

Where were you on Thursday night, July 7? I remember almost everything. After eating dinner and putting our twins to bed, Jen and I went out on a small date. One of the pastors from White Rock Fellowship came over to the house to stay with our girls while we were gone. Before leaving, I had a long conversation with him about what was next for our two churches in the aftermath of the killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. We weren't sure should happen, but we at least wanted to begin a larger conversation about our role as Christian leaders in racial reconciliation. After we wrapped up that conversation, Jen and I left to go have dessert and coffee in the Design District.

The café was only a block away from the freeway. While Jen and I chatted over a slice of cake, I heard several emergency vehicles flying by, not too far from us. I just assumed there was a fire or a fender bender near us. A little after ten, we hopped in the car, and made our way back home. And as we crossed over Woodall Rogers, cruising by downtown Dallas, we noticed all of the exits were closed off to traffic. Little did we know that about a half a mile away from where we were driving, there was a deranged shooter taking aim at our police.

We arrived home and several minutes later, our friends started texting one another. We turned on the television to witness the horror that would soon capture the attention of the entire nation. Monday had been Independence Day. Tuesday was Baton Rouge. Wednesday was Minneapolis and Thursday was Dallas. And Friday was Dallas. And Saturday and Sunday and Monday was Dallas. On Tuesday, at the Memorial Service, the Chief of Police lovingly quoted Stevie Wonder and the President beautifully quoted scripture. In the days since, Dallas laid to rest five members of our police force. Meanwhile, around the rest of the world, Satan is at work. And now, once again, we are praying for France we're thinking about Turkey and we're left wondering what's next.

Many of you may be tempted to move quickly past grief, specifically, the grief of those killed here in the United States and in Dallas. But I want to caution you to not move too fast. In our society, we tend to err on the side of moving more quickly than we should in an attempt to artificially cover up our sorrow. We tell ourselves that if we pretend it isn't there, then maybe it's not there. We don't allow ourselves enough time to hurt, to go to God and one another with our pain and allow Him to bring comfort. We are far too likely to bottle up emotion. We read in Ecclesiastes "For everything there is a season . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance." I still don't feel like dancing. We must allow one another a season to lament.

So when you hear what I'm about to say, please do not take it as a belief that it is time to move past our grief. Please do not hear that I am ready to forget the names Sterling, Castile, Ahrens, Smith, Krohl, Zamarrilla, or Thompson. During these next few moments, I ask that you consider what's next for us as a city, for us as a church and ask yourself what is next for you. Because soon, it will be time to build upon our grief. We must build upon our grief.

Today we're concluding our series, deVOTEd. Over these last weeks, we've been taking a look at Christian involvement in the political realm of our culture. There are plenty of ways for Christians to influence culture: Business, Arts, Media, Education and the Church. But there is probably no sphere of culture that is more divisive in our country than politics. And

as Gary has mentioned in the last weeks, Christians tend to either view politics and place an inappropriate amount of faith in the political realm, thinking that our country's salvation is tied up in its human leaders, or they abstain from the political process completely, and choose not to vote – they “de”-vote. They're de-voted.

When we began the series, we studied how important it is for believers to value the Kingdom of God over earthly kingdoms and governments. Gary pointed out, “If your concern for America is greater than your vision of the kingdom of God, then you are in for a really bad November.” As Christians, we know God's kingdom is coming, and we are citizens of heaven. In the meantime, we are to be God's representatives on earth. Our calling is to be a prophetic voice to an earthly kingdom. We are in the world but not to be of the world. We must seek the welfare of our cities, as believers waiting to go home. As we kick off the party conventions tomorrow night, we need to remember that regardless of who the leader of the free world is for the next four years, God will remain on the throne as *the King*. And not just any king, He is the King of Kings.

We have also spoken about how America's greatness is found in her Church. A couple of weeks ago, we read the quote from Alexis de Tocqueville arguing, “America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.” De Tocqueville is obviously appealing to the need for moral virtue in our society. The more we divorce life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness from virtue, the more our nation will devolve in to a country obsessed with money, fame and carnal pleasure. There is no such thing “great” without “good”. And there is no such thing as “good” without “God.” The church is vital. If this country is to stand as tall as it ever has, not just militarily, not just economically, but morally upright as well, it will be the Christian church that will call her to be the greatest nation in the history of God's creation.

But what is a church? We've talked about this before. It's not simply a building. It's far more than a Sunday morning service. The church is made up of individuals. A church is a community, made up of people. The church is you and me. So let's put this all together: As believers, we know that our citizenship is in heaven, but we also know that God has called us to seek the welfare of our country – our state, our city – here on earth. In order for our country to be strong, our churches must be strong. And our churches are made up of individuals, which must mean that our churches cannot be strong unless we, as individuals, focused on Christ and His work in our lives, are doing our part to represent His love to our hurting world where we live, work and play.

But how do we be strong? How do Christians represent Christ's love to the world?

Firstly, we have to hear His call. ***Christians must hear God's call.*** In the fifth chapter of Matthew, Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount. Christ sits His disciples down and begins to teach them. He begins by listing different types of people who are blessed by God; different types of people who find God's blessing. After this list of various blessings, Jesus turns to His disciples and gives them a vision for their role in society as His followers. Read with me verses 13-16, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall

its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Salt and Light. Followers of Jesus are to be *salt* and *light*. Jesus begins with saltiness. Jesus calls us to be salt. Not only does salt bring flavor to food, but it also serves as a preservative. Salt slows down decomposition and decay. Salt keeps things from going bad. But salt is useless until it begins to interact with the food.

As believers, our interaction in the world acts as a preservative, keeping things good. Or better put, when we represent Christ to our world, God can use us to keep things from going bad. But we do not do so coercively. We don't force ourselves on people any more than Christ forced Himself on anyone. We simply season relationships with the flavor of Christ everywhere we go. He's in our actions. He's in our facial expressions. He's in our words. He's even in our vote. We are to be salt. We are salt.

We are also meant to be light. Jesus calls us to be light. And light isn't meant to be hidden. Light shines, piercing the darkness. When we turn on the lights in our home, we don't cover them with opaque fixtures, seeking to nullify the light. We position the lights in our home in a place where everything can be well-lit. Similarly, we are to be placing ourselves in places that are dark that need to be well-lit. They need to be brightened not by our own personalities or glory, but with the light that Christ brings.

It is an honor to be called the light of the world. When Jesus references His followers as light, He is identifying them with *Himself*. We read in John's gospel, concerning Christ, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world," (John 1:4-5, 9). To be called light is to identify with Christ.

So when we act as salt in the world, we begin to prevent decay. When we act as light, we illuminate the love of Christ to a world in desperate need of Him. In his second letter to the Corinthians – or as some might call it, "two Corinthians" – Paul suggests that being salt and light makes us agents of reconciliation. When we are salt and light we are agents of reconciliation. We are to be a bridge from the chains of this earth to the freedom that can only be found in Christ. And don't you see the need for reconciliation at almost every turn today? It's almost palpable – I can feel the need for reconciliation.

To be agents of reconciliation, to be agents of unity, it will require hard work. Building unity in Dallas in times like these will be incredibly difficult. But as we begin to build upon our grief from the shootings around the country and now in our very own city, we must realize that people are ready to unite. We see it in the news. We hear it in the responses to our police chief and even in our protests – one of the last places you would expect to find

unity. Check out this news story from a protest that took place just half a mile from where you're sitting:

[protest video]

People are ready to unite. And notice that the unity on display in this video had its seeds in the love of Christ with the protest ending in prayer. Building unity in our city will be hard work and the work belongs to primarily to us, as Christians. We are *called* to be agents of reconciliation. Secularists don't have that claim. They may seek reconciliation, but it's not because they're called to reconcile. We have that calling.

Building unity in our city will be hard work. This hard work can't be done by politicians. The most powerful man in the free world came to visit our city. And as powerful as his speech was, he got back on his plane and flew back to DC. He can inspire unity, but he cannot build it. The work of unity can't be done by the media. In fact, they have an economic interest to divide us. Ratings go up whenever someone gets into a fight. They get paid to divide us. Outside of supernatural influence, the media won't lift a finger to unite us. The hard work can't be done through social media, either. If you think that you can sit behind your computer, log into Facebook or Snapchat or Instagram and initiate any real change without getting out and meeting people, speaking to them, working with them, breaking bread with them, I'm sorry to say that you're not much better than the politicians. After all, most people use Facebook as a soapbox. They might as well update their status with a teleprompter.

Politicians, the media or social media can't do the hard work of unity; the work must be done by Christians – by anyone living into their call as agents of reconciliation. We are the only ones called to be salt and light.

This year, it seems like Republicans and Democrats can't agree on anything. They have far more in common than they realize. But there's at least one thing that seems to unite them more than anything else: *anger*. Everyone is angry. Republicans are angry. Democrats are angry. Even independents are angry. And many of us are looking at all of this anger in our country and it makes us . . . well, it makes us angry. But why is everyone so angry? I believe, it's because they're begging politics to give them something that can only be found in Christ. People want hope. People want change. People want America to be great again. People are begging for transformation, but what they don't understand and what Christians often forget is that transformation can only be found in Christ and in Christ alone. America doesn't want a strong President, we want a new heart. And God is in the business of making hearts new. And He uses His people as agents of reconciliation.

How do we represent Christ's love to the world? Firstly, we have to hear His call. We are called to be salt. We are called to be light. We are called to be agents of reconciliation. We have to hear His call. And then we must engage with civility. ***Christians must engage with civility.*** If we are going to be salt, light and agents of reconciliation, we must engage with civility. And I think there are a few ways, as it pertains to politics, that we can engage well:

1. We must engage *Socially*. (We must communicate)-

This might come as a surprise to you, but if we're going to be salt and light in a dark world, if we're going to be agents of reconciliation, we are going to have to talk to one another. Again, it's so easy to check out on a phone, in front of a television or online, but we must have real-life conversations with real, live people. Who do you engage? Who do you talk to about life? Are the people you speak with people who believe the exact same way that you do about everything? It's not hard work to be civil with someone who agrees with you about everything – that's easy. One of the reasons everyone is so divided is because they only hang out with people who look like, talk like and think just like them. There are no conversations.

If you want to engage socially, find someone at work, in your neighborhood, some other parent on your kid's soccer team, someone from this church – find someone who is different than you and have a conversation. If you want to engage in racial reconciliation, find someone who is a different race and talk with them. If you want to discover why the church has had such problems with people in the gay community, find someone in the LGBTQ community and have a conversation. And – if you dare – find someone who might not be voting the same way as you and ask them why.

And when you find someone different than you – do your best to not preach at them. Ask questions and just listen. Don't justify yourself. Don't validate your opinions. Just listen. Be civil. And engage socially.

2. We must engage *Educationally*. (We must learn)-

If we are going to be civil, as a community, we must do our best to learn. Now, when it comes to politics, I have to confess, this comes easy to me. I have a degree in government. I *love* politics. I even watch the State of the Union every year. I set my DVR. I realize that some of you don't prefer politics and you would rather not pay attention, but if we're going to be civil we have political conversations with people, it will help to know what we're talking about.

Educate yourself politically. Know what's going to be on your ballot *before* you get in the ballot booth. Understand the basic issues and the basic stances of the people who are running. When it comes to the race for President, this is easier to do. One non-partisan web site that I found helpful is ISideWith.com. This site lays out a lot of the issues that exist in our country. You select your stance on the issues and how important that issue is to you and the site tells you how strongly you align with any one candidate.

But even state and local races require some basic education. Find out who the representatives are who are running in your district. Spend five or ten minutes on each candidate's web site or Facebook to make sure you understand their stances on the issues. We tend to spend hours and hours focused on the Presidential race, even though most of us know where they stand, and spend relatively little time focused

on city politics, school board elections, local judges or even state races. Might I suggest we flip that script and take the time we would spend focusing on the race for the White House and invest that in what is happening locally? We must engage educationally.

3. We must engage *Civically*. (We must vote!)

Not only must we engage socially and educationally, we must engage civically. We cannot act civil in our society without taking part in what makes this society function at a basic level. Obviously, the most basic of civic duties is our *vote*. We must vote. We can't sit around, talk about being agents of reconciliation and change without initiating change ourselves. And this happens fundamentally at the ballot box.

But, as Christians, our civic duty doesn't end there. In addition to voting, we will have to step outside of our comfort zone and engage in ways that we are not used to engaging.

The night after the shootings, there was a prayer service held at Concord Church in South Dallas. Concord Church is a predominantly African American church and it isn't too close. But our church was represented there. Gary was one of the dozen, or so, pastors who spoke that night. And in the midst of the pain and anguish of a very difficult week, Fellowship Dallas joined hands with churches from all across our city to register our voice and to say we are willing to have the hard conversations and take the difficult steps towards racial reconciliation in our city.

What is more, this past Thursday, we attended a meeting of about 200 pastors from around the city and at the end of our time, a covenant was handed out to everyone. In the covenant were six different action steps each church could take to pursue racial reconciliation. Here is the list of six things that we are prayerfully considering as a church:

1. We commit to connect regularly to cultivate relationships for a year.
2. We commit to lead our churches in having courageous conversations about race.
3. We commit to practice racial sensitivity and work against racism in practical ways.
4. We commit to equip our people to engage in the work of racial reconciliation.
5. We commit to participate in the Dallas pulpit swap in March 2017.
6. We commit to support law enforcement and the community by partnerships that serve the greater good.

Engaging civically isn't always easy. But be prepared to hear more about this in the coming months and years. We are to be salt and light. We are to be agents of reconciliation. And doing this will be hard work. But the work will be good.

One more thing, before we go. For Christians to represent Christ's love to the world, we must hear God's call, we must engage with civility and finally, we must embrace the virtue of humility. ***Christians must embrace the virtue of humility.***

Going forward during these difficult times will require humility. Now, a lot of people find this word confusing. Some people think that humility means thinking poorly of yourself, but that isn't it at all. We find humility embodied in the person of Jesus Christ who, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men," (Philippians 2:6-7). Christ knew He was God, but didn't seek God's glory while here on earth. He didn't think poorly of Himself, He knew exactly who He was.

Theologian Miroslav Volf writes that humility has two aspects: Unconcern for our own glory and a sober awareness of our limits. He goes on to write: "At first glance, humility doesn't seem to be at home on the public stage. On closer examination, however, we see that it is vitally important for following Christ in the public arena. Humility keeps us from getting caught up in the mad scramble for attention, reputation, and status that characterizes so much of contemporary public life. The whole process of a modern electoral campaign, for instance, boils down to candidates "selling" themselves to constituencies, striving for the highest name recognition and the best approval ratings. Candidates carefully craft their "brands" and tailor every word and gesture to match them. The media focus on the horse race of campaigns more than the issues that are at stake. Politicians and pundits treat governing like a zero-sum game, where admitting that the other side has done even the least bit of good undermines one's standing and achievement. Unlike such self-promotion, humility focuses on the tasks at hand and welcomes foretastes of the kingdom wherever it finds them, even among our erstwhile opponents," (*Volf and McAnnally-Linz, "Public Faith in Action," p. 187*).

Humility is a virtue that requires us to look first to God. And when we begin to exercise humility, we begin to put pride to death. This past Spring, we spent two months talking about putting on the armor of God – how our true enemy is not flesh and blood, but in the dark spiritual forces that wage war against our souls. Next week, we will begin a new series focusing on the Seven Deadly Sins and look at the corresponding virtues that put those sins to death. Humility is one of those virtues. Humility is required for us to come together, be salt, be light, and be agents of reconciliation. Please join us next week as we speak more about what it looks like to put sin to death in our lives. We must embrace the virtue of humility.

For Christians to represent Christ's love to the world, we must hear God's call to be salt and light. We must engage with civility. And we must embrace the virtue of humility. We must ignore the divisive voices in our culture. We must unite as believers.