

June 3, 2020

Dear OPC Community,

One of the first things pointed out to me when I first entered the doors of our congregation was a framed letter from the 1960's. This letter, signed by the pastor of our church at the time, was a bold denunciation of racism and segregation. It was signed by many other clergy in Atlanta, a faithful act of solidarity. I admired the fact that this letter has remained framed, and continues to be in the consciousness of our congregation. However, structural racism and realities of police brutality have continued to run rampant in our world and the time for faithful response has only grown, particularly after the killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and the daily peaceful protests that have taken place in the city of Atlanta and all over the world.

We worship a God who demands not only our faithful worship, but faithful living toward one another. We worship a God who created us equally in God's image, knowing us before the day we were born. We worship a God who spoke through the prophets in a time of great injustice, declaring through Amos: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." We worship a God in Jesus Christ who lifted up the poor, the outcast, and all who were denounced by society. We worship a God, who, through the Holy Spirit, continues to blow through our church, inviting us to step outside of our comfort zones to declare God's loving justice in a hurting world.

We continue to partner with a number of organizations that do meaningful justice work in our city: Suther's Center, providing food and resources for all in need; AMIS, providing community and support for international students in our midst; Mercy Community Church, serving many of those experiencing homelessness in our city; and many more. Yet there is always more we can do.

For now, I hope you'll join me in prayer for our nation: for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. For protests to be peaceful gatherings where the voices of the marginalized are truly heard and steps toward effective change can be made. That space for anger may be permitted, but violence and forceful intimidation be left behind. Let us be able to proclaim boldly "Black Lives Matter" until the day our world truly reflects that reality.

As the days unfold, I'm hopeful we'll find time for meaningful conversations around structures of racism and realities of white privilege. I'm hopeful we'll find opportunities for collaboration with organizations and other faith communities who are also seeking out how to live into God's call for justice.

Amidst all of this, let us remember, that we continue to be in the midst of a pandemic. We continue to find ways to protect the health of our community, city, and larger world. I pray you will continue to care for yourself, your family, and our own faith community. Give yourself much grace for the balancing you've had to do and know that God is in the midst of everything. As we pray for justice, we continue to also pray for health and healing for so many.

Our leadership will be discerning ways we can respond to all these recent events as a church and we look forward to sharing those when that time comes. Until then, may God's grace remain with you and may the peace of Christ dwell deeply in our world.

In Christ,

*Mike*

