



On Racial Injustice

A Statement from The Austin Stone Community Church

The tragic killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd have again brought national attention to an ongoing conversation about race, justice, police brutality, and the possibility of human flourishing for all Americans. In the last few weeks, this conversation has poured into the streets of the United States and around the world as people have protested for change and progress.

Some have been frustrated that we have not yet said anything explicit about this topic in our sermons. We understand this frustration, and we apologize for what may seem like a delay. We ask for your grace. We are working hard behind the scenes to develop long-term strategies for the equipping of our people so that this is not just another momentary response. Rather, we see this time as an opportunity for long-term change—first in us as a people, and then through us to the world around us.

Some are frustrated that we are addressing this issue at all. We understand your desire for us to be people who stick to studying and teaching the Word. But truth be told, it is our commitment to the truth of that Word that drives us to engage. One of our core convictions is that we are ruled by God's Word—not just as truths to be acknowledged, but as truths to be embodied as a local church. The Bible tells us to “mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15). It tells us to “love mercy, to act justly and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8). It tells us to “love our neighbors as we love ourselves” (Matthew 22:39). To ignore the desperate cry of so many would be to ignore the call of the Scriptures. We are a people who long to love God and to love our neighbors, and in this moment right now, that means we have to be a people who engage this conversation in a meaningful, thoughtful, faithful, and loving manner.

We speak now, because the Bible demands that we speak out in empathy and mourn with those who mourn. We hear the pain of our black and brown brothers and sisters. The ethic of love outlined in the New Testament demands that we stand alongside people who are in pain. The Bible also calls us to speak against injustice where we see it, and these injustices, now highlighted on a global stage, have been happening in our midst for far too long. The people of The Austin Stone Community Church are going to get their thoughts and ideas about this from somewhere. We want to faithfully steward our responsibility to disciple our people as best as we can to follow the way of Jesus in the season in which we live. The people of Jesus need training on how we will be distinct in a divided world and how we will be a people of hope, unity, grace, and greater justice in a world that is crying out for those things. We speak now, because we desire genuine unity in this moment and not a fabricated unity which is kept through silence. Genuine unity is a beautiful thing. David speaks of it in Psalm 133 and says that it

demands the Lord's blessing. Unity happens in the church when people who are ordinarily very different from one another choose to unite with one another under the lordship and shed blood of Jesus Christ. Sadly, we have seen some who are willing to divide over things outside of this deep, mutual bond we share in Christ. We need to be people who are more passionately committed to the gospel and how it drives us to justice, mercy, and truth than we are to our own particular provider of cable news. In a world that will desperately try to separate us into teams and camps, we declare that we stand united in the camp that Jesus invited us into when He smashed the dividing wall of hostility that existed between people (Ephesians 2:14). Unity will ultimately be fueled by fidelity to the Scriptures. We must be a people who allow our worldviews and ideologies to be shaped by Scripture, rather than shaping Scripture to fit in with our worldviews and ideologies. This means we will all be challenged by the Word, all the time. Our allegiance should never be primarily right or left, but above.

Some express a concern that speaking now is a sign that the church is becoming political. We understand that concern and want to be a church that is always primarily about the gospel of our King Jesus. Having said that, it is important to acknowledge that the church is always political in its very existence. We are a community of people who together state that Jesus is King, which means that Caesar is not. Our core belief is in and of itself a political statement of humble resistance. In addition, we have been unafraid to take right and good stands on other issues, like our belief that the unborn are image-bearers who are worthy of protection. This is a political stance that is saturated with gospel belief. This is nothing new for us.

A lot of confusion in this national crisis and global human rights protest comes from people assuming what others are saying. We want to be clear and specific, and we hope that this serves as a rallying cry that we can all gather around, full of faith, hope, and courage.

We affirm the inherent dignity, worth, value, and potential that is placed in every single image-bearer of the Divine. This image-bearing is present and precious in every human being from the womb to the tomb regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, immigration status, tribe, tongue, or nationality. Part of what it means to love God is to love all of the image-bearers who He created in His vast display of creative genius revealed in all of the shades He chose to reflect His beauty and worth. We, therefore, reject any agenda or effort to destroy that image in any person, be that through racial injustice and prejudice, or abortion, or other forms of murder, cruelty, or subjugation.

We stand opposed to racism in all of its forms. We reject white supremacy as demonic sin, and we stand against any systems or structures that seek to uphold, support, or prolong it in any fashion or form. We also recognize that while many of the civil rights movements in American history have been explicitly Christian, the church has often been complicit in the creation and maintenance of this system. Our desire is to be a courageous church that would stand boldly against such evil and seek redemption where brokenness exists.

We affirm that God grants civil authorities and their civil servants, ideally, for human flourishing and for the peaceful advance of His gospel wherever possible (Romans 13:3-4; 1 Tim 2:1-2; 1 Pet 2:13-14). The Scriptures teach us that God grants measured authority and responsibility for agents of the state to uphold good and restrict evil. We, therefore, recognize our law enforcement officers and first responders as bearers of that responsibility. We want to join them in their stated desire to serve and protect, while

acknowledging that elements of the system make that desire difficult or at times impossible. We recognize the vulnerability and the dignity of those in our body who serve in these roles. Therefore, we reject any effort to destroy those image-bearers. At the same time, we desire our policing to be fair and just and devoid of any kind of brutality or corruption.

How Then Will We Respond?

In order to be helpful people in this conversation, we need to be people who listen, learn, lament, and commit to lives of love. These are the helpful postures to which we are calling our church in this season, and each posture has specific action steps.

Listen

James 1:19 issues us clear instruction: “My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger ...” (CSB).

As followers of Jesus, we want to be good listeners who are particularly attentive to cries of pain and anguish. We want to listen to understand, not just to correct. This can only be practiced by people who take seriously the biblical instruction to consider others as more important than themselves. And over the next weeks and months, we want to highlight the stories of brothers and sisters of color who can speak to us about their experiences. We want to listen with open minds and hearts.

Learn

Where we are now—this movement—is not born of isolation, but rather, it resulted from the trajectory of our history. We need to be people who are educated theologically and historically so that we can actually understand what is happening, and from that understanding, commit ourselves to actions of meaningful change.

Over the next weeks and months, we are going to begin a process of historical education for our staff and leaders that we hope to be able to turn into helpful spiritual formation and equipping strategies for our church as a whole. We will be sharing some recommended reading and listening resources to help us all begin to engage in the conversation in a meaningful way. We are also going to bring in a third-party organization to help assess and train us as a staff team, and we hope and pray that this process of learning will be able to set us up for years of meaningful action as a church.

Lament

Listening and learning will expose us to the prevalence of sin in and around us. Because we are people who have a high view of the Bible, we are not surprised to find that sin continues to infiltrate and dominate not only individual people, but also the structures that they build. This means that we will need to be a people of lament and repentance wherever we find our own participation in sin. We want this important part of what we have been doing as a church in this season of prayer and fasting to be a regular part of who we are as a people. We will have cause to lament until we are home and God releases us from sin.

Love

Lastly, we want to be people who live lives of Christian love—people who follow Jesus in the way that He showed us—laying down our lives in love for our friends. We want to take meaningful and practical action steps of reform as we encounter them, and we want to be a unique people of faith, hope, and love in a world of division, defensiveness, and hate. Please pray for us as we begin to plot that course, and please partner with us in unity as this sort of people.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13 (CSB)

