

**THE UNSCRIPTURAL PRACTICE OF RACISM**  
**Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 2020**  
**Acts 17:24-26**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Acts 17:24-26: **God, who made the world and everything in it, is the Lord of heaven and earth. He does not live in temples made by human hands,<sup>25</sup> and human hands do not serve Him as if He needed anything. He Himself gives everyone life, breath and everything else.<sup>26</sup> From one man He has made every nation of mankind to live all over the earth. He has set the times allotted to them and the boundaries inside which they should live.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

How sad it has been to see protests happening around the world after the truly horrifying murder of George Floyd in Minnesota a couple weeks' ago. This murder has been the cause for tensions and riots to erupt across America, resulting in the deaths of several people and the destruction of property and livelihoods. It has even spread to our own country, with protests held across the nation last weekend, protesting the treatment, or deaths in custody of aboriginal people. The slogan "Black lives matter" does nothing but make a nation divided and further inflames tensions.

People have different opinions on these protests, whether they will achieve anything, or even if they should have gone ahead since we are still under restrictions because of Covid19. These protests do make a mockery of the social distancing rule. But no matter what one's opinion may be, these protests are all about racism. Putting aside our personal opinions, let us ask a couple questions, namely, "What *is* racism, and what do the Scriptures have to say about it?"

Racism is a belief system founded on the supposition that inherent, biological differences, or, in some cases, ethnic or cultural differences among various human groups determine not only social or human achievement but also the value of individual members of the human family. Those who adhere to its claims usually act as if their race is *superior* and therefore entitled to the right to rule over others. We do not hesitate at the outset to label racism and its supporting rationale as fundamentally incompatible with what the Scriptures teach concerning human beings and their relationship with God. What are the scriptural principles that lead us to make this judgment? It is to the theological issues raised by racism that we must turn, and we do so in light of what we have learned from the Scriptures to confess concerning the God who has created, redeemed, and sanctified us.

In our text, we find Paul standing in the middle of the Areopagus<sup>1</sup> in Athens where he told his listeners, "**God, who made the world and everything in it, is the Lord of heaven and earth,**" and declared that this God is the One who "**has made every nation of mankind to live all over the earth. He has set the times allotted to them and the boundaries inside which they should live.**"

In creating one man, Adam, God created all the descendants of Adam. The nations which cover the earth in all their variety of stature and colour and appearance descend from a single ancestor and has established their allotted place in human history. His one desire is that they would seek Him. Against all claims to racial or ethnic superiority, Paul unambiguously affirmed the unity of humankind. Without differentiation, *all of humanity owes its origin to God's creative act*.

Racist lines of separation between human beings, declaring some to be lesser members of humankind are, therefore, a blasphemous insult to our Creator. Likewise, any affirmations of superiority or comparative worth that are based on differences in the nature of persons as human beings are an indictment of God's work as Creator.

"**God, who made the world and everything in it, is the Lord of heaven and earth,**" the God "*who gives breath to the people who are on it and spirit to those who walk on it*" (Isaiah 42:5). Not even the tragic fall of humankind into sin has erased the central biblical affirmation, summarised by Luther, that "*God has made me and all creatures.*"

In repentance, people need to remember that the LORD "*is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty and the awesome God, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribe*" (Deuteronomy 10:17). No human being, however distinguishable from a human standpoint, is any less fully God's creature - created in His image.

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<sup>1</sup> "Areopagus" also came to describe the city council.

No less central to the biblical doctrine of creation is the truth that the value of all human beings is grounded ultimately in the value God places upon them. The value of a person is not determined by observable degrees of relative worth. Instead, it is bestowed in love by the One who has shaped him in his mother's womb.<sup>2</sup>

In racist ideology, the worth or value of an individual or group is determined principally, if not solely, by genetic origin and/or biological characteristics. *Race* then becomes the basis for drawing conclusions concerning aptitudes, abilities, and personality characteristics of individuals, for the purpose, in turn, of making a statement about the comparative worth of a person as a human being.

However, when God created Adam, He made a creature who would live in a unique relationship with Himself.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the rest of all creation, Adam and Eve were created to worship and serve God in a most personal, intimate way. To be sure, to live under their Creator in obedience to the Word, and in utter dependence upon Him, meant at the same time that they were to live over the rest of creation. But Adam and Eve were not autonomous beings: they were to rule over creation on God's behalf but with accountability to Him, and to place their trust in God alone and to serve Him alone.<sup>4</sup>

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, they succumbed to the temptation to be "*like God*,"<sup>5</sup> God's rival. This is the sin of pride: It is the desire to make oneself a god while rejecting one's own relationship to God as the creature to Creator. In their solidarity with Adam, all who are born into the human family have joined in Adam's sin.<sup>6</sup> The grave consequence of humankind's rebellion against God is that Adam's offspring worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.<sup>7</sup> The effects of this root sin of idolatry are tragic also for the relationship of human beings to one another. By definition then, racism grounds the identity and security of human life in self rather than God, in creature rather than the Creator, apart from whom a human being has no identity or security. Self-indulgent pride in "race," therefore, must be regarded as idolatry in one of its crassest forms. It is an attempt to be "*like God*."

However, we know the opposite to be true: God became one of us. Of Jesus Christ the apostle John wrote, "*The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son – He is full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). Paul writes that Jesus was "*born a descendant of David according to His human nature, but who, according to His holy divinity, was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead*" (Romans 1:3). Jesus was made like His brethren in every respect except for sin.<sup>8</sup> The genealogies of Jesus reveal that He is bound by ties of kinship not only to Israel but *to all of humanity* and that His mission to go the way of the cross embraces all of humankind.<sup>9</sup>

Any claim that there is something about the nature of another human being as such that renders that person to be of *inferior value* not only denies the biblical doctrine of creation but also calls into question what the Scriptures teach about the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As a human, Jesus descended from Adam, whom God created, and whom all human beings have as their ancestor. To deny the full humanity of any fellow human being is at the same time to compromise the apostolic truth that in Christ "*all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily*" (Colossians 2:9).

God sent His Son Jesus to be the Saviour of all human beings, no matter in what nation or culture they come from. God, our Saviour, St. Paul wrote to Timothy, "*wants all people to be saved and to come to know the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom instead of all*" (1 Timothy 2:4-6). "*God was in Christ*," he also writes to the Corinthians, "*reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them*" (2 Corinthians 5:19). In obedience to Christ's command to make disciples of all nations by baptising them in the name of the Triune God and by teaching,<sup>10</sup> the apostles proclaimed the Gospel to Jew and Gentile alike. Peter learned from the vision in Simon's house, with specific reference to the Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea, that "*God does not show favouritism, but that in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him*" (Acts 10:34-35). Again and again, in the apocalyptic vision of St. John, we read that God in Jesus Christ has completed His work of salvation for all kindreds, peoples, languages, and nations.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 139:13

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-17

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 10:12, 20

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 3:5

<sup>6</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:25

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 2:17; cf. 4:15; 5:2

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 5:8-9; 7:9, 10; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15

Racism, as the ideological doctrine of a providential selection and election of human races, stands in opposition to the Gospel of God revealed in the Scriptures, according to which God has acquired the forgiveness of sins for all people by declaring that *the world* for Christ's sake has been forgiven. God's love for the world is indiscriminate and embraces people of all cultures.

If, as Christians, we were to somehow get drawn into the politics of protests over racism, how would we respond?

As the Gospel was being proclaimed in the ancient world, the apostles had to deal with the historic wall of separation that existed between Jews and Gentiles. The apostles' solution to this problem was *not the removal of differences*, but the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ who through His work on the cross has gained salvation for all who call upon His name. St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "*However, now, in Christ Jesus, the blood of Christ has brought you, who once were far away, near.*"<sup>14</sup> *For He Himself is our Peace. In His human nature He has made them both, Jew and Gentile, one, by breaking down the wall of hostility that kept them apart.*<sup>15</sup> *He has abolished the Law with its Commandments and Regulations, to create the two into one new person in Himself, so making peace,*<sup>16</sup> *and that He may reconcile them both to God in one body through His cross, on which He has killed the hostility"* (Ephesians 2:13-16).

In Christ, God has destroyed all barriers between Himself and human beings, as well as all barriers between human beings. The role of the church is to continue in its proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ effectively to a world that is becoming smaller and smaller and at the same time being violently torn apart by racial and ethnic differences. The church itself will do well to pay heed to the counsel of St. James, who said, "*Do what the Word says and do not merely hear it and deceive yourselves,*" and "*Show me your faith without works, and I shall show you my faith by my works!*" (James 1:22; 2:18).

What a glorious opportunity we have to let God's will be done on earth as it most certainly is done in heaven, where there is not now, neither will there ever be, *any partiality shown to anyone*. We must all continually seek God's help in helping each other to resist the temptations toward racist thinking and to eradicate its poisonous effects in our own lives, that we may walk together in true unity of mind, heart, and purpose.

Jesus Christ, the God-man who became a descendant of Adam, died on the cross in our place, taking the penalty of death for us that we deserve because of our sin. Through His death, Christ nailed our sin to the cross. Repenting of our sin and trusting in Christ alone for salvation, we are forgiven, and He remembers our sin no more.<sup>12</sup> Not only that, but we're given a new heart, with a new love for others, and we're adopted into His one family, the one body of Christ. This is our ultimate hope, and it's the only ultimate answer to racism, discrimination, prejudice, and the sinful heart behind such things. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, our strength and our stay, we praise You for creating all things by Your power, and for sustaining the earth and all who live on it. Help us to hear the witness of Your creation and to see the wonder of Your glory.

Father, we praise You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word, and for showing us Your holy will. We thank You for the inspired writers of Your wise and true Word, for through them You have shown us Your forgiving love and given us rich promises of hope. We praise You for Your grace in Christ Jesus, by which You have provided us our escape from Your judgment on all disobedience. Pour out Your Spirit on us so that we may grow in knowing You.

We praise You for leading us from death to life through the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Your Son. We praise You for our freedom from the condemnation of Your Law, and for delivering us from the ceremonial shadows of the Old Testament Law. By Your love for us, move us to the love and mercy that is the concern of Your moral Law, so that we may not love in mere words but in deed and truth. Give us sympathetic hearts for those in need, that we may share with them the things You have given us. Grant that through our love they may learn to know Your love, and praise You.

We thank You that You have prepared for all people the rest of eternal salvation, and that through the Gospel You invite all to it. Enable us faithfully to spread the good news of this great relief to all whom we meet in our lives, that they also may respond to Your mercy with happy and thankful hearts. Grant that the spiritually poor may taste and see that You are merciful and good.

Almighty Lord, rule over our nation, and guide all to whom You have given authority. Bless our society with pure motives, noble goals, and moral strength. Give all Australians the desire to live before You in loving trust and obedience. Correct wrong. Punish and thwart evil, and especially racist evil. Grant peace that Your Gospel may flow all the more freely, especially to those most blinded by evil.

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 8:12

Bless our homes, and make them places of true learning and love, that all who live in them may find peace and joy in harmony with You and with one another.

We pray for Your special protection and help for the sick, the sorrowful, the aged, and the lonely. Meet their needs with Your mercy, and show them the wonderful things You have prepared for all Your children. Father, hear our prayers, and if there is anything else we should have asked for, grant it for the sake of Jesus Christ who has saved us and pleads for us. Amen.

### The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6)

Exodus 19:2-8

<sup>2</sup> After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Wilderness of Sinai and set up camp in the wilderness. Therefore, Israel camped there in front of the mountain. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses went up the mountain to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain. He said: "This is what you shall inform the family of Jacob and what you shall tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup> 'You have seen for yourselves what I have done to the Egyptians and how I have carried you on the wings of eagles and have brought you here to Myself! <sup>5</sup> Now, if you strictly obey Me and keep My Covenant, then out of all nations you will be a special treasure to Me, because the whole earth is Mine. <sup>6</sup> You will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation.' These are the Words that you shall speak to the people of Israel!"

<sup>7</sup> Moses came back, summoned the elders of the people and laid before them all these things, which the LORD had commanded him. <sup>8</sup> All the people answered together and said, "We shall do everything that the LORD has said." Then Moses took the answer of the people back to the LORD.

Romans 5:6-15

<sup>6</sup> For, while we were still helpless, at the set time Christ died for ungodly people. <sup>7</sup> For very rarely will someone die for a righteous person, although someone might perhaps even dare to die for a good person. <sup>8</sup> However, God shows His own love for us by this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more, therefore, now that we have been justified by His blood, we shall be saved through Him from God's wrath. <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, now that we have been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. <sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death also spread to all people, since all have sinned. <sup>13</sup> For until the Law sin was in the world. However, sin is not charged against anyone's account when there is no Law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death ruled from Adam to Moses, also over those who had not sinned in the same way as Adam did when he broke the Command (Adam was a type of Him who was to come). <sup>15</sup> However, the free gift is not like the transgression. For, if the many died as the result of the one man's transgression, much more, God's grace and the gracious gift of the One Man, Jesus Christ, have overflowed to the many.

Matthew 9:35-10:20

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus travelled through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness.

<sup>36</sup> When He saw the crowds, He felt sorry for them, because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then He told His disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest!"

<sup>10:1</sup> Jesus called His twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out unclean spirits and to heal every disease and every sickness.

<sup>2</sup> These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew, the tax-collector, James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, <sup>4</sup> Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus sent these Twelve out with the following Instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any city of the Samaritans! <sup>6</sup> Go, rather, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel! <sup>7</sup> As you go, preach: 'The kingdom of heaven is near!' <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and drive out demons! You have received freely: give freely! <sup>9</sup> Do not get any gold, silver or copper money to put into your money-belts! <sup>10</sup> Do not take a bag for the road or two tunics or sandals or a staff! For a worker is worth his food. <sup>11</sup> Whenever you go into any city or village, inquire who is worthy in it and stay there until you leave! <sup>12</sup> When you go into the home, greet it! <sup>13</sup> If the home is deserving, let your peace come on it! However, if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you! <sup>14</sup> If anyone does not welcome you or listen to your words, go outside of that house or that city and shake off the dust from your feet! <sup>15</sup> Truly, I tell you, it will be more bearable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city. <sup>16</sup> You see, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves!

<sup>17</sup> "Nevertheless, be on your guard against men! For they will hand you over to councils and will flog you in their synagogues. <sup>18</sup> You will be brought before governors and kings because of Me, to testify to them and to the Gentiles.

<sup>19</sup> However, when they hand you over, do not worry how you are to speak or what you are to say! For it will be given to you in that hour what you are to say. <sup>20</sup> For you are not the ones who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father, who is speaking in you.