

October 13, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters of FPC Northshore, Ipswich,

We wanted to communicate with you during this troubling but important time in our country as we collectively seek to better understand the existence of racial issues, injustices and sins. As followers of Christ it is right and good for us to seek to understand these injustices and their impact both historically and presently in society at large and even within the Church of Christ. We also want to be discerning and sensitive to what God may be doing in this cultural moment in this country.

Denominational Overview:

Our session is deeply aware that this is a serious issue that deserves our careful attention, discernment and most of all prayer, as we consider what our own church's 'next steps' may be here on the North Shore of Boston.

Resisting the impulse to be quick to speak yet slow to listen, we want to be thoughtful and deliberate. To that end our session has appointed a task force comprised of elders Jon Conant, Rob Joss, George Papanicolaou, Meirwyn Walters and Director of Women's Ministries, Esther Baird. This team has been meeting to review, pray, read, investigate, and grapple with what our response here at FPC can be with respect to the racial tensions currently roiling the country.

We are thankful that, prior to joining the Presbyterian Church of America in 2018, our own denomination has several times looked closely at issues of racism within the PCA. They have produced a detailed analysis, which is [available on our website](#), of what they believe to be true from Scripture, where we have failed as a denomination, and recommendations both nationally and regionally for all of us to incorporate.

A helpful summary statement of what this study provides can be found in the following quote from the 2017 statement on Biblical and social justice from our denominational seminary, Covenant Theological Seminary:

Issues of racial reconciliation and justice are subsets of larger issues that marginalize all kinds of people in our failure to love God and love neighbor. Prejudices and ethnocentrism fuel racism and many other forms of mistreatment of people across various ethnic differences and socioeconomic strata. However, application to the issue of racial sin against African Americans is of particular relevance in the PCA, and the United States of America in our long and sad history. It is right to name it, repent of it, grieve it, and steward present and future opportunities to make things right going forward.

Scriptural Truths:

Beyond the value of this larger PCA report, our own session here at FPC acknowledges the following truths from Scripture:

- We the people of First Presbyterian Church North Shore as a body of believers under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, denounce racism in all its forms and expressions as contrary to Scripture and to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- The Bible begins with a remarkable declaration and description that everyone was and is created in the image of God, and it concludes with the stunning reality of God gathering his redeemed people from every tribe, tongue and nation (Genesis 1:26-28; Revelation 7:9).
- God, who is love and loved us first, commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We demonstrate that love by acting with righteousness and without partiality. We are called to act justly and love mercy. We are exhorted to be

peacemakers as far as it depends on us (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39; Deuteronomy 10:17; 16:19; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18).

- Jesus loved and treated persons from all backgrounds with dignity, and he teaches his followers to do the same (Mark 11:17; Luke 4:16-27; Luke 7:2-10; John 4; Matthew 28:18-20, Ephesians 2:10).
- Jesus Christ calls us to mourn with those who mourn. We lament the grievous sin of racism. (Romans 12:15). We lament with those who have and continue to suffer its wide-ranging impacts. We lament the pain and hardship it has and continues to cause our black brothers and sisters across this country. We lament the loss it has caused us all.
- Jesus Christ calls us to be a light in the darkness and to be salt, resisting the decay of our world (Matthew 5:13-16).
- Scripture tells us what God has created in advance for us, and it shows us a picture of a people so vast, *“that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”* (Rev 7:9). Diversity is God’s perfect design since the moment of creation until time eternal when we will gather our many-colored hands together with our palm branches. There is no room for racism in that glorious scene before the throne of God.

Moving Forward:

During this period of discernment, our subcommittee is meeting, praying and utilizing a variety of resources (books, lectures, videos, personal interactions, podcasts etc.) to help us determine what may be our next steps and what we may present to the congregation.

As with any sin, the first step is seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance in uncovering our own wrongdoing in the sin of racism. We encourage each of us at FPCNS to prayerfully consider where we each may have sinned. Let’s pray together that God would open our eyes to any sin that exist in our own hearts so that together in Christ we can claim and proclaim true reconciliation and peace. As well, we need to be open to discerning our shortcomings and even sin as a local church in the area of racism.

The airwaves make it easy to fall into discouragement and inactivity, or anger-filled recriminations. We the Church of Christ, however, have by grace, been made partakers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the ultimate solution to racism, and the only power strong enough to heal the malignant effects of sin and transform human hearts. The gospel of our risen Savior is the final triumph over racism because it is the final triumph over sin and over death. We can say with all confidence “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As we add this work to our task as a church, beloved brothers and sisters be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord our labor is not in vain!

May we will live out that reality with grace, humility, and faith.

-The Task Force for Racial Understanding and Justice at FPCNS