So God created humankind in God’s own image.

God, you have made man but little lower than the angels, you adorn him with glory and honor.

Amen

I expect all of us have watched the events of the last two or three weeks with many emotions – grief, horror, sadness, anger, anxiety. These events have many facets: issues of race, violence, institutions, the appropriate or inappropriate use of religious language and symbols, the appropriate or inappropriate use of force.

Our lectionary includes these two verses that I repeated at the beginning of my sermon – these two verses that speak to the value and dignity of humans, all of whom are created in the image of God. All facets of the events of the past few weeks could be reflected upon in light of these verses, and I encourage you to do so. All of these issues are important and deserve considerable prayer and theological reflection. Please know that I share with you concerns in all these areas and that I pray for God’s peace and wisdom for our country in all these areas. Please know that I share your belief that violence is never the answer.

My call as a preacher and pastor is to speak to you about God’s words to you – in some cases, words of comfort; in other cases, words that encourage you or challenge you to live into the call to be people of God and to spread the Gospel of God’s unconditional love to all people. Although God’s word certainly speaks to all that has been going on, we in this community cannot necessarily effect change equally in all these facets. We’re not violent folks, looting and pulling police out of cars to injure them, so we are already living into God’s call to be nonviolent. We are a group of caring, ordinary, law-abiding white people. We would welcome a black person into our church. We treat all people kindly. We know that God created all people in God’s image. We know that God loves all people. So, your pastor today – a caring, ordinary, law-abiding white person like you – speaks to us (you and me) today about how we can help to change those structures in society that still don’t give people of color a level playing field. Ultimately, these structures will change only if white people get behind the change because only those with the political and economic power can really make a lasting change to these systems.

Now, I know that black people have more power than they did 50 years ago and, I know, that some of us may feel that we lost something we should have had because of affirmative action or a similar law. But on the whole, whites still have the power.

* 96 percent of US governors are white
* 100 percent of the top military advisers are white
* 91 percent of the President’s Cabinet officers are white
* 93 percent of those who decide what shows are on TV are white
* 90 percent of those who decide what books are published are white
* 85 percent of those who decide what news is reported are white
* 82 percent of teachers nationwide are white
* 97 percent of the owners of men’s professional football teams are white[[1]](#endnote-1)

So most of our institutions are still white-controlled. We, the caring, ordinary, law-abiding white people must be part of the solution. So, how do we do this? We already welcome black people and are kind to them. What else are we called to do?

One thing is to realize that because we are white our whole life experience is different. To be white is to fit in with all of society’s structures. We seldom, if ever, have the experience of not belonging because we are white. By contrast, a black person has that experience many times every day for his or her entire life. They have few role models of their own color. They automatically don’t fit in.

Another thing we can do is to realize that because we control all these institutions, we benefit from them in ways a black person doesn’t. For example, if I were jogging past a bank at the time it was robbed and a black person was also jogging in the same place at the same time, the police would almost invariably stop the black jogger but not me. If I, as a white person committed a crime and a black person committed exactly the same crime, prosecutors are almost twice as likely to charge me with the minimal offense (so I would get less prison time) while charging the black person with the maximum offense.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Housing segregation patterns and redlining, which one or two generations ago blocked off many black neighborhoods from receiving investment and the ability of people to receive loans to buy homes in that area, has limited the ability of many black families to create wealth. For every $100 of wealth created for us white families, black families have amassed only about $5. School funding, which is based on real estate tax revenue, is often unequal with predominantly white schools receiving more money and black schools receiving less. Education, as we all know, is a key to economic advancement. Also while there is less discrimination in hiring than there used to be, studies have shown that when resumes are identical, the person with the white-sounding name will get 2 times as many phone calls to interview as the person with the black-sounding name.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Other things we can do, then, is to be aware of the implications of certain political decisions on race; for example, how schools are funded, how crimes are prosecuted, how political districts are redrawn to dilute black vote. We can be aware of restrictive housing practices such as advertising homes only to a few people who we feel will fit well with the neighborhood. Or hiring subtleties such as choosing candidates based on how well they “fit” with the team. Teamwork is important but sometimes, unconsciously, our brain tells us that John will fit in with our team of Tom, Mary, and Bob, while Jamal will not.

We also can show our willingness to be part of peaceful organizations seeking solutions and resist the urge to take over leadership of these groups. Letting black people lead is a new experience for us and one that will grow and stretch us.

And finally, prayer always works, especially because it changes our hearts to urge us to act.

We caring, ordinary, law-abiding white people can and will help to re-create this world into the one God intended. Jesus models for us a new disclosure of God, a new vision of human community. Jesus models for us that unconditional love for all people. As followers of Christ, we put that unconditional love into action.

1. Robin DiAngelo, White Fragility, Beacon Press (2018) location 713 Kindle edition. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. M. Marit Rehavi and Sonja B Starr, University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository: [Racial Disparity in Federal Criminal Sentences,](https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2413&context=articles) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Systemic Racism Explained- [youtube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrHIQIO_bdQ) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)