

Text: Genesis 1:26-31 (NIV – Updated Version)

Message: Whose Life Matters

I had planned to begin a series of sermon studies on The Church but in light of what has been happening in our nation, I sensed that the Lord was directing me to change directions for today.

We are all aware of what has been going on in our nation the last 10 days. I referred to it last week in our time of Corporate Prayer. The death of George Floyd at the hands or rather under the knee of a Minneapolis Police officer, while 3 other Policeman stood by or assisted in helping to hold him down while he suffocated, has ignited a wave protests across our country. Unfortunately this death of a black man at the hands of white police officer is just the latest instance of brutal treatment against black men and women in our country. I believe that a majority of people would agree that the actions of the police officers went far beyond what was warranted in this instance. Many people, black and white were heart broken, were angry about the images we saw. The outrage has resulted in protests. This outrage has come not just from the Black Community but many White people have lifted their voices in protest. Many people are feeling like Enough is Enough. We need to see change. Sadly there have been many instances of vandalism, looting and destruction of property. I believe that most of those who have tried to express their anger over the death of George Floyd in a peaceful way, have been just as angered about the destruction that has accompanied their protests. They know that the looting and destruction undermines their peaceful protests. I admit that as a white pastor, I do not understand the hurt and grief that is being expressed by the Black Community. Perhaps I am not qualified to speak to these issues. I admit that these are not easy matters to talk about, and I don't have all the answers. But I believe these matters must be addressed. As followers of Jesus, we pray a prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. We pray, ***Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Let this world down here be like the world up there.*** Life down here is NOT what we anticipate Life will be like up there. So I will talk about it. I have seen this several times this statement several times this week. I believe it was attributed to Deitrich Bonhoeffer. ***To fail to Act is to Act; To fail to Speak is to Speak.***

Why do we need to talk about this?

- Our nation and cities are being torn apart because of the anger and pain that people are experiencing. Many lives have been destroyed. People have lost their life savings. Something has to change.
- The anger and pain that come because of the sin of Racism is a sign of the brokenness of our world that is the result of the presence of sin in our world. As Christians, we believe that the gospel which we claim to believe is good news. Jesus alone can heal the brokenness of sin including the sin of Racism.
- In **Matthew 5:13-16**, Jesus calls us to be Light and Salt in the world – to be instruments of change and goodness. Salt and Light are elements that bring about change – for good. We cannot sit idly by. We must let our light shine in the darkness.

There are many questions and issues that could be addressed as we talk about these events. I have read a lot of articles, listened to a lot of interviews and speeches, I have watched many news broadcasts. Much has been said, and much more will be said. I want to focus on one thing that I believe is **foundational** to this whole problem of racism that has brought us to this point. I want to talk specifically about the phrase: **Black Lives Matter.** I know that many people – white people – shut down when they hear that statements, but I beg of you, hear me out. (When I talk about that phrase, I am not talking about the Political Organization that goes by that name. I am talking only about the statement itself). Why is that statement such a Big Deal, and how should we respond when we hear it. More specifically what does that statement have to do with us? My friend Pastor Dan Masshardt who serves at the Fairview Bethel Church of God – my “sending” Church – wrote an article about this, and I am borrowing (with his permission) some of his thoughts.

Pastor Dan points out that a typical response, especially by White people when they hear that statement is to counter by declaring **All Lives Matter.** Dan suggests that if we make the statement “**Unborn babies lives matter**” it is highly unlikely that anyone would jump up and say “**No, All lives matter**”. I would guess that if I

said **Blue Lives Matter**, again no one would jump up and say, **No, All Lives Matter**. If anyone did respond that way, there would likely be some scowls or frowns. They would be viewed as undermining Police. BUT, when we make it about race, **Black Lives Matter**, some feel a need to correct that. **NO, ALL LIVES MATTER**. I do not believe that when Black people who say **Black Lives Matter** they are not saying that White lives do not matter, or Blue Lives do not matter. They do not mean other lives do not matter. They simply are affirming that if **All Lives Matter, then Black Lives must matter**. So, whose life does matter?

What does the Bible say? I think that the Bible affirms that according to God, **ALL LIVES MATTER**.

- **Creation:** I read the passage from Genesis which tells us about the Creation of the human race. Verse 26 in many translations reads “**Let us make man in our image....**” In the updated New International Version, it is translated like this: “**Let us make mankind in our image....**” That is a more helpful translation. In the Hebrew text there is no definite article. So it is a reference to the human race, rather than just 1 man. The creation account then affirms that all of the human race (male and female, black, brown or white) have been created in the image and likeness of God. And, as the text continues the human race has been entrusted with the responsibility of ruling over God’s creation. And let us not miss verse 31: ³¹ **God saw all that he had made, and it was very good... All Lives Matter!**
- **God’s Mission:** In Genesis 12, God announces His mission in the world in His calling of Abraham:
*“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.”^[a]
³ **I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”^[b]***

It is God’s intent to bless ALL PEOPLES ON EARTH. **All Lives Matter!**

I think it is significant to note that when the Old Testament prophets rebuked the people of Israel for their sinfulness and announced that God was going to pour out His judgment and wrath on them, one of the sins that was often highlighted was their lack of concern for Justice for the poor and oppressed. The prophets don’t just rebuke God’s people for not loving Him, they rebuke God’s people for not loving other people! Listen to these words from **Ezekiel 22:23-31**. I believe these are powerful words from the prophet that affirm that **All Lives Matter**.

So we learn that God Himself values All Lives. **All Lives Matter**. But we also learn that it angers God when His people do not **Value All Lives, when some lives do not matter**. Angers Him enough to pour out His wrath and judgment on His own people! **All Lives Matter**.

But is it important to highlight specific groups of people. I would suggest that in the Life and Ministry of Jesus, Jesus made it clear that certain groups who had been put down, neglected, and oppressed mattered to Him. But Jesus would surely have said: **Children’s lives matter. The Lives of Women matter. Lepers matter. Samaritans matter**. The disciples and religious teachers of the day protested when Jesus ministered to those who they considered did not matter.

So we probably all agree. **All Lives Matter!** Why do we have to separate a specific group like black people and say **Black Lives Matter**. I believe we must affirm that because for 400 years of our history as a nation, **Black Lives have not mattered**. As I said George Floyd was not the first black person who was brutally murdered by a white man just because he was a black man. Ahmad Arbury, Emmitt Till, 4 little black girls who were blown up in a Birmingham Church by white criminals. There have been hundreds of thousands of others in our history. Black people were only considered to be property, not people. Black people were denied the opportunity to register to vote. Black people were denied equal opportunity in schools. **Black lives simply have not mattered**. And they are tired of not mattering. So if there is going to be healing of our broken nation, our divided nation, we must as a nation, and as the Church of Jesus Christ affirm that **Black People Matter**.

What can we do about it? There is much more that can be said, and much more that must be said. But we need to start thinking about what we can do, what God is calling us to do to change our nation. If we are the redemptive arm of Jesus in the world, then let's start to figure out how we can be an instrument of healing. We can get all defensive and stutter with our "but statements". But that isn't going to solve anything. That is still denial that Black People Matter. We can protest and say "Well I never said, or did anything. I've never used the N-word or other slurs to refer to black people. I'm not responsible. So there is nothing for me to do." But that is no longer good enough:

- Pray that Christ would open your heart and mind and fill your heart with love for all people. Pastor Antoine Lassiter, who pastors a Church of God congregation in North Carolina suggests that anytime we feel even the slightest twinge of racism in our heart, we need to take that to Jesus. Let Jesus heal our hearts and change our heart.
- Prayer for our nation – prayers of confession and repentance (Nehemiah; Daniel).
- **GET AN EDUCATION!** Read or Listen to the stories of Black people. Learn from them. Sensitize your heart to their pain.
- Learn to Weep with those who weep, grieve with those who grieve
- Speak up when necessary; Be quiet when that may be more productive. You don't have to say anything when someone says, **Black Lives Matter!**
- Teach your children and grandchildren through your words and example.

All lives certainly do matter. We must affirm to those who have been victims, to those who have been oppressed because of their economic condition, or because of the color of their skin, or because of their country of origin, we must affirm to them that we will stop implying that their lives do not matter. Let's get on with it Church.

Prayer

Benediction – May the Lord bless you and keep you; May he make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; May He lift up HIS countenance upon you and give you peace.