

I can't tell you how disappointed I am to have had to cancel our Tailgate Party. I was so looking forward to being together, and I have struggled with grief over the last few days. I know many of you are feeling the same way. We shouldn't be surprised when we miss gathering because there is bond between us that was established by God through his Spirit, and it causes us to long for one another in this time. But as we grieve over being apart, I don't want us to miss the incredible reminder and supernatural opportunity we have in this time of a national discussion on justice and race.

[Acts 17:26-27] ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

Those words have implications for us. In God's providence, he has placed Fellowship Dallas at this place and this time to be his Kingdom representatives to those around us who may be seeking God or feeling their way towards him. The NE corner of Park Lane and Central Expressway is no accident. It is significant. If we were located just 80 yards west of here, on the other side of Central, we would be a different church with a different influence. But God has assembled this family, in this place, to show him off and display the solution to the problem we're in, a problem we know is first and foremost spiritual. Paul talks about it this way.

[Ephesians 2:1-3] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Each and every one of us began our lives spiritually dead, walking in darkness and disobedience, and following the influence of the devil. And the truth is, dead things don't love well. Dead things are, though, very capable of hate, strife, anger, self-pity, and division, and what we find ourselves in today is the result of dead things doing evil things. Rightly, many of us are asking how we should engage, and the options the world is offering are numerous.

There is the heartless view of indifference. It concludes there is nothing to see here and we should just stop talking about it. We could follow the Marxist and anarchist mobs that are wreaking havoc and spreading chaos throughout our country. We could rely on social media where we get the mixed messages of speak up/shut up, ask questions/don't ask questions, jump in/stay out. Or we could count on November because if we get our guy or gal elected, all will be well.

All of those solutions will fall short because they are created by people who fall short. They ask us to pick sides and work to beat the other side into submission. But what remains is still division. Division is a deeply held value in hell, an expert practice of Satan, and a consequence of the fall of man. And it has no place in the Church if we are to be the people God has made us to be and model the only true solution to the world.

As I heard Tony Evans say recently, “The solution is not sociological, it’s theological.” That means the other option we have is the Gospel, but in order for that to be a viable option, we have to decide if we are going to believe what God says about us, decide if it is sufficient, and decide to live into what Christ has accomplished.

You see, after the bad news of vv. 1-3, there is a phrase that should always make us sit up and pay attention. V4 begin with “But God...” It’s a sign something has changed due to God’s grace. Paul continues and says, though we were dead, those of us who have placed our faith in Christ have now been made alive with him, and where there is life, there is potential. That life is both individual and corporate, and it’s in the corporate life where we have our opportunity today.

[Ephesians 2:11-22] 11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The Gospel is ultimately the work of Jesus Christ reconciling enemies. We all began as enemies of God and he reconciled us back to him. And, as we read, Jesus also reconciled one-time enemies of Jews and Gentiles to one another. To understand the magnitude of that reconciliation, we have to understand the magnitude of that division.

The Jews were God’s chosen people. They were given their own nation, had their own beliefs and customs, and were a specific ethnicity from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God set them apart in order to make clear his radical holiness. The Gentiles, though, were hopeless. They were without Christ, without the promises, and far from God. Their God-ordained differences were geographic, religious, and ethnic, and that separation created hostility. That divide was as, if not more, significant than anything we face today. That’s why this is such good news.

If God can reconcile these two groups to one another, God can reconcile all ethnic groups to one another. There is nothing he can’t overcome. And the truth is, he already has. Racial reconciliation is not something we must achieve. Christ has already accomplished it on the Cross. But it is something we must believe, and something we must live out by loving one another through the power of the Holy Spirit. We often talk of living out our identity in Christ,

and we do so when we are talking about things like shame, doubt, fear, the opinion of others. We also need to do that here, because our identity defines who we are and what we are to do.

Based on the work of Christ, our new identity is that we have been made one. The shed blood of Christ has broken down the wall of hostility between all of us who call him Lord and Savior and we have been united into one new man. Jesus Christ is our peace, the source and substance of our restored relationship with God and each other, and he accomplished it by paying with his life for all the brokenness that flowed out of us when we were dead in our trespasses and sin.

Let's talk about that oneness, because we can confuse it. We have unity, we are fellow citizens, we are all members of the household of God. We are part of one body and that means we belong to one another. But this oneness does not mean sameness. **Christ's work does not dissolve distinction but displays reconciliation**, and that's why it's compelling.

If you've heard testimony you've heard of the Roberts brothers. They were my best friends in elementary school and part of the family that introduced me to the Lord. One was black and the other was Egyptian, and the first time I went over to their house I met their white parents and their white sisters. At seven years of age, I didn't know what was going on, but I knew it was cool. As I got to know the family, I recognized a peace and joy that I was not familiar with. I wouldn't have used those words, but it drew me in, nonetheless. They loved each other deeply, and there was a wholeness, a oneness, that didn't erase their differences but made them all the more fascinating because this kind of unity and love could exist where these differences existed. Because of them, I became a follower of Jesus. That's the opportunity we have before us today.

What God desires through the reconciliation accomplished by Jesus is that we would be a people so in love with God and empowered by his Spirit that we are free of enmity, united in truth, resting in and exuding the peace of God, and a picture of the difference Jesus makes. That unity in Christ would reach across ethnic and racial lines to such an extent that there would be no strangers, no aliens, no one far off, no hostility in our midst, but instead be the peaceful household of God and the dwelling place of his Spirit.

That's what's possible. That's what I believe we aspire to. But for it to become a reality we have to believe it and commit to living it out. You see, diverse does not necessarily mean reconciled. We can be gathered in the same place but still be miles apart. I was told this week that some people of color have expressed that they feel invisible in our church, and it breaks my heart. I do not want to lead a church where someone feels like they do not matter. So I want to tell you what I believe is the key to us living this out.

If we look at this passage, the cause of this reconciliation is unmistakable. V13 – brought near by the blood of Christ. V14 – the wall of hostility is broken down in his flesh. V16 – that we might both be reconciled to God in one body through the cross. **If we are to live out this reconciliation, we must meet each other at the Cross.** It's at the cross where enmity, malice, vengeance, division, jealousy, self-pity, fear, hatred, pride, self-promotion, and indifference were defeated, and it's at the Cross where **all** of us go to let Jesus purge those things from our hearts. There are two things in particular that happen at the Cross that allow us to live out our identity in Christ.

The Cross reminds us we are all worth dying for in the eyes of God.

Jesus loves everyone who ever has or will walk this earth so much that he was willing to be born of a virgin, live as a man, die an unjust death on a cross, be buried for three days, rise again, ascend into heaven with the promise that he will return to set all things right, and offer eternal life to anyone who believes in that. And before he went to the cross, he told his followers “love one another as I have loved you.” So when we meet at the Cross, we are reminded of what it took to make our identity a reality, we begin to see each other as Jesus sees us, and we become more and more willing to love one another like Jesus loves us, by laying down our lives for each other.

Meeting at the cross allows us to recognize that we are one and that every life is infinitely worthy in the eyes of God. And, in times like these, it compels us to be explicit and specific in expressing that infinite worth to our black brothers and sisters, in God’s eyes and in our own, that we see them, they are valued, and they are loved, and that in our oneness, their pain is our pain, their need is our need. It also means that, if anyone can come to the Cross, anyone is welcome in our family.

The Cross reminds us we are all desperate for mercy and forgiveness.

Unity is the result of humility, and there is a humility from meeting at the cross to remind us of our brokenness and helplessness apart from Christ. Our salvation is unearned. It is only by the grace of God we have been saved. None of us have any reason to boast. Humility confesses we don’t have all the answers, humility allows us to give one another the benefit of the doubt, humility recognizes we need each other, and humility inspires us to repentance and to seek forgiveness, and to be a family who restores one another.

At the cross we are reminded of the forgiveness we’ve been given and are eager to extend that to others. It prevents us from making and believing destructive statements like I heard from a prominent voice speaking into this issue when she said the white race is all barbaric devils. It prevents us from participating in cancel culture, that blasphemous idea that sets us up as judge and jury and condemns someone by claiming they are beyond redemption. There is only one person who has walked the face of the earth who had the power and authority to cancel anyone, and he chose, instead, to go to the cross. **At the cross there is no us and them, only us, because we are one and we are in this together.**

"I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honour of Christ and for the spread of the gospel, than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God's purpose and Christ's achievement it already is—a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by his Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as Peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due to his name." -John Stott

Those words were spoken years ago but they could not be more relevant today. That’s the call of the Church, and I really think **that’s the call of Fellowship Dallas because of where God has placed us and who God has made us.** And that’s where we need to start. Our conversations will include what we do and say next. The elders spent the last three Monday’s talking through it and

have lots of thoughts and perspectives and will continue to talk about it. But everything we do as followers of Jesus must be done out of our identity in him individually and collectively. We must first pursue the unity he has established and go out from there. **When we start by loving him and loving one another, we remind each other of who we are, and we show the world what's possible.**