

A Special Note from Bill Cleveland, Sojourners Group Leader

Alive to God

The sermon this past Sunday, "Alive to God" addressed the paradox we face as Christians, in that how do we who have "died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:2) In other words, at our second birth, do we suddenly turn into perfect people? Obviously, no. Just as a newborn must grow into a functioning adult, so we, too, must grow in our faith, but it is important to realize that the old self has been crucified with Christ, and we are called to leave behind the behaviors and habits of our old life. This is the place we find ourselves during this chaotic time of COVID 19 and racial unrest, and as Pastor Andy said, we must evaluate where we are in order to go where God wants us to be. This is always true in our spiritual life – evaluating how our actions measure up against the standards set forth in God's word, and finding ourselves under conviction where we fall short. The path to wholeness begins with our repentance and asking forgiveness for our transgressions, pledging to "walk in newness of life" (as the sacrament says).

As we evaluate where we are as the Church, we see large gaps in our efforts to live out the gospel in our community. We talk about loving our neighbors, but what do our neighbors say about our love for them? Certainly our black neighbors would find our efforts somewhat lame. We can look around us and say to ourselves, "Why look how far we have come! There are black people on TV all the time, both in the programs and the commercials. There are black people in our workplace and our grocery store. Black unemployment has hit an all-time low recently. We even have a black man as our choir director. Aren't we doing great?" This sounds like the comments of parents who have indulged their children with everything money can buy, but have withheld the one thing the children want and need most – the parents' love. To say to our black brothers and sisters, "Look at how much you have achieved" makes little sense if it is followed by, "Now, go over there and be happy!"

The gospel is still shared one-on-one. Unless we engage our black neighbors personally and individually, nothing's really going to change. It starts with listening. What are the complaints? We don't have to give in to every demand, but we must hear the wounded cries that lie behind the demands. We can be sensitive to the horrific crime that infests most black communities, understanding that those who live there are just as frustrated by it as we are, and work together to bring peace and justice to the situation. Government programs don't work without persons to hold the hands and dry the tears of those who suffer. Most of all, we need to share the gospel message that Jesus is the answer to our sinful predicament, and we are His hands and feet. Jesus is still changing lives and healing sin-sick souls.

Grace & peace,

Bill