

PASTOR'S NOTES – July 2020

*You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."(Leviticus 19:18)But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*James 2:8-9

In our centuries-old debate on racism in this country, I doubt that I have anything new to offer, except an old observation: whenever we differentiate our care for people by race, or gender, or age, or ability, or language, or any other criteria, we are not following the command of scripture. can also raise a couple questions:

Why deny being a racist?

For me, I don't deny the role racism and other "isms" have played in my life. I'm not proud of any of them, but I understand it partly reflects the culture in which I grew up. By default, we follow the culture's ways unless we have become aware of them and consciously choose to think and act differently. That is the reason why Martin Luther wrote back in 1521: *As long as we are here [in this world] we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness, but, as Peter says (2 Peter 3:13), we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

So while in the past I denied it, I admit to being racist and biased toward and against people in other ways. I consider it a part of my spiritual growth to continually root out and face those pieces of myself if I am to become more and more like Jesus.

However, a big part of the "isms" usually goes unnoticed by me. Most of my life as a white male I have been unaware of how much I have been able to take for granted: safety, kindness from strangers, a fair shot at getting the job I want, no restrictions (except income) on where I live or my children's schools. It is only after listening to people's stories and more careful observation that I realize not everyone can take those things for granted.

I remember hearing words from Dick Gregory back in the early 70s, though I can't seem to find the quote online (he has many more quotes since then). I recall it, it went something like this: *"I don't care if you like me or any other black person. don't have to like us; just don't keep us from being able to get a home, a job, a school for our children, and the safety that you take for granted."*

Why is up to the people hurt by the system to push for change?

As I think back on the efforts of African-American persons to gain equality in this country, along with women who worked for laws protecting them from abuse, I was very much aware of how personal the struggle was for most of them. One who wanted to fix things, it rarely seemed that I could be supportive in a way that they would appreciate. I think I didn't understand the value of just listening and supporting another's right to be heard.

Today I begin to think that there is an unwritten rule that everything in this culture is fine; if it doesn't work for you, we won't believe it unless you prove it to us. I believe that from the beginning our constitution and laws treat everyone fairly, and yet we have had to add laws just to include certain classes of people. During a speech at the University of California at Berkeley in the fall of

1966, Stokely Carmichael said, *"For example, I am black. I know that. I also know that while I am black, I am a human being. Therefore, I have the right to go into any public place. White people didn't know that. Every time I tried to go into a place, they stopped me. So, some boys had to write a bill to tell that white man, 'He's a human being; don't stop him,' that bill was for that white man, not for me. I knew it all the time."*

We should ask ourselves why it is that African-Americans, women, and others have had to take the lead to make those changes. The Bible tells us that looking out for the powerless is *our* responsibility (that is, the responsibility of those of us who have the power and means). For instance, when I do a quick search in the Bible for the "poor" and how we are to care for them, I find Isaiah 3:14-15, 10:2, 32:7, 58:7, 61:1, Jeremiah 2:34, 22:16, Ezekiel 16:49, Ezekiel 18:1-18, 22:29, Daniel 4:27, Amos 2:6-7, 4:1, 5:11-12, 8:4-6, Zechariah 7:9-10, Matthew 19:21, Mark 10:21, Luke 4:18, 14:13, 18:22, Galatians 2:10, and the James passage I quoted above. I could look for similar words and come up with many more verses.

So how can we be more aware of how our sisters and brothers around us are being treated? First, we listen; we hear it from their point of view. Ultimately, this is how we love our neighbor. This may seem rather small compared with the scope of the problem. With our connected world, we can get overwhelmed by the wider sphere of events and feel powerless to do anything. But then we fall into thinking in terms of "classes" of people: police, grieving families, protesters, looters. Who are these people? What are their names? What are their stories? We can't love classes of people, we need to interact personally with individuals. The individual approach was the way Jesus modeled love for others. Loving the individuals we encounter is the biggest step we can take to bring down the "isms" of our culture. It also helps to remember the words of Hebrews 13:1-2: *"Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."*

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, enclosed in a thin black rectangular border. The signature is stylized and appears to be the name 'Ken'.