

“We Are All in This Story”
2 Samuel 12:1-9

12 ¹ and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.” ⁵ Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶ he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

⁷ Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸ I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

This is the Word of the Lord.
THANKS BE TO GOD.

This week has been a heavy week. This week, I, like many of you have witnessed the video of Jacob Blake being shot seven times in the back. That has been followed by protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin, followed by riots, followed by two other protestors being shot and killed, followed by our entire sports world stopping this week to protest racial injustice. By Thursday morning, I knew my planned sermon on Jacob and Esau would need to wait another week. This is what we as people of faith need to be talking about and facing right now. But I have to tell you, words have not come easy. Even in the last couple days I have struggled with what to say. I don't have all the answers, or an easy, simple solution.

But I do believe the following to be true:

1. Black Lives Matter. Black lives matter to the Lord of heaven and earth who breathed each human being out of dust and calls them each good and beautiful. And black lives matter to us: we who proclaim God's image is embedded in each human face, and we who worship a savior who had dark skin, spoke another language, got in trouble with the law, and spent his life among the outcast, the oppressed, the arrested, and the crucified.

But sadly, there are a lot of black Americans right now who do not feel like their life matters. There are a lot of black Americans this week who feel scared and helpless, and wonder if even we as the church care about them and see them as equals. In voice after voice this week – from athletes, to community leaders, to family members, the same words kept being spoken – “I'm tired.”

2. We are not just observers to this story. We are in this story. I know it can feel at times like the events of the world are way out there, and our role is just to hear and read about them, and maybe make a comment or two. Or talk as if we are outside of it all. Like King David listening to the prophet Nathan, we think the story of racism, the story of fear, the story of conflict and protests and anger and sadness, is a story about other people in other places in other times.

But as King David found out, this story is about us. We are not above it or beyond it. We are in the middle of it. As the prophet Nathan said to King David, "You are the man!" That's us. We are in the story. We play a part.

In one of his final recorded songs, Johnny Cash sang a cover of the great spiritual, "God's Gonna Cut You Down." It's a song in which the narrator is telling Christians to stop being hypocrites. Don't come to church and still lie and cheat, back-bite and work against your fellow man. It sounds like it's about other people, and how they are worse Christians than us. But about halfway through the song, Cash adds his own name into it, as he sings:

*He called my name and my heart stood still
When he said, "John, go do my will!"*

As Cash heard and sang the song, he realized its message wasn't just for other people. It was for him too. God was speaking to him through the song. And God is speaking to us today.

As human beings living in this world, citizens of this nation, neighbors and colleagues, educators and business owners, parents and siblings and friends – and most of all followers of Jesus Christ, we have a big decision to make.

We can either allow racism to keep living – in our world, in our communities, and in our own lives (yes, we all have prejudice and biases). We can say, leave this work out of the church, and not speak to it at all. Not face it and grow from it and help change it.

Or we can fight racism and proclaim a greater justice, a greater truth, and a greater love. We can say, “I know I’m not perfect and I’ve got work to do. I, like all people have prejudice and bias in myself. But I’m in this story. I’m a part of my community. I can make a difference in this world. And God is calling me to help my brothers and sisters. God is calling me to a more perfect love.”

While I don’t have all the answers, I do want to share some first steps, some concrete actions each of us can take:

1. Be slow to speak and quick to listen. If you have a friend, a family member, a co-worker, a neighbor of color this week, check in with them. Ask how they are doing, And listen, as much as you can without comment or judgment. That’s a hard urge to fight – I know, especially for me – but offering just a listening, empathetic presence this week will mean a lot.
2. When speaking, do consider your words carefully. Try to get rid of words that make people into other or devalue their worth. Get rid of phrases like, “This is what you get” or “this is what they deserve.” One word I especially ask you to get rid of is the word “thug.” Almost everytime I hear it, it gets used for black males, and it’s a word that turns the person from a whole human being into someone we can just cast off. With all of our words this week, all of

- our thoughts, imagine a family member of the person you are speaking about is in the room with you, and go from there.
3. Worship with a church one Sunday that is not primarily white. We may be sharing something soon with New Zion Baptist. But there are a number of churches in our area – Chickahominy Baptist and First Baptist Williamsburg that you can at least worship online with. I will not be hurt or offended in anyway if you skip our worship one week to do so. I will actually be very excited and want to hear all about it. Not only may we learn something from that service. But it can be a great Christian witness at this time that we are all brothers and sisters and a part of the body of Christ.
 4. The final way I will recommend is to stretch yourself and join in on a book or study that's facing racism and the ways the church can respond and help at this time. One book that I have just started and recommend is: "Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation." I like this one, especially because it comes from a faith perspective, includes spiritual practices, and has a goal not just of guilt or shame, but of justice and reconciliation.

We as the session of the church will be looking at ways we can live out racial justice and reconciliation more fully as the body of Christ. If you have recommendations for us – studies, programs, service opportunities, songs, prayers – send them our way. Because this is a work we are all called to. Because as Nathan reminds us, we are all in this story. And through God's grace through the calling of Jesus Christ, we all can join in with God's work of love and justice, and creating a better world for all people.

As Iris plays, I invite each of us to take a minute and reflect and write down our thoughts to this question:

“What can I do to join in God’s work of racial justice and reconciliation?”