

Week 6: Bridging the Divide: Embracing God's Call to Racial Oneness

I. Briefly summarize sermon series.

Introduction:

Ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters in Christ here at TAB church this morning or online, we are gathered together to delve into the depths of God's Word and explore His heart for racial oneness.

I know it can get a little uncomfortable anytime subjects like race or gender get brought up. We all are challenged with what's right or what's wrong to say, what's offensive but used to be totally acceptable. That's why it is important that we have these conversations and sermons. To unify us and to make us one in focus. We live in a world marked by division and strife, but we as followers of Christ have a cheat code (the Bible).

A. Today we turn to the book of Genesis, the very beginning of God's story, to uncover profound truths that illuminate our calling to bridge the divide and embrace racial oneness.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-27

1. In the opening chapters of Genesis, we encounter the majestic creation account. God, in His infinite wisdom, spoke the universe into existence, forming the heavens, the earth, and all living creatures. But it is in the creation of humanity that we witness something truly remarkable. In Genesis 1:26-27, we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.... So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.'"
2. In these verses, we discover a profound truth: every human being, regardless of race or ethnicity, is created in the image of God. This foundational truth establishes the intrinsic value and worth of every person, irrespective of outward appearances or cultural backgrounds. It sets the stage for us to recognize the beauty and diversity found within humanity and to embrace God's call to racial oneness.

II. Transition:

A. As we immerse ourselves in God's Word, let us embark on a journey to bridge the divide and embrace the call to racial oneness. By exploring key passages, examining the life of Jesus, and drawing practical lessons, we will discover the transformative power of unity in the midst of diversity. May our hearts be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as we seek to align our lives with God's heart for racial oneness.

B. Today we come together to reflect upon a sacred and urgent calling that God has placed upon us: Oneness, specifically Racial Oneness.

C. We live in a world that often finds itself divided along ethnic lines, God's Word offers us guidance and hope. Let us turn our attention to Ephesians 2, Romans 10:12, and several other scriptures that reveal God's heart for unity and inclusion.

Scripture: Ephesians 2 and Romans 10:12

1. In Ephesians 2, the apostle Paul reminds us of our past state of separation—both from God and from one another. We were once lost in the darkness of our own disobedience, but through His immeasurable love and grace, God intervened. He reconciled us to Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, breaking down the wall of hostility that existed between us. This act of love extends beyond individual reconciliation; it tears down the dividing walls of ethnicity and culture.
2. Romans 10:12 further emphasizes the inclusive nature of God's salvation, declaring that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all.

Scripture: Galatians 3:28, Acts 10:34-35, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Revelation 7:9

3. Galatians 3:28 echoes this sentiment, reminding us that our identity in Christ surpasses societal divisions. In Him, we are united as one body, regardless of our race, social status, or gender.
4. Acts 10:34-35 reveals that God does not show favoritism but accepts people from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.
5. 1 Corinthians 12:13 reminds us that through the Holy Spirit, we are baptized into one body, irrespective of our racial or social distinctions.
6. Finally, in Revelation 7:9, we catch a glimpse of heavenly worship—a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and the Lamb. This powerful image reminds us of the ultimate unity and diversity that awaits us in God's kingdom.

D. Illustration: The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

- 1. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches us a profound lesson about racial oneness and compassionate action. He tells the story of a man who was brutally attacked and left wounded on the side of the road. Both a priest and a Levite, individuals who were expected to uphold religious and moral standards, passed by without offering assistance. However, it was a Samaritan—a member of a despised ethnic group—who stopped, cared for the wounded man, and even went the extra mile to ensure his well-being.**
- 2. Through this parable, Jesus challenges the existing racial and social divisions of His time. He highlights the importance of showing mercy, compassion, and love to all people, regardless of their background. The Samaritan's actions demonstrate that genuine racial oneness is not bound by societal norms or prejudices but is rooted in a heart transformed by Christ's love.**
- 3. Jesus is teaching us about love and compassion that transcends racial and cultural boundaries. Just as the Samaritan, despite being despised by the Jews, demonstrated kindness and care for the wounded traveler, we are called to love our neighbors, regardless of their race or background. This parable challenges us to break down the barriers that may cause us to prejudge and embrace a spirit of unity.**

E. Testimony: The Conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48)

- 1. Another biblical example of breaking down barriers and building bridges for oneness can be found in the testimony of Peter and Cornelius, a Gentile centurion in Acts 10.**
- 2. In this account, Peter, a devout Jewish follower of Jesus, was shown a vision from God that challenged his ingrained beliefs and cultural prejudices. God commanded him to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile and a Roman centurion, who was considered an outsider by Jewish standards. Initially hesitant due to the religious and cultural divide, Peter eventually obeyed God's instruction.**
- 3. When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, he proclaimed the gospel message, and to his astonishment, the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentile household, just as it had upon the Jewish believers at Pentecost. Witnessing this divine confirmation, Peter exclaimed, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." (Acts 10:34-35)**
- 4. Through this encounter, Peter shattered the barrier of prejudice and recognized that the message of salvation was meant for all people, regardless of their ethnicity or background. This pivotal moment marked a significant step toward building a bridge of oneness between Jews and Gentiles in the early church.**
- 5. Peter's willingness to challenge his own preconceived notions and extend God's love to those considered "outsiders" paved the way for greater inclusivity within the Christian community. It set an example for the early believers to embrace racial and cultural diversity, acknowledging that the gospel transcends societal divisions and calls for unity among all believers.**
- 6. The story of Peter and Cornelius reminds us that breaking down barriers and building bridges for oneness requires humility, obedience to God's leading, and a willingness to challenge cultural norms. By following Peter's example, we are encouraged to examine our own biases, step outside our comfort zones, and actively seek unity with those who may be different from us. In doing so, we participate in God's work of reconciliation and demonstrate the transformative power of the gospel in our lives and communities.**

F. Practical Steps for Embracing Racial Oneness:

- 1. Educate ourselves: We must take intentional steps to educate ourselves about the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by different racial and ethnic groups. This includes reading books, engaging in discussions, attending seminars, and inviting speakers who can enlighten us about the realities of racial inequality and injustice.**
- 2. Foster diverse relationships: We should actively seek opportunities to build relationships with people from diverse backgrounds. Let us create a welcoming and inclusive environment within our church, where individuals from all races and ethnicities feel valued, respected, and heard. Through genuine friendships and open dialogue, we can learn from one another, dispel stereotypes, and promote understanding.**
- 3. Advocate for justice: As followers of Christ, we are called to be ambassadors of justice and reconciliation. Let us stand up against racial discrimination, inequality, and injustice in our communities and society at large. By partnering with organizations dedicated to promoting racial equality, advocating for fair**

treatment, and working towards systemic change, we can make a tangible difference in the lives of those affected by racial divisions.

4. Engage in intergenerational conversations: Create spaces for intergenerational dialogue within our church community. By bringing together different age groups, we can share perspectives, learn from one another's experiences, and foster understanding. Intergenerational conversations provide opportunities to address biases, challenge stereotypes, and promote empathy, ultimately fostering greater racial oneness within our church family.

G. The church has always played a Role in either Hindering or Helping Racial Oneness:

Throughout history, the church has played a significant role in either hindering or helping the cause of racial oneness.

1. There have been moments where the church perpetuated racial divisions, such as in the era of segregation in the United States and during South Africa's apartheid. These examples remind us of the damaging effects of prejudice and discrimination.
2. On the other hand, the church has also been a catalyst for change. During the Civil Rights Movement, many churches and Christians stood up against racial injustice, advocating for equality and justice. In South Africa, the church played a vital role in the reconciliation process after the end of apartheid. These instances illustrate how the church, guided by God's Word and empowered by the Holy Spirit, can lead the way towards racial oneness and healing.

3. Historical Context: Norfolk, Virginia, and Racial Divide

Our very own beautiful city of Norfolk, Virginia and tidewater area as a whole has a complex history of racial divide. Like many cities in the United States, it experienced periods of segregation and racial tensions. As a church it is essential for us to acknowledge this history as we seek racial oneness in our community. By understanding the past, we can recognize the present challenges and work towards healing and reconciliation.

III. Conclusion:

A. Church, let us remember that racial oneness is not an optional pursuit for the church; it is a commandment and a reflection of God's heart for unity and inclusivity. As we conclude this sermon, let us pray together for the strength and wisdom to live out this calling, trusting in God's guidance and grace.

1. May the words of Ephesians 4:3 resonate in our hearts: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."
2. May our church be a beacon of unity, from Norfolk to the nations extending God's love to all people and leaving a lasting impact on the world around us.
3. May our church be a testament to the power of unity, transcending racial and ethnic boundaries. May we be a living example of the love of Christ, embracing and celebrating the beautiful diversity within the body of Christ here at TAB.
4. May our collective efforts pave the way for a future where racial oneness is not just a distant dream, but a tangible reality.
5. May our church be a beacon of light, love, and unity in a world often marked by strife and division.

B. Church, let us commit to educating ourselves, fostering diverse relationships, advocating for justice, and embracing reconciliation initiatives. By taking these practical steps, we can actively dismantle the walls of division, foster healing, and participate in the work of reconciliation that God has entrusted to us.

C. Let us prayerfully commit to embracing God's call to oneness, realizing that it is not merely a social or political issue, but a deeply spiritual matter that reflects the character and love of our Heavenly Father.

**D. And May God's grace and peace be with us as we embark on this journey together.
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.**

E. Transition to worship response song: The words we have heard today remind us of the firm foundation we have in Christ, who breaks down barriers and unites us as one body. Let us join together in lifting our voices and declaring our commitment to racial oneness, inspired by the love and grace of our Savior. Let the lyrics of the song 'Firm Foundation' resonate in our hearts and guide us as we continue this journey of unity, reconciliation and as we discussed last week – Forgiveness.

F. Closing: Let us remember the title of our sermon, "Bridging the Divide: Embracing God's Call to Racial Oneness."

- 1. It is a call that resonates deeply with the heart of God, as revealed in Scripture and exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. We are called to break down the walls of racial division.**
- 2. As we go forth, may we be agents of change and reconciliation, working to dismantle the barriers that separate us and embracing the beauty of God's diverse creation. In doing so, we will honor His call to love one another as He has loved us, and we will witness the transformative power of racial oneness for His glory. May God bless you abundantly as you respond to His call and actively participate in bridging the divide, embracing God's call to a Heavenly oneness.**