

**Children's Moment** *What is racism?*

Good morning, boys and girls, our topic for today is racism. I wish we could be together for this important talk. If you have any questions, talk to your Mom and Dad afterward. I'm happy to help, too.

I'm sharing a story told by Christena Cleveland. She wrote an article titled, "Everything I Know About Racism I Learned in the Church."<sup>1</sup> Christena says, "Many people recall junior high as a dark and stormy stage in their identity development. But as one of two black girls in my class at my Christian school, I had [to] figure out who I was and where I belonged while surrounded by a sea of white classmates who only interacted with me long enough to ask to touch my hair. Feeling different and excluded, I signed up for choir, hoping to find a place to belong.

That year, the Christmas musical script called for a "Rapping Angel." Without auditioning the part, our choir director (with obvious support from my classmates) cast me as the rapping angel, saying, "You can do it, right Christena?"

Nope, I couldn't. [A rapper], I was not.

But since I didn't fit in with my classmates, I was desperate to prove that I belonged to another relevant social group – namely, black people. So I went along with our director's decision and now have the distinction of being the most woefully miscast Rapping Angel in the history of cheesy Christmas musicals.

*The church taught me that I belong nowhere – not even in the tiny stereotypical box that they tried to stuff me into."*

When we treat people with different skin color that way, we're being racist. We're hurting them. We aren't loving like Jesus does. We're telling children God loves there isn't a place where all of us can be ourselves, safe and secure together. That's wrong. All of us are welcome in God's house, exactly as we are!

*Let's pray ...*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.missioalliance.org/everything-i-know-about-racism-i-learned-in-the-church/>

## Message: “What Do You See?”

### **“I can’t breathe.”**

Those are desperate words, spoken in a desperate situation. When you’re struggling to take a breath, life is all you’re thinking about. Without oxygen, we can’t survive. We know it. We feel it. We’ll do everything we can to struggle to find it. If we don’t find it, we die.

### **“I can’t breathe.”**

Those words were spoken two weeks ago in Minnesota by George Floyd, who friends and family describe as a gentle person, a man of peace. Floyd said those words eight times as he was lying on the street with a police officer’s knee on his neck. Minutes later, he was dead. Floyd was being arrested for passing a counterfeit \$20 bill, which he may not have known was counterfeit.

### **“I can’t breathe.”**

Those words were spoken six years ago by Eric Garner on a sidewalk in New York City, as he was held down by a police officer. After saying the words eleven times, he died. Garner was being arrested for selling cigarettes without a tax license.

### **“I can’t breathe.”**

Today you see those words on t-shirts, signs, banners and masks as people protest across the country. They are a rallying cry for peaceful protest. They are a cry of distress from those who are oppressed and abused primarily because of their skin color. They are a cry for liberty, for the opportunity to live as openly and freely as others in our society.

### **They are words calling us to wake up!**

For most of us, the protests, riots and unrest are far away. We retreat to the safety of our homes, turn on the TV and find something to distract us from the troubles of the day. We find news about Ahmaud Arbery, killed while jogging in south Georgia, or Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency room technician killed in her own apartment in Louisville, KY, disturbing. But we don’t do anything about it. We feel powerless. We aren’t sure what we could do.

**Yet we are called to do more, to BE more.**

James wrote, *“You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves. Those who hear but don’t do the word are like those who look at their faces in a mirror. They look at themselves, walk away, and immediately forget what they were like. But there are those who study the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continue to do it. They don’t listen and then forget, but they put it into practice in their lives. They will be blessed in whatever they do”* (James 1:22-25).

**Today, we’re looking into the mirror.** We won’t like what we see. We won’t believe what we hear. It’s not a “feel good” message. This isn’t a “feel good” moment. It’s a moment for adults to wake up, pay attention, stand up and take meaningful action. There is hope, but we have to find it together.

**Let’s start with the basics: racism is alive and well in America.**

I doubt there’s a person listening who doesn’t know this to be true. It’s present in our communities, neighborhoods and homes. It’s not just in the south or in west Los Angeles. It’s present all across America, from Philadelphia to Ferguson to Midland to Sacramento.

**Jesus said, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).** He used the example of a Samaritan to show the Jewish community how to act towards others. The Samaritans were looked down on, oppressed and marginalized; much like people of color are today. Jesus commanded us to love one another, sacrificing ourselves in love (John 15:12). That means we’re to put the needs and interests of others first. I know, it’s hard. But it’s what’s expected if we’re going to follow Jesus and learn another way, the way of grace and mercy.

**That’s the mirror we look into.** The image we hope to see is the image of Jesus. Yet today, when we look, what we see is abuse, prejudice, violence and unrest. We see immigrant children being deported without notifying their family. We see more than 110,000 people dead from a pandemic and 40 million people unemployed. We see a large majority of those affected having black or brown skin.

**We see a house divided.** Our leaders are divided, an indication of the division in our nation. The calming voices, the ones seeking peace with justice are present, but they are few in number. We see police officers and leaders who are listening and engaged in the conversation about making our communities safer for everyone. We also see police officers and leaders who are aggressively using force in their interactions with peaceful protestors. We need to change.

**Change must start within each of us.** Our resident Bishop, Rev. Grant Hagiya reminds us finger-pointing isn't the answer. That's not the way of peace. Grant gives us three questions to reflect on:

- What are my own racist tendencies that I don't want to talk about or admit?
- How have I been complicit in American racism?
- What can I proactively do about it right now?

These aren't easy questions. I encourage you to answer them.

**When was the last time you took a good look at yourself?**

I'm not talking about seeing your coronavirus hair in the mirror. I'm talking about a sober, authentic look inside yourself and at your life. The current unrest in our country gives us great reason to do so.

**I warn you. You may not like what you find. I don't!**

For far too long, our systems, institutions and worldview has promoted inequality. White privilege exists. Actions follow attitudes.

**I acknowledge I'm a beneficiary.** That's not right. I don't feel wealthy, yet I don't have to go to work and worry about whether I'll catch COVID-19 and take it home to my family. I have a job that let's me work from home and give me the means to do so.

**I can go for a walk without a driver's license.** I don't have to worry the police will stop me, question what I'm doing and arrest me for not having an ID. I know I'll be treated well, paid well and given opportunities. It seems like that would be true for everyone, but that's not the case.

**I was at Costco a couple of weeks ago when a man behind me started saying racist things about the couple from southeast Asia who were in front of me.** You could see them cringe. They became flustered, trying to quickly finish what they were doing and leave. I turned around and looked him in the eyes without saying a word.

**He stopped. Yet I fell short.** I didn't offer the couple my support. I didn't say anything to them at all. I'm ashamed to admit that. I, as much as anyone, have much to learn. I don't tell you this story to make myself look better. I tell you this story to show you that all of us need to change. We have to stop trying to climb over others to get to our perceived vision of comfort and security. That's a me-first way of living, rather than a loving way of living. We have to take some risks.

**We have to stop pretending to be better than we are.** When we do that, we're putting ourselves first, ahead of our neighbors and ahead of God. That's what Paul tells us in his letter to Corinth. God deliberately uses men and women that culture exploits, overlooks and abuses to expose the way we are and to expose the prejudice we perpetuate.

**I know this sounds dreary, but there is a way.** We need a clean slate, a fresh way of thinking, a right way of living. Jesus shows us the way. It's what Jesus expects of those who follow him. It won't be easy. Jesus shows us the way of radical hospitality, risk-taking mission and extravagant generosity, the way of love and compassion.

**I have good news: there is hope.** There are people who are peacefully protesting, seeking change. There are people who are helping to clean up, fix damage and help those affected by violence to be restored. People are willing to sit down, listen and take action.

**There are leaders with vision.** Josie Gonzales is Vice Chair, Board of Supervisors from the 5<sup>th</sup> District in San Bernardino. She writes:

“As emotional, and at times disturbing as this weekend's events have been, I choose to see this as an opportunity for us to come together to truly address the systemic racism that has disadvantaged a specific segment of our American family. I do not condone the violence and the looting that has hurt many of our businesses, especially our small

businesses that already have been crippled by COVID-19. But the outcry we hear is not just outrage over the killing of Mr. George Floyd. It is about Ahmaud Arbrey, Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, Botham Jean, and too many other African American men, women, and children who have died violently and unnecessarily as the result of an economic structure that once saw African Americans as property and has yet to fully see them in an equal, humane light.

Tomorrow, leaders of our community will come to the County's Government Center to ask us to listen, to begin the dialogue, and to initiate change right here in San Bernardino County. This will be an opportunity to have ongoing conversations about the real issues African Americans face and how we can work together to erase inequities and disparities that impact their lives. I look forward to being part of the discussion."<sup>2</sup>

**Along with others, I urge us to take a breath for peace.**

That's what George Floyd's family asks. That's what Ahmaud Arbrey's family asks. Violence, damage and aggression won't build bridges or solve problems. We all need to pause and let our tempers and emotions subside.

**Let's take a good, hard look in the mirror.** Let's see ourselves as we really are, pray for God to help us and then do the right thing.

**That's where we'll find Jesus, already at work.**

I invite you to engage in a conversation with a person who doesn't look like you. Sit with them. Listen to them. Don't judge. Build a relationship based on openness and accountability. When you do, you're setting out on a new path.

*Let us pray ...*

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<sup>2</sup> #SBCCountyTogether County Update – June 1, 2020

**1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (MSG)**

The Message that points to Christ on the Cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction, but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense. This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out. It's written,

I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head,  
I'll expose so-called experts as crackpots.

So where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb - *preaching*, of all things! - to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation.

While Jews clamor for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified. Jews treat this like an *anti*-miracle - and Greeks pass it off as absurd. But to us who are personally called by God himself - both Jews and Greeks - Christ is God's ultimate miracle and wisdom all wrapped up in one. Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God. Human strength can't begin to compete with God's "weakness."

**James 1:22-25 (CEB)**

You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves. Those who hear but don't do the word are like those who look at their faces in a mirror. They look at themselves, walk away, and immediately forget what they were like. But there are those who study the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continue to do it. They don't listen and then forget, but they put it into practice in their lives. They will be blessed in whatever they do.