dirty); I don't think it is called the RTD now since it has been improved... it is now the MTA.

So we had an awesome time with our first experience with clean public transportation, and in every stop there was a pleasant voice on the speakers saying: "Mind the Gap". We loved it! It was so nice, so lovely... and of course it was something we totally got used to and continued repeating to ourselves: Mind the Gap!

Well that same year in the Fall we also travelled to New York, again we wanted to experience the city, the lights, the history, the architecture, Broadway, oh and the subway! We got there and then we got on our first subway ride, we had a rude awakening... It was dirty, warm, smelly, crowded and worst of all nobody was saying Mind the Gap!!! It was more like get out of the way or you will end up being trampled in the Gap! What a difference in cities and cultures...

Well when it comes to talking about crossing over gaps in our lives, we might feel that we are going to be trampled. We can be filled with fear as we seek to live with people who are very different than us. Last week we started the series titled: "Mind the Gap", where we believe God is speaking to us and saying Mind the Gap that lies between you and my children. He is saying to us anew: Seek to work on the things that have divided you. Last week Pastor Brad started the series talking about the political gap, and wow I'm amazed that you are all still here! Let's see if you will continue to come after this week as we look at the racial gap (hahaha).

I will be honest, looking at the racial gap can be quite challenging, it goes against our nature, it goes against culture, but as new creation in Christ we are called to live in harmony with each other. Way before Rodney King in the 90's asked: Can't we all just get along, I believe God, our Father has been asking for many years... my children, can't you all get along? You see racial reconciliation is not about being political correct or just joining a social cause. It is rooted in the Father wanting His children to get along and accept the richness of diversity in his Kingdom.

It does seem that crossing over the racial gap is a big part of God's heart for us... Throughout the Bible we see many examples of God wanting every tribe, nation and

tongue to know who He is... There are so many Scriptures that we do not have the time to see, but I want to give a brief panorama of God's redemptive story of love for the nations, and all the different racial groups.

In the first chapter of Genesis we learn that God created ALL people in His image... Everyone, everywhere is unique in God's eyes and in this world. After the fall, sin and separation ruled mankind, but God promised a plan of redemption to Abraham.

He told Abraham, that he would bless ALL the people of the earth through him... Then throughout the Old Testament, Abraham's descendants, the Israelites struggled with this universal inclusive promise to call the nations to God.

Even though Israel was a chosen people, their nation could not claim ethnic purity because of intermarriages, alliances and assimilations. Time and time again, they were reminded not just to tolerate the "aliens and stranger" but also to welcome them. These words were challenging for them and continue to be challenging for us today.

Okay so in the New Testament, Jesus comes to bring the ultimate redemption from God, He taught us to love him above all things and to love our neighbors... While on earth, we also see that Jesus ministered to both people groups: Jews and Gentiles (those who are not Jews) and He broke down the walls that divided them... He then commanded his disciples...

2 Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

3 After the death of Jesus, his disciples stayed together. This takes us to the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, the Spirit of God falls on them and people start speaking in tongues, but this tongues were of the the different nations around them. Even though there was a common language, God chose to communicate to everyone in their own "native language." (Can you see the heart of God for the nations?)... The church is birthed and it is dispersed because of persecution.

4 The first followers of Christ were told that once the Holy Spirit came over them they would be witnesses in **Jerusalem** (those who are like us), **Samaria** (those who are nearby, but different: ethnically, culturally, in language, and religion), **& the ends of the worlds** (those who are different and live in a different countries)...

I've always had this question: Why is it easier for us to want to minister to people in different countries than serve different people in this country? I think that ultimately we like to keep strong boundaries and feel like we are the ones saving others. Maybe those who are different and live around us are too close for comfort?

5 Throughout the book of Acts we see different cultural tensions, we don't have time to go through them, but the church grow in numbers and in unity. Do you know that the first place that followers of Christ were called "Christians" (little Christs) was in Antioch?

What was so amazing about that city was that the church there was lead by multiethnic leadership who had a heart for all nations. There is something about coming together and living life with different people groups that just says there is something of God in that place.

So as we talk about race, people can have many different postures...

Some feel a discomfort, no let's not talk about it, it is hard, we are just going to bash on majority culture...

Others are dismissive, that is not important, we are one in God, everyone needs to get over it...

While others come from a defensive posture because of bad experiences... all white people are racist or I can't trust all Hispanics. Because of our defensiveness sometimes we cannot see the racism we ourselves carry in our own hearts.

But as followers of Christ, we have to recognize that we have been called to develop and deepen relationships with those who are different than us. I do really believe that a big part of our conversion is allowing God's heart for others to permeate our being. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation.

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2 Corinthians 5:17-19 (NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

This world desperately needs to be reconciled to God and for us to be reconciled with each other. I remember a few years back hearing that we lived in a post-racist world. I remember just thinking there is still a lot of racism, it is just under the surface, but as we have seen and experienced these last few year, it has come back to the surface. There is something in us that would like to see change in the world. Yes there is systemic oppression that needs to change, but there are also many hearts that are filled with hate, fear and racism.

I've also noticed that it is easy to judge and condemn others for their racist remarks and actions. We tend to take days and weeks hearing how bad people are on the radio, television and online. We feel better about ourselves because we are not as bad as certain people, but we do well in identifying what areas in our hearts need to grow so that we can join the ministry of reconciliation.

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We tend to look at racism in terms of black and white, you are a racist or you are not. But let me tell you there is a lot of grey area in between. In other words, we think you are either a white supremacist or you are good, but in between, there are the words we say, the thoughts we have, stereotypes, prejudice, and biases that we need to identify, confess and allow God to heal. I'm not sure we can be totally clear of any racism, but through the power of the Holy Spirit we can move closer that way.

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Many of us are living with the hurt and pain of our parents, grandparents or ancestors and it hasn't even been our own experience but we carry those words, fears, and conflicts. Or maybe we did experience a horrible situation with someone, but then we have generalized it, and in our minds we now have a problem with a whole race.

So let's just take a moment before God and in silence ask Him to search our hearts.

Father we bring you our pain, our fears, and our sin of racism. Heal us today!

For the next part of our time together, I want us to look at a few practical ways in which we can

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Live a life with the goal of reconciling others to God and each other... This involves

1. Looking at the similarities and differences in your fellow human being.

Yes we are all made in the image of God. The truth is that we have more in common with each other than things that divide us. We all seek to love and be loved, we all seek to belong, we all want to have purpose in life, and we all have a need for God whether we recognize it or not.

Those of us who have chosen to live as disciples of Jesus have many other things in common.

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Galatians 3:26-29 (NIV)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

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So yes over anything we are now through Jesus children of God and we are one! But that does not mean we are all called to be the same. We are called to have unity without uniformity (a body with different members). Some people say: we are ONE, why do we have to talk about our cultural differences? Well because something happens when we say we are ONE... those who are married have experienced this when we say that two flesh shall become one. What we usually understand is as we become one the person ultimately becomes an extension of my thoughts, views, and life. Again those of us who are married understand that things do not work out that way. We need to learn to value, respect and enjoy the differences.

Once a week my wife and I take our son Jacob to buy ice cream after we know he has done well on his weekly spelling test. Sometimes we go to McDonalds and there is only one choice, you get a vanilla cone, but it is such a rich experience going to Baskin Robbins and having all the different choices to chose from. Well God in His wisdom made us similar and yet different, this adds to the richness of our human experience.

Some of us can live with a certain shame of our ethnicity or some have never really thought about where we they came from. After your family assimilated in this country it lost all ties to the country of origin. What I'm trying to say is that we are all ethnic, in other words we all have an ethnicity. We need to learn to enjoy ours and also learn to enjoy other people's ethnicities.

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Part of this process involves...

2. Listening with empathy to the other person's heart and experiences.

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We do really need to learn to listen more and talk less.

Proverbs 18:13 (NLT)

Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.

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If we are going to break the walls that divide us we need to learn to relate with each other. Unfortunately in our times, issues about real people become political stances that come down to statistics and numbers. Let me tell you something, sometimes we need to learn to sit with things for a while instead of having an answer ready to debate others. We need to learn to empathize with what the other person has experienced.

Again, I'm not trying to sway anybody in their politics, but just want you to hear two stories and just sit with them for a day, or for the week.

First, as I stand here before you I want to confess something... I am not your typical Hollywood portrayed Hispanic. I'm so sorry to burst your bubble! I wasn't born in East L.A. I've never liked low riders. I've never been a part of a gang. I'm not even from Mexico. Well I'm half Mexican my wife, my better half is from Mexico (and I eat spicier food than she does so I guess I've earned the title). My parents are from Guatemala a country just south of Mexico. You see in the United States we have put together people from different countries and cultures under the umbrella the label: Hispanic. This term represents a richness that is too big to put under one name (we have done the same with Asians where there is so much diversity with each county).

Well during these elections I did come to realize something I never knew. I have another "title" I'm an anchor baby. Both my parents came from Guatemala with student visas, met in Los Angeles and stayed after their visas expired. Eventually they got married and I came into existence (as you can see I'm a pretty hefty anchor). Well my dad had his own business for many years, my mom worked full time, was a full time mom and a part time student for many years, and at the age of 50 got her Bachelors degree and has been an elementary school teacher for LAUSD. My youngest sister is a labor and delivery nurse, my younger sister is an educator and I, well I think I've done ok... I've been blessed serving God and others! We all have contributed to this county... Yes at times we can speak in Spanish, yes we love Guatemalan food, but the United States of America is our country.

Another story... During these years we have been hearing a lot about the Black Lives Matter movement. Again this can be politicized, but again it is about people. Our minds

can go to so many places when we hear Black Lives Matter. What? All Lives Matter! Blue Lives Matter... Again, sit with something for a while before giving your thoughts. Of course there are extremists and knuckleheads in this movement like there are in so many other movements and religions, but at the core the message is: black lives matter too.

It is like we are all sitting at the table and someone didn't get food and says hey I'm hungry, I'm at the table, I matter... and we quickly respond: we are all hungry, we are all at the table, we all matter, and never give them any food. I think we could totally respond differently if we learned to empathize.

Rich Nathan who is the pastor of a Vineyard church in Columbus, OH talks about a catalytic moment and how he was opened up to change and to see things from a different perspective. He talks about a conference he attended where they were talking about race and an African American pastor said: "Let me ask the white pastors who are sitting in this room, how many of you have taught your sons what to do with their hands when they are driving and they are pulled over by the police?" The white pastors all looked at one another and said, "No, we've never done that." Then the African American pastor proceeded, "Let me ask the brothers. How many of you brothers have taught your sons what to do with their hands when they are pulled over by the police?" Everyone raised their hand. He asked three or four more really pointed questions. "How many of your white pastors have done this? How many of you brothers have done that?" In every case, it was 0% and 100%, 0% and 100%, 0% and 100%. Then fixing his eyes on Rich, the African American pastor said, "Rich, every day when you look in the mirror you see a man. Every day when I look in the mirror, I see a black man. You never think about race. I think about race every day of my life because I'm forced to." Hmmm. Let's sit with that.

As we hear other people's stories let's sit with them for a while and allow them to become catalytic moments in our lives.

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We also need to continue the process in...

3. Learning with humility in the midst of tensions and confusions.

I really admire our lead pastor Brad Bailey. He has spoken about how he recognizes that he has had a privileged life because he is an educated, white man. You know it takes guts and humility to say that. It is not about white shame or blame; it is about recognizing how things have been and how we can strive to sit at the table to learn from each other as equals. I have learned tons from him and I hope he has learned from me as well (At least over the years I think I've convinced him that Taco Bell is not really Mexican food).

As we seek to connect and know others who are different, we have to be aware that there will be tensions. We have to be prepared and know that they will come and when they come we have to see them as opportunities for growth.

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Romans 12:16-18 (NIV)

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

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We are called to be peacemakers and live in harmony with one another... This is very hard, but not impossible! Again we cannot generalize, sometimes we will connect with someone and some type of jokes are ok, but then we connect with someone else and those jokes can be offensive. There is a saying in Spanish that says: Cada vida es un mundo (every life is a world). Even though people are part of the same ethnicity, everyone has different attitudes, personalities, experiences, and their own biases etc...

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Something that is helpful when dealing with this type of conflict is to recognize the difference between intent and impact.

If you've been hurt, try focusing more on the intentions of the person than how you've been impacted by that person's words or actions (many times people didn't mean to hurt). If you've hurt someone, try focusing more on how the person feels impacted by your words or actions than on your intentions (this talks about humility).

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Ultimately this whole process involves...

4. Loving each other while seeking unity in the new kingdom reality.

It is easy to say, I love everyone... I don't have any problem with any race. Let me say: love is not a passive feeling. Love is willing to sacrifice for the good of another. Love says things are not fair and I want to make a difference... Love also says, I know we are different but you matter and I want to grow and learn from you... Sometimes we think we are the ones helping others, but it is the opposite, those who are different are helping us grow to be more like God.

Have you ever pictured heaven? Let me tell you it will be more like Baskin Robbins... It will be such a rich and diverse experience. You know what, not everyone is going to look like you and that is more than ok! Imagine sitting at the table, everyone as equals, and no one without food... Oh I can picture the spread on the table... I'm sure there will be tacos... as well as chicken tikka masala, collard greens, mashed potatoes, hummus, sushi, oh and of course hamburgers and pizza...

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I want us to end with that picture...

Revelations 7:9-10 (NIV)

After this 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 before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Can you see the diversity? Another passage in Revelations talks about every nation bringing its treasure before God. What an amazing experience! Every ethnicity has something to offer God and each other.

So look around this room, make a commitment to seek to connect with someone who is different... Let's start getting used to the whole idea of heaven's diversity here on earth. It is awesome that we can gather together in diversity to worship God in this room, but you know what is more awesome? It is gathering together outside of these walls and growing in relationship with those who are different. Jesus prayed that people would know Him by the way his disciples loved each other. In a culture that is divided, these Christ-centered, diverse yet connected relationships will speak about the Kingdom of God breaking into our lives.

We also have another opportunity; we have a Spanish gathering at 2pm. We just celebrated 10 years... Can you believe it? God is good! Maybe that is a great opportunity for you to connect with people and experience a little bit of what Spanish speakers experience as they are seeking to connect in this country even though they have spoken a different language for years.

Or next time we have activities when we have all the communities together, you can seek to connect with those from Comunidad Viña. The truth is that just by being there (and being a small percentage of the gathering) they have crossed many gaps, and so you can take a step as well in connecting with them as equals. Now that is another of picture of heaven on earth...

So what step is God calling you to take over the gap that has divided us today? I'm sure there are a lot of thoughts and emotions racing in your mind and heart right now, but you know, the Father is pleased when we seek to connect and love each other as the brothers and sisters that we are.

Let's pray...