



A THEOLOGICAL VISION FOR BIBLICAL RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

Endorsed by the Session
First Presbyterian Church
Winston-Salem, NC
by Rev. Dr. Peter Barnes

October 2019

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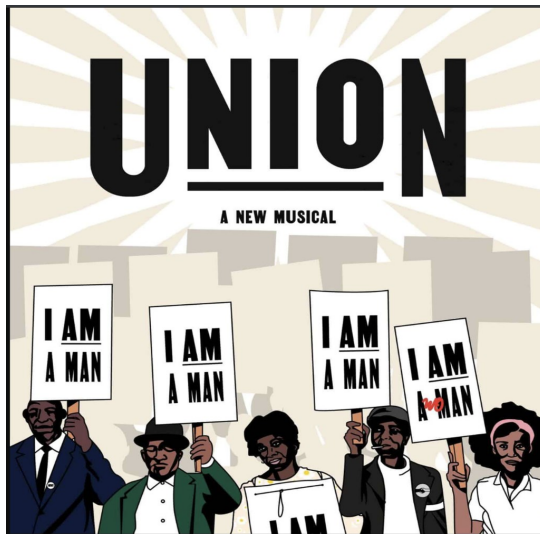
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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This past year our congregation engaged in efforts to address problems in our country and in our city related to racial reconciliation and racial justice. We partnered with other congregations in our community to sponsor two events – *Union: A New Musical* and the Forum on Faith and Culture, which this year focused on the racial divide in our nation and our city, and we also held a Jan Term class on Race and the Gospel which many people in our church attended in preparation for this year's Forum. These events sparked lively conversation in our congregation about important biblical matters, and at times they also created some tension. Not everyone agreed with what was presented at the Forum or in our Jan Term class. This prompted me to preach a sermon on "Our Union in Christ" the Sunday after Easter to address these tensions and also to talk about what the Bible teaches regarding reconciliation and justice. In addition, a series of dialogues was created and led by laypeople in our church to help facilitate open conversation about these important issues.



In an effort to provide guidance to our congregation and staff as we seek to grapple with what the Bible teaches regarding biblical justice and reconciliation, I offered the Session this paper to help us clarify where our church stands on these important matters and also provide clear direction for the future. The Session reviewed this document and endorsed it in October 2019 to serve as a guide for our Session, staff and congregation as we respond to God's call to reconciliation and justice.

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR RECONCILIATION¹ AND JUSTICE

One cannot read very much of the Bible without coming face-to-face with the reality of God's concern for reconciliation and justice. It is at the heart of what the Gospel is all about. In Genesis we read that after God created the world good, our first parents fell through their disobedience, and the result was that it affected not only Adam and Eve but all of creation as well. Their relationships with God, self, others, and even the created order were damaged by their sin, and we're still dealing with effects of the Fall today. However, God didn't leave humanity in this condition of sin and death. Instead, He launched a rescue mission, born out of His love, to redeem fallen humanity, and, in fact, to redeem the whole world. This mission culminated in sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross in our place, and in His resurrection Christ demonstrated His ability to overcome sin and death and bring salvation to the world. And now God invites us to join Him on His mission of love to bring this reconciliation to the whole world.

This is the fundamental calling of every Christian. We who have been reconciled to God are now called to be His ambassadors of reconciliation in the world. The apostle Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians, *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ..."* (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). Jesus Christ is the strong center pole on which a church's ministry of reconciliation must be built.

This ministry of reconciliation includes racial reconciliation, and God calls each of us to help tear down the walls that separate us. This provides a good contemporary example, or a case study, of what it means for Christians to engage in a ministry of reconciliation and pursue justice with Christ at the center.²

¹People mean different things these days when they use the word "reconciliation," and some would like to abandon the word because of the confusion that surrounds its meaning in contemporary usage. However, it is a word that comes right out of the Bible, and I believe we need to reclaim its biblical meaning and reframe its use in the church today. For the purposes of this paper I will be using Brenda Salter-McNeil's definition of reconciliation: "The ongoing spiritual process that involves forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and broken systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish." docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c61a3a_f9975de7de8c4a268b5974ce81b408ae.

²We should be quick to add that it is only one example of many for what it means to pursue justice, and there are many wrongs in the world the people of God should seek to join Christ in combatting and correcting. It is one opportunity the Holy Spirit has presented to our church during this cultural moment in our city in which we can engage, but it is not the only one.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes, “*For Jesus Himself is our peace, who has made the two [races] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility*” (Ephesians 2:14). In this passage Paul is talking about the terrible racial conflict that existed in the ancient world between Jews and Gentiles. Racism and discrimination are nothing new, and they were alive and well in the first century. Christians back then who came from different ethnicities had as great a challenge of getting along as we do today.

The gospel of Jesus Christ compels us to tear down all the walls that separate people and build bridges of understanding, mutual love, and support. Any pursuit of racial reconciliation will inevitably lead to a concern for racial justice. As Timothy Dalrymple recently wrote in an editorial for *Christianity Today*, “If white Christians wish to stand on the bridge [of reconciliation] with brothers and sisters of other colors and backgrounds, they need to stand with them first in the foxhole [of injustice] If we abandon our sister in the foxhole, we cannot expect her to attend our potluck.”³

The word “justice” is a polarizing and emotionally charged word these days, but it is a word that comes right out of the Bible. However, it is important that we understand how the Bible defines justice. And once we have done this, we need to reclaim it because we cannot describe ourselves as being filled with the love of Christ if we aren’t pursuing justice. And the reason for this is because justice is a component of love, just as forgiveness is. In his book *Generous Justice*, pastor and author Tim Keller explains that the Hebrew word for “justice” is *mishpat*, and it appears in its various forms over 200 times in the Old Testament.

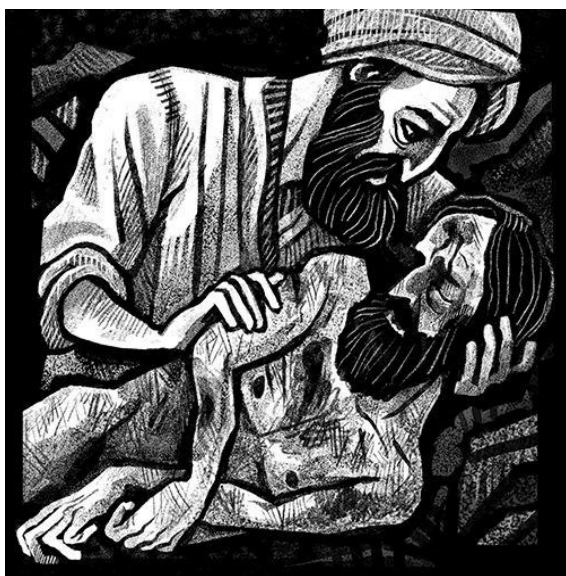
Its most basic meaning is to “treat people equitably.” It means acquitting or punishing every person on the merits of the case, regardless of race or social status. Anyone who does wrong should be held accountable, and they should be given the same penalty regardless of their race or social standing. But *mishpat* means more than just the punishment of wrongdoing. It also means giving people their rights. For example, Deuteronomy 18 says that the priests of the tabernacle were to be supported by a certain percentage of the people’s income. This support is described as “the priests’ *mishpat*,” which means their due or their right. Therefore, *mishpat* is giving people what they are due, whether punishment or protection or care.⁴

³Timothy Dalrymple, “On Court Prophets and Wilderness Prophets,” July 19, 2019. Online editorial for *Christianity Today*. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/july-web-only/prophets-trump-nathan-david-john-baptist.html

⁴Tim Keller, *Generous Justice* (New York: Viking Press, 2010)

In the New Testament the Greek words for “justice” and “righteousness” appear together almost one hundred times. In addition, when Jesus began His public ministry, He quoted the prophet Isaiah and announced, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty for the captives and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”* (Luke 4:18,19). Then Jesus said, *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* In effect, the Lord was saying, “Justice is a centerpiece of My message and ministry.”

Biblical justice isn’t about politics. It transcends politics. It isn’t affiliated with any political party, economic system, or social construct. It isn’t liberal or conservative, progressive or fundamentalistic. It is simply living out the implications of the gospel and the horizontal demands of loving one’s neighbor as oneself. Biblical justice is part of what it means to live a life of love. If I respond to Jesus’ call to truly love my neighbor as myself, then what harms my neighbor harms me, and what is a problem for my neighbor is a problem for me. I need to attempt to see the world through my neighbor’s eyes and try to understand what it’s like to be in his or her shoes. If my neighbor isn’t being treated fairly, then, in so far as it is in my power to do so, I am called to do something to help make things right for him or her. This is the clear implication of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, and it is our missional calling in Christ.



The Good Samaritan, by Kristin Miller



The Good Samaritan, by He Qi

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright puts it so well when he writes,

“

The message of the resurrection is that this world matters! That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won. If Easter means Jesus Christ is only raised in a spiritual sense—[then] it is only about me and finding a new dimension in my personal spiritual life. But if Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world—news which warms our hearts precisely because it isn't just about warming hearts. Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things—and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement the victory of Jesus over them all.⁵

It is clear from Scripture that if a person wants to know the heart of God and if we want to be involved in addressing things He cares about, we need to be concerned about justice. Micah 6:8 is a good summary of what the Bible teaches: *“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”* Throughout Scripture there are five groups of people God has a special concern for – the poor, the widow, the orphan, those in prison, and the foreigner or refugee. As we read through the Old Testament we see the writers of Scripture time and time again instruct the people of Israel to treat these groups of people fairly and to protect them. And the reason God wanted His people to advocate for these individuals is because they were so vulnerable in the ancient world, and people with power often abused and took advantage of them. It continues to happen today.

Wherever evil raises its ugly head, the people of God are to oppose it in the power of God's Spirit. In addition, whenever evil manifests itself in institutions and society as a whole, when it becomes systematic and institutionalized (such as human trafficking, unjust laws, slavery, racist practices, corruption in government, the abuse of children, or corporate malfeasance, etc.), God calls His people to speak the truth in love to the institutional powers and seek to correct the injustice.

⁵N.T. Wright, quoted by Tim Keller in *The Reason for God* (Penguin Books: New York, 2008), p. 210.

That's why Moses went to Pharaoh and boldly declared, "Let My people go." I can't excuse myself from getting involved just because the problem doesn't affect me personally. If it impacts my community, if it hurts my neighbor, God says I need to be involved. The Incarnation of Jesus is a demonstration of the biblical mandate for personal engagement with the disorder and injustice of the world. God sent His Son to make things right. For us this may involve individual acts of love-in-action, or it may include institutional efforts to address systemic issues. Both are equally valid expressions of God's concern for justice. And *why* and *how* believers oppose evil differentiates them in the world. There is no justice without love, and acts of justice done without love are not reflective of our calling in Christ.

The Bible says that one day Jesus will return, and all the nations, tribes and ethnic groups of the world will be united into a single international, interracial, and intercultural choir praising God. The land and its creatures will flourish once again. Peace will reign. Evil will be punished once and for all, and the tyrants of the earth will be judged. The world will be set to rights, and God's kingdom will come to the earth. Until then, the people of God are to pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and they are to do all they can to help make that in-breaking kingdom of God a reality here now. We're supposed to help fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. We're to proclaim the Good News of God's love in Christ through evangelism, and we're to love our neighbors as ourselves through personal and corporate acts of righteousness. It's a ministry of reconciliation in word and action.



Jesus, by Solomon Raj

THE STAGES OF GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN THE MATTERS OF RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

Most Christians have a general sense that they should try to live a righteous life, and after they are converted it is not uncommon for believers to grow in their awareness of this and with the help of God's Spirit seek to change their behavior which isn't aligned with what the Bible describes as the kind of life God desires. However, for many Christians it is just a personal matter and they rarely think about the larger implications of the Gospel not only for their own lives but also for society as a whole. One of the curses of Christianity in the West is that too often we tend to think primarily in individualistic terms. We think that the Christian life is just about Jesus and me. But the Bible was written in a culture that always saw the individual in the context of community, and Scripture provides a healthy corrective to an individualistic approach many Christians take today in living the Christian life. The more one reads the Bible and the longer one follows Jesus, the more that person will become aware of a more complete understanding of living out the implications of the Gospel not only in every area of one's personal life but also in every part of society.

AWARENESS

When it comes to reconciliation and justice, I've observed that as Christians seek to understand how God calls them to live in the world, there are two steps that are part of our general growth in Christ, and there is an additional third step that is particular to specific people and institutions. The first step is **Awareness**. The Holy Spirit reveals to the believer new insights into the holy life God desires them to live personally, and they discover all the ways their lives aren't aligned with the purposes of God. However, a careful reading of Scripture will begin to expand their awareness to include a growing understanding of the implications of the Gospel beyond their personal lives, and they become concerned about evil and the injustice they see around them in the world. Brenda Salter McNeil says that this often happens after a catalytic event in a person's life which creates a new sense of awareness.⁶

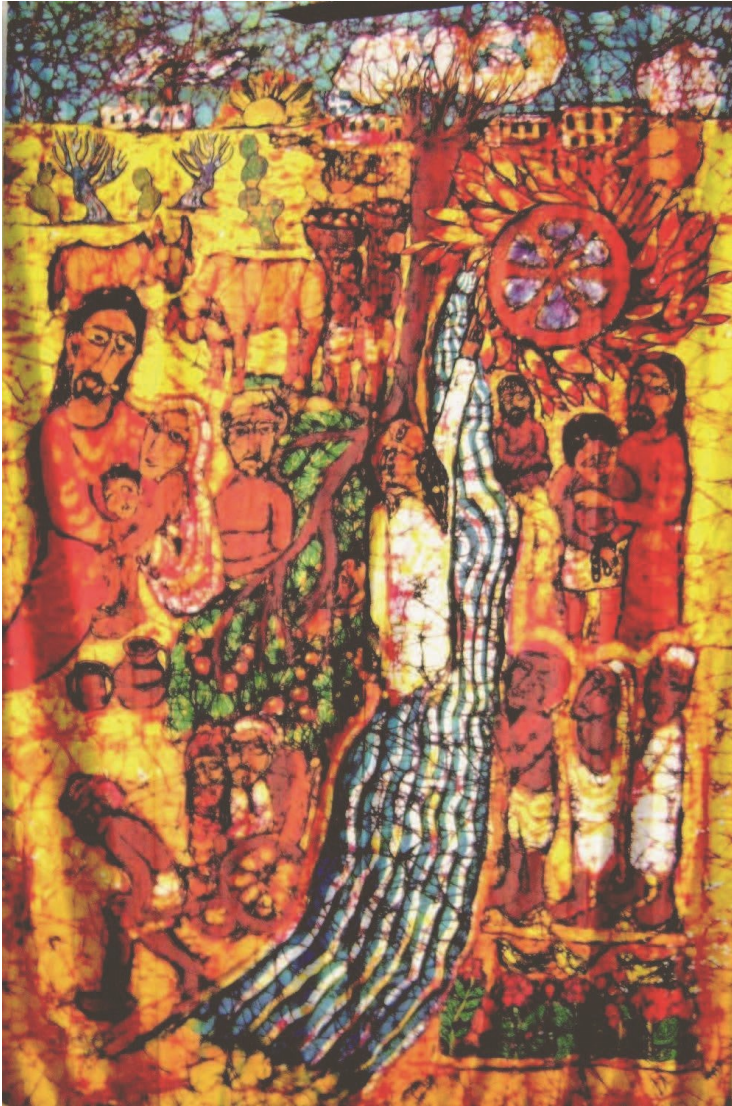
⁶See Brenda Salter McNeil at www.saltermcneil.com/subscription-details.

SENSITIVITY

This leads to the second step in the process of growth in discipleship regarding issues of justice – ***Sensitivity***. When Christians become aware of the problems of injustice in the world, they begin to become sensitive to the problems of poverty and those who are oppressed, as well as people who are disadvantaged or marginalized in the world. They try to educate themselves about the problems of injustice, and they grow in their understanding of the difficulties. They also seek to repent for the ways they have been complicit in the problems. And when believers become aware of the need for change, they want to do something about it. It is not uncommon for Christians in this stage to begin to talk with friends and family members about matters of injustice that weigh upon their hearts, and often these concerns become the subject of many of their prayers. In their personal lives, they become much more sensitive to issues of injustice, and they are marked by compassion, mercy, and kindness towards those who have experienced injustice.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

For Christians this leads to a third step regarding specific issues of injustice. It is the step of ***Active Engagement***. Awareness of problems in the world and a growing sensitivity about them usually leads followers of Christ into action to become personally involved. The Holy Spirit reveals the problems that plague a community, and Christians roll up their sleeves and get involved to try and bring change in an organized and even institutional way. Examples of this abound in church history. For example, William Wilberforce was deeply troubled by the slave trade in England in the 18th century, and he felt called by God to help abolish it. Amy Carmichael, who was a missionary in India in the 20th century, believed the Lord wanted her to address the problem of temple prostitution in that country, and she built an orphanage which eventually housed over 400 young girls and provided them education and skills for making a living as well as telling them the good news of God's love in Christ. And in our own day Mother Teresa became a champion for the poor and the dying in the city of Calcutta.



Thirst for Justice, by Solomon Raj

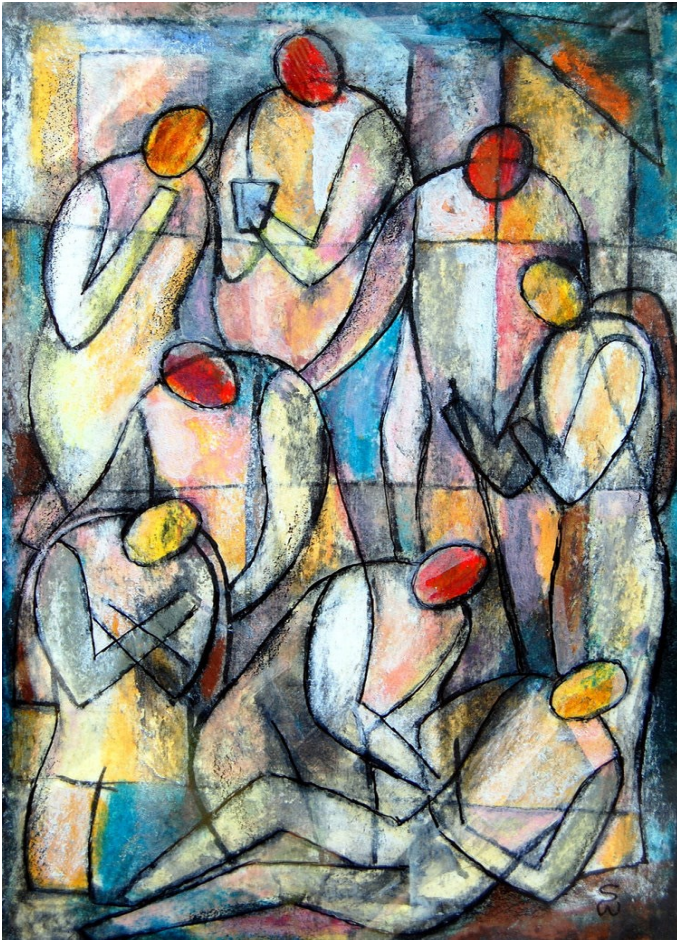
THE ROLE OF OUR CHURCH IN THE STAGES

When it comes to matters related to issues of justice, First Presbyterian Church has played a role in all three of these steps. We have a long history of personal discipleship and transformation, we have been advocates for change in many parts of our community, and we have worked with others in an organized way to raise awareness and to help address issues of injustice in our city and beyond. However, historically our church has not said that the calling of every Christian is to be actively involved in a specific work to fight injustice, and we have typically left it to our covenant partners to determine when, where and how they feel called by God to engage in individual and collective efforts to fight injustice.

For some in our church, their Christian engagement to work for biblical justice involves volunteering in the emergency overflow shelter our church hosts during the winter months or serving on the Good Neighbor Team to welcome refugee families we have helped sponsor. Others in our church feel called by God to be a Lunch Buddy at Cook Elementary School or to lead a Bible study for women in prison. However, others in our church have chosen a variety of intentional expressions such as lobbying government officials regarding unjust practices and even demonstrating to protest unjust laws. We don't have a one-size-fits-all approach to Christian discipleship, including when it comes to reconciliation and justice.

In our history the approach to discipleship First Pres has maintained when it comes to reconciliation and justice primarily has been to focus on the first two steps of the process of growth and development and leave it to our covenant partners to explore a variety of ways to actively engage in matters of justice. And the leadership of our church has typically resisted the efforts of some to influence the congregation into a particular or specific stance or expression of engagement. I think it would be helpful today to clarify, restate, and reaffirm what I call the "educating, equipping and empowering" approach we have historically taken in order to provide guidance and direction to our staff and congregation.

However, I also think we need to encourage everyone in our church and on our staff to engage in activities related to reconciliation and justice as they feel led by God while reminding them that what they do in the public square reflects on our church. I also believe we should provide multiple opportunities for active engagement and allow folks to choose where they believe the Lord wants them to get involved.



Least of These, by Soichi Watanabe

One final word on this. We may be coming to a time in this country and in our community when Christians and churches will need to speak out, stand up, and work for biblical justice in a more pronounced way. Extreme voices of discrimination and hate in our culture are on the rise, and the people of God will need to take a clear and often public stand to oppose them. However, prudence and wisdom are all the more necessary in discerning what each person and each church decides to be involved in as we live out our faith in an increasingly polarized world.

THE PASTORAL CHALLENGES CONGREGATIONS AND LEADERS FACE WHEN WORKING FOR RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

Satan loves to destroy and divide. His name means “splitter,” and he will take every opportunity to bring division in a congregation whenever he can. It is not uncommon for churches to experience tension in their body when issues regarding justice are studied and discussed, and for this reason the leadership of a church needs to be all the more vigilant in providing clear direction and pastoral sensitivity whenever a congregation begins to take seriously and live out the implications of the gospel in these areas. Tension can be a good thing, and it can lead to growth. The prophet Amos warned, *“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion” (6:1)*. However, pastors and elders need to shepherd a congregation well through the seasons of tension in a church’s life.

As **pastors and church leaders** shepherd their flock, **they should follow the example of Christ who was both Prophet and Priest** during His earthly ministry. Jesus was prophetic and He unequivocally proclaimed the truth of God, and the cleansing of the Temple is an example of His zeal and passion for God’s justice. But the Bible also says that Jesus is our Great High Priest, and He is presented in Scripture as One who sympathizes with our weaknesses and who cares for us as a shepherd does for His sheep. Fulfilling both of these roles in church leadership isn’t always easy, and we are often tempted to gravitate toward one or the other in pastoral ministry. However, our job is to fulfill both callings and live in the tension between the two tasks.

In the prophetic task, church leaders need to be humble whenever they teach about and work for reconciliation and justice. It is easy to become self-righteous when discussing these matters, and it can even result in a sort of Gnosticism.⁷ We begin to think that we’re the enlightened ones, and if only others could come to see things as we do, then they would get on board and join the heavenly band. We also need to avoid the temptation of making justice an idol. Idolatry doesn’t just involve worshipping little pieces of carved wood or stone. Idolatry is also when you take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing. Therefore, humility is an important character trait we need to cultivate and embody as we seek to lead and shepherd our church as it learns about and pursues biblical justice in the world.

⁷The word “Gnosticism” comes from the ancient Greek word *gnosis* which means “knowledge.” It was an early Christian heresy in the 2nd century AD which celebrated a special spiritual knowledge some people had. They were viewed as “enlightened” by God in a special way and had more spiritual insight than others. Early forms of Gnosticism were emerging during the time of the apostles, and Paul warns against these false teachers in his epistles on many occasions.



A second pastoral consideration I want to mention **is the importance of dialogue.** The round table discussions which covenant partners in our church helped to organize and lead in the Spring of 2019 were very beneficial in encouraging people in our congregation who don't agree on these issues to talk and listen to one another and grapple with the problem of race in our community. It is all too easy to get stuck in an echo chamber and only talk and listen to yourself or to others who agree with you when talking about race (or any other subject related to biblical justice), and the more we can come together and wrestle with these issues in community the better chance we will have at maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in the Body of Christ. It is so important to learn to listen, and the Prayer of St. Francis which we used in our congregational dialogues has been an excellent example for our church in dealing with controversial issues.

*Lord make me an instrument of your peace
 Where there is hatred let me sow love
 Where there is injury, pardon
 Where there is doubt, faith
 Where there is despair, hope
 Where there is darkness, light
 And where there is sadness, joy
 O divine Master, grant that I may
 Not so much seek to be consoled as to console
 To be understood as to understand
 To be loved as to love
 For it is in giving that we receive
 And it's in dying that we are born to eternal life*

PRAYER of St. Francis of Assis

I will also add that we've got to **be willing to get uncomfortable** as we pursue racial justice and reconciliation. The more we lean into efforts to pursue racial reconciliation and justice, the more we will discover the depth of pain people of color have experienced. And we should not be surprised when discussions become uncomfortable or our efforts to tear down the walls that separate us are difficult. The truth hurts and discomfort and struggle can be good things, because they reveal just how profound the problems are and how much work we still have yet to do. We need to lean into this important work even when it's uncomfortable, even when it's hard, because it is the important kingdom work to which the Lord is calling us.⁸

Another pastoral suggestion I want to offer involves **Grace and Truth**. John 1:14 says that Jesus was full of two things – grace and truth. Grace without truth is fuzzy, codependent, enabling, and permissive. And truth without grace is punitive, legalistic, harsh and self-righteous. But grace and truth together are an unbeatable combination, and Jesus' ministry was marked by both. When the woman was caught in adultery in John 8, Jesus told the woman, *"Neither do I condemn you, but go and sin no more."* Grace and truth. When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life in Mark 10, the text tells us that *"Jesus looked at him and loved him."* But the passage also says that Jesus said, *"One thing you lack, go sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and come follow Me."* Grace and truth. And when Jesus met with the woman at the well in Samaria, Jesus offered Himself – the Living water of God – to her, but He also told the woman the truth about her many marriages and the relational wreckage of her life. Grace and truth. Whenever we deal with matters concerning reconciliation and justice we need to be full of both grace and truth, just like Jesus.

⁸When it comes to racial justice, I believe I as a white person have been complicit in and have benefitted from the systems of injustice that have existed in the past which have discriminated against and disadvantaged people of color, and these systems are still deeply embedded in our culture today. And I think this tragic historical reality needs to be clearly stated and owned, and we need to lament it and repent of it.



I Am the Living Water, by Marleen Hengelaar-Rookmaaker

A final (and perhaps the most important) recommendation is to emphasize the need for **prayer** whenever we seek to address matters of reconciliation and justice. This work is ultimately spiritual, and without the help of the Holy Spirit no lasting spiritual change will happen in the world. In addition, this isn't work we attempt to do in a vacuum. Our calling is to join God in the work He is already doing to bring reconciliation to the world. Our task is to find out what He is doing and join Him on His mission of love. It is very freeing to realize that it isn't up to us to make justice a reality on earth. Rather, it is the work of God to bring it about, and we have the privilege of joining Him in this holy work.

THE PROPHETIC IMAGINATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Whenever Christians take up the difficult prophetic task of proclaiming the truth of God in a fallen world, there are many pitfalls that are easy to fall into. Wise is the Christian leader who does this in a circumspect manner and engages in the task of preaching, teaching and leading a congregation with some fear and trembling. This is not to say we should be timid when speaking the truth, but rather we should do so in a spirit of humility and prayer, always animated by the love of Jesus.

The apostle James offers the following wise advice:

“

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

James 3:13-18

Ultimately, I think it is the positive, beautiful and creative vision of the Kingdom of God that is most compelling and transformative in the hearts, minds and lives of people. The beautiful picture in Scripture of the Beloved Community God desires to create by His Spirit has the ability to capture the imagination and win the heart more than just about anything else. We should never lose sight of the wonderful picture of the reconciled community of God portrayed in the Bible.

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John is given a glimpse of what this vision of a reconciled world will ultimately be one day. He writes, *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ He said to me: ‘It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life’” (Revelation 21:1-6).*

To God be the glory!

A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recognize and reaffirm that reconciliation and biblical justice are central to living out the implications of the Gospel in one's personal life as well as the corporate life of a church, and leadership should teach, lead, model, support and encourage our staff and covenant partners to work for justice in our city and nation. This may include taking a public stand on matters of injustice. When it comes to racial reconciliation, "we cannot expect our brothers and sisters of color to stand with us on the bridge of reconciliation unless we are willing to stand with them in the foxhole of injustice."

2. Emphasize awareness and sensitivity involving matters of reconciliation and justice and leave it to our covenant partners to determine how God wants them to be actively engaged in the work of these important issues. On some occasions the leadership of our church may decide to commit our whole congregation to a particular action or activity (such as helping sponsor the production of *Union* and the Forum in 2019), but this will happen only after much study, thought and prayer and with the support of the Session. Pastors and church leaders are encouraged to actively engage in individual acts of service and corporate efforts to work against injustice, but they should always bear in mind that what they do reflects on the church.

3. Pastors and elders in our church should strive to fulfill both the prophetic and priestly roles of leadership and hold in tension both callings. We should encourage and foster an attitude of humility when discussing, teaching, preaching and working for reconciliation and justice, and we should strive to be full of both grace and truth when it comes to these matters.

4. Dialogue is encouraged, and opportunities for robust discussion should be organized and nurtured by the leadership of the church. A strong center pole of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture can make for a big tent which allows for a diversity opinions and political views. This has been one of the hallmarks of First Pres historically.

5. We've got to be willing to get uncomfortable as we pursue racial justice and reconciliation. The more we lean into efforts to pursue racial reconciliation and justice, the more we will discover the depth of pain people of color have experienced and just how difficult and complex the problems are. Even though the work is hard and the problems aren't easily solved, it is important kingdom work to which the Lord is calling us. So we must stay engaged even when we feel uncomfortable or see little fruit from our efforts.

6. When explaining, discussing and working for racial reconciliation and justice, in addition to telling the truth about the awful and tragic history of racism in our country and in our city, make every effort to also emphasize the positive beautiful picture of the Beloved Community Scripture talks about in an effort to bring change and encourage dialogue. When driving a car, it is important to look in the rear-view mirror to see what is behind and to get a sense of your bearings and see where you came from. However, that task is only to help you with the more important job at hand which is to look through the windshield and see where you need to go.

7. Finally, emphasize the need for prayer in the work of reconciliation and justice. Ultimately this is spiritual work, and without the leading and blessing of the Holy Spirit, all our efforts will be for naught. Reconciliation is God's work, and we're invited to join Him on His mission of love.



*Inviting all people to say "Yes!"
to Jesus with their whole lives.*