

## The Price of Unity

Today we are going to talk about racism and its ongoing impact on our society and on the body of Christ. By racism I primarily mean “the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and that a particular race is superior to others<sup>1</sup>”. This kind of ideology has both overt and covert manifestations. Most often we think of the overt form—hateful thoughts and actions based on skin color. The milder form of this which we might more readily admit to is a vague sense of distrust of other races. The covert manifestation is a little trickier. It is the self-propagating legacy that our parents and grandparents left us—the great inequalities built into our neighborhoods, schools, work places, government, and especially our churches.

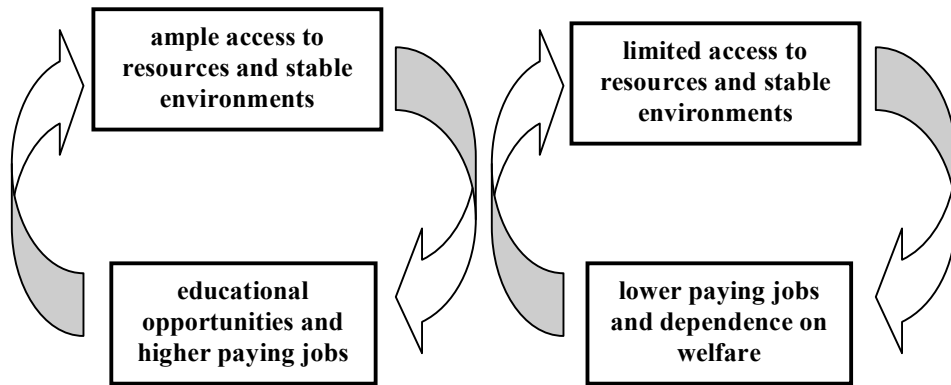
This is not a topic that I look forward to speaking on. It is too volatile. It cuts too close for my comfort. Yet, as one of my neighbors reminded me the other day, we must talk about it. In particular, I think our body of believers must talk about it because although small we are racially diverse and situated in one of the most color-coded metropolitan centers in the nation. You each come from a unique background. Because we live in a society where race matters, your race shaped your life, the way you see Christianity, and the way you see this community.

Ultimately the sins of discrimination and prejudice started in the Garden of Eden. These are part of our sin nature that we inherited from Adam and Eve and have no part of our new, Christ-like nature. In the United States we most often see our racial problems as starting when white Europeans enslaved black Africans to build their ever-expanding empires. Christians and non-Christians alike engaged in this practice, and developed raced-based theories to justify their actions. The differences in the color of skin provided an all too convenient reference point. With the Civil War came an end to slavery but it did little to close the color gap in America. White Americans still held the economic power with its associated educational and political benefits. Segregation was institutionalized and continued to be until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

So, does the “race problem” still exist and if it does what do we do about it? Consider the diagram below. I propose to you that in general whites and blacks are operating in two different cycles. One is a well resourced cycle and the other is an under resourced cycle. After the Civil War, black men and women were dumped into the under resourced cycle. They had no money and very little resources with which to build a life. Reparations were either absent or woefully inadequate. By in large, blacks have been stuck in that cycle ever since. Due to various pressures both from within and without of each cycle it is hard to break out of either one. This is our self-propagating legacy. If we do nothing and go about our lives as usual we will pass the same legacy onto our children. We will have neglected our call to justice for the oppressed and the vast inequalities will be unchanged. These inequalities will continue to kindle the fires of hatred and malice between races. To do nothing, therefore, is not an option.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Copyright © 2009 by Houghton Mifflin Company.



Since I see this primarily as an issue of social justice I will primarily be speaking to two different groups of people. The first is the group with the resources, whether these be jobs, homes, money, social standing. You are most likely but not necessarily white. The second group does not have resources. In this community that most likely, but not necessarily, means you are black. The burden of responsibility for social justice in scripture lies primarily with the well resourced and that is still true today.

First, I want to talk to those Christians who are well resourced in terms of opportunities and ability to pursue education and higher paying jobs. When we look around us we see that there are more opportunities with regards to jobs, schools, political positions than ever for blacks and other minorities in the United States. Because of that it is tempting to think that we live in a country with equal opportunity, especially if we do not live among those of other racial backgrounds. We know where our hard work has gotten us and believe that if others, regardless of skin color, simply had the same motivation they too could be successful. We forget the role that our social network played in giving us access to valuable resources and opportunities. By in large we grew up in middle class homes where everything we needed (though perhaps not wanted) was provided. Our first jobs came because of people we knew or our parents knew. Most or all of our friends graduated high school and went onto take college classes. Our parents could pay for those classes or at least could co-sign the student loans for us. If we're honest, we didn't require much motivation or effort to get a decent job or into a college. We fail to see that for people who didn't grow up in that kind of environment, the playing field is significantly slanted in our favor.

Our traditional solution to the "race problem" has been to reemphasize the need to evangelize and convert others. We reason that if everyone were Christians then we would all love each other and be able to get beyond the sins of prejudice and discrimination. This has been the stance of white evangelicals since the Civil War. It has failed to bear fruit because we've settled for converting people and cared little for their development into Christ-like disciples. We also argue that the solution to the economic inequalities is simply more motivation on behalf of blacks and other minorities. We feel very much confirmed in this assessment when we can drive around our community and see able-bodied men and women, 98% of whom are black, sitting on their porches getting drunk in

the middle of every weekday. We lament the poorly designed welfare-system that rewards laziness and promiscuity. Yet our solutions offer nothing to address the issues of “inequality in health care, economic inequality, police mistreatment, unequal access to educational opportunities, racially imbalanced environmental degradation, unequal political power, residential segregation, job discrimination, or even congregational segregation.”<sup>2</sup>

The second group I want to talk to are those Christians who are black and/or under-resourced. For this group, the question of whether there is a “race problem” in the United States seems laughable because it is so obvious. You’ve grown up with the reality that people treat you different than they do those who don’t look like you. Perhaps not everyone treats you differently, but enough do that you instinctively know that there must be something wrong with the system. While it cannot be denied that motivation plays some role, when the deck is stacked against a person the average amount of motivation simply won’t yield results. Opportunities exist but they are not equal and when you fall there is no safety net of savings or parents to catch you. So you fall further and harder and the desire to get up again progressively weakens.

Pressures from within and without keep us each in our cycle. So what is the solution? Good theology. In other words, we need accurate beliefs about God that transform our lives and spur us on to seek out and tear down the racial divides in our lives and in our society. Hear me family of God, I am not talking about conversion. I am talking about transformation—rebirth, death to life, new creation—as we read about in scripture. Too often Christians are guilty of using our culture as the reference point for what we should do and how we should act. We approach life and faith the same way we do a shopping mall. We look for a product that satisfies us at the lowest possible cost to us. So we end up at churches where people talk, act, and worship in ways that make us feel comfortable. We do not seek out the church that calls out sin in our lives or disciplines us and works out the inconsistencies in our beliefs. We do not end up at the church that pushes us to fight on the front lines or makes us more holy and Christ-like. Above all we do not stay very long in places that ask us to lay down our lives and take up our cross daily. Oh that we would take Christ at his word, no matter what the cost. What a day that would be!

Today I am going to be using a passage from Colossians 3 to illustrate that transformation. I chose this passage because it offers a clear and concise picture of what it means to die to our old sinful self and to be made alive in Christ. It is Christianity 101. It is a basic and universal call to Christ and unity in him. That is, the words here apply to everyone who wants to follow Christ. If you don’t want to follow Christ don’t listen, but if you do then take heed of Paul’s exhortations.

<sup>5</sup>Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup>You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup>But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

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<sup>2</sup> p. 132 *Divided by Faith*. Emerson and Smith.

Put to death. There is nothing soft or half-hearted in that. He is not asking them to try and tone down sin. No. Paul demands that everyone who is in Christ execute—put before the firing squad or in the electric chair or chop off the head of their earthly nature. This is reminiscent of Christ's words in Matthew 5:28 "If your right eye causes you to sin gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." For some reason, we don't appreciate or take to heart the severity of this language. Though the language is not literal, it is forceful and for good reason. We need to be shaken out of our apathy to sin. Our tendency is to try to mix our old and new lives. What Paul and Christ are calling for is a clean break, a definitive end and new beginning—death and rebirth. That is the gospel. How many of you have done this? How many of you are walking in the same blatant sin and apathy that you had before you professed Christ to be Lord of your life? How many of you are still living with or having sex with that man or woman you are not married to? How many of you are paying more attention to your home value than storing up treasures in heaven?

<sup>9</sup>Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

How many of you are playing the game, putting on a religious act when you come here or meet with your discipler? You cannot fool God. Why would you even want to? What reward is there in that?

What does our new self look like? What does it mean to be renewed in the image of our Creator? What are attributes of God that we are to emulate? Though there are many attributes of God that we could talk about today, I want to highlight the justice of our God. It is a fundamental and necessary characteristic of the God of the bible.

Psalm 89:13-15 (NIV) 13 Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted. 14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. 15 Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD.

We don't see justice named in the passage in Colossians and we ourselves too often neglect it, but it is a necessary component of unity in the body. Without justice deep rifts develop. Our God is just and He expects that we will be working his justice on earth (Psalm 103:6<sup>3</sup>, Proverbs 29:7<sup>4</sup>, Deuteronomy 16:20<sup>5</sup>). Lack of justice and concern for the marginalized are common themes in the prophetic rebukes of ethnic Israel in the Old Testament. Consider for a moment the passages below, taken from 11 different prophets. Lack of justice and apathy towards the oppressed was central to God's rejection and destruction of his people Israel.

Isaiah 1:11-17 (NIV) 11 "The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. 12 When you come to appear before

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 103:6 (NIV) The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 29:7 (NIV) The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 16:20 (NIV) Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.

me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? 13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. 14 Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; 16 wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, 17 learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Jeremiah 21:12 NIV O house of David, this is what the LORD says: " 'Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done— burn with no one to quench it.

Ezekiel 22:29 NIV The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice.

Hosea 12:6 NIV But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

Amos 5:12 NIV For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

Amos 5:24 NIV But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Micah 3:8 NIV But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.

Habakkuk 1:4 NIV Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

Zephaniah 3:1-5 1 Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled! 2 She obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD, she does not draw near to her God. 3 Her officials are roaring lions, her rulers are evening wolves, who leave nothing for the morning. 4 Her prophets are arrogant; they are treacherous men. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law. 5 The LORD within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame.

Zechariah 7:7-12 NIV 7 Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled? 8 And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: 9 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.' 11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.

Malachi 3:5 NIV "So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

The Israelites neglected their call to justice, because of that they were destroyed. We, as believers and members of spiritual Israel, have the same responsibility and we are guilty of the same shortcomings. One danger here is to outsource the call to others. From the

passages above, it is clear the call to justice is a universal call to God's people. It is not a call for lawyers only. It is not a call for me or for Jim or for Chanel or for Duante alone. No. It is a call for all believers. Another danger is to pretend like we are not apart of the problem. We can read these passages and say "surely that isn't talking about me? When have I ever withheld justice? When have I ever robbed the fatherless?" I'm sure many in Israel had the same questions. What we fail to realize is that even if we are not actively oppressing others, our natural tendency as humans is to maintain the status quo. The inertia of society keeps us doing the same thing, the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. It keeps economic power and opportunities among the same group of people. We who have resources have the greatest ability to affect change and the least incentive. Justice, though good for the marginalized, will cost us dearly so we push it onto the back burner.

<sup>11</sup>Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

I met a woman a couple of months ago who has a disease called vitiligo, which caused her naturally dark skin to develop patches of light skin. When the patches covered enough of her skin that she couldn't go anywhere without people staring she elected to undergo a treatment that took the pigment out of the remaining parts of her skin. This woman talked extensively about the identity struggle that she and her family went through as her skin color changed from black to white. She told us that her husband had a hard time being intimate with her anymore because, as he put it "I married a black woman not a white woman." It was as if a change of skin color could change who she was as a person. She herself had the same struggle. Though you could no longer tell by looking at her, she repeatedly and emphatically referred to herself as a "black woman." Again, it was as if her skin color and her identity as a person were synonymous. When pressed to explain what being black meant, beyond a skin color, she struggled to come up with a definition despite its obvious importance to her. Finally she blurted out, "I guess we just don't want to be white." This woman's identity had collapsed when God saw fit to change the color of her skin.

Do we have the same problem? Do we find our identity in something other than Christ? I suspect that we do. Is it more important for us to be black than a Christian? Is it more important for us to be wearing the right clothes at church than to clothe ourselves with compassion and kindness? For the under resourced in our community there seems to be a pervasive need to put on a good show with clothes and cars and gifts. Like the high school kid who lives on welfare checks but insists on wearing the newest clothes and the \$150 tennis shoes. This misdirected pursuit of identity transcends race or economic status, though it is perhaps easier to see in the under-resourced because they, like the woman with the two copper coins, are spending all that they have to live on in pursuit of what they treasure. Tragically, unlike the woman with the two copper coins, they are treasuring the cheap and the temporary.

The great tragedy in all of this is that we fail to exalt Christ to his rightful place in our lives. If Christ is truly all then it should be a small thing to give up our dependence on us cultural and racial boundaries for him. If Christ is truly all then it should be a small thing

for us to intentionally desegregate our congregations and communities. If Christ is truly all that it should be a small thing for us to be uncomfortable for his glory's sake.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Family of God be encouraged. Those of you who are pursuing God today are his chosen people, holy and dearly loved. He holds you firmly. He is working his good purposes in you and will carry them unto completion. Just as with any team or army there is a certain dress code that comes with being God's people. This is part of being made into the likeness of our Creator. We are to adorn ourselves with kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience along with the rest of the fruits of the Spirit. Remember we died to ourselves and we are made new in Christ.

<sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

I am convinced that much of our conflict with others stems from a lack of recognition of our own depravity and sinfulness. We like to think of ourselves as fundamentally good. What bad there is in our lives comes from the negative influences of our environment. This is not what the bible teaches. We are all sinners. We are all enemies of God from our very first breath. We are as guilty of causing Christ's suffering as the Jewish leaders who condemned him and the Roman soldiers who whipped his back bare, spit on him, mocked him, nailed him to the cross, and put a spear through his side. Do you believe that? Do you understand the weight of your sinfulness?

If you do understand the extent of your sin, then you are much closer to understanding just how much Christ has forgiven you. No matter how badly a person (or race) has wronged you, it is insignificant in comparison to your sin against a holy and righteous God. We are to forgive as he forgave us. If we desire forgiveness we must first let go of our hate and angry and grudges against others. Jesus illustrated this point in a parable in Matthew 18:21-35.

21Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' 27The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. 28"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 29"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 30"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured,

until he should pay back all he owed. 35"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

If we are to have any unity in Christ, we must be willing to repent of and forgive each other for any past and present sin. Horrible and awful sins have been wrought by whites against blacks both historically and presently. It has been suggested that racism is only possible from a position of power. Therefore, blacks and other minorities are not capable of racism. This idea is then used to justify any manner of discriminatory and hateful words and actions. We live in a society and area where racism abounds. It is not just white to blacks or blacks to whites. It is both and more. Family of God we must repent. We must also be open to loving criticism from other members of other races. For discipleship to work we must be willing to give and receive rebuke, no matter who it comes from. We live in a society where it is off limits for whites to talk critically of blacks, no matter what the context. To my black brothers and sisters in Christ, I exhort you, do not categorically dismiss criticism from whites as racism. If you do, you will not grow.

<sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Our unity is a testimony to a broken and divided world of our God's power to recreate and to restore. In America we have hundreds if not thousands of different denominations. We have a smorgasbord of choices when it comes to where and how we worship God. The result is we go where we feel comfortable based on the types of songs that are sung, how much preaching there is, what people in the church look and or talk like. We don't necessarily choose churches based on race, but we do gravitate towards the type of people we like to hang out with and the culture we grew up in. So we end up in racially segregated churches. We cannot tell the story of Christ's unity because we do not know it anymore. If we are ever to exemplify the unity of Christ in our local churches we must seek out churches where we are spurred onto pursue justice for the oppressed, develop fruits of the Spirit, and be unified with brothers and sisters from other races. If you settle for a church based on your comfort with the music, the people, the sermons then you are mostly likely perpetuating the disunity of Christ's body.

So where do we go from here? Look around you. We are a small group of believers here, yet we represent several different nationalities and races with a fairly even mix of blacks and whites. We are an unusual congregation, both in terms of diversity and commitment to living out truth. Because of that we at Mack Ave have a tremendous opportunity to show the world what it means to pursue Christ and to find our identity in him. The tendency will be for us to slowly and steadily fall away into lifestyles and churches that are easier. The tendency will be to let the pull of family ties, the worries of this life, and the deceitfulness of the American dream choke us out. By the grace of God, I pray that that would not be true of us. Let us rather have the word of Christ "dwell in us richly" and in so doing work for our lives to be transformed more and more into his image.



Despite all the lofty intentions and good emotions many of you will not be here in a few years. In our three short years we have seen many come and go. Why do people leave? I think in large part because we continually remind ourselves that the goal of our lives is to get Christ, not to be comfortable. When Christ reminded the crowd in John 6 of this, thousands left and a dozen stayed. Today we have a similar problem. Most people come to church though not for Christ, but to be patted on the back and make friends. This may well be the path to earthly comfort but it is not the path to deep and eternal joy.

Certainly, Christians are needed in other places and God uses that. Remember, though, that the world is caught up in a spiritual war. In some places the fighting is thicker and soldiers are falling left and right. These are the places that have the greatest need for stable Christians and resources. Other places the fight looks more like a peace keeping occupation, with less demands for soldiers and supplies. Few of you will leave Mack Ave and Detroit to take up the fight in a place where the fight is more fierce. That is not to say such places do not exist, but let us not pretend that because God is at work everywhere that places like Colorado Springs, CO or Holland, MI have as much need for kingdom builders as Detroit. This is why we are so adamant that we disciple only those who want to commit to this community and to discipling men and women here. To disciple you and send you off to a Colorado Springs or a Holland is akin to soldiers in Iraq giving away their guns and boxes of ammunition to soldiers in the US so that there can be parades. In our discipleship agreements we ask you to commit to discipling at least two others from our community. The implication is that you would disciple each one long enough for he or she to be prepared to disciple others. Disciples are you committed to that? Do you know how long it takes to raise up healthy believers from unhealthy backgrounds?

Whether you are white or black, this is a hard community to live in. Crime is common. Public services are lacking. Quality goods and services are overpriced or unavailable for purchase in our zip code. The school system is bankrupt and unable to educate properly the majority of their students. Is this a racial issue? Well consider that across Alter Road, where the people are by in large white and well resourced, the picture looks vastly different. What does systemic justice look like here? Racial inequalities still exist in large part because the people with the resources maintain status quo. They live around people of similar means (and thus looks) and share their resources physically and through social networking with the same group of people. It is not that you maliciously deny people of other races and social standing, but you aren't around them enough to identify with and meet their needs. Even if we forget about skin color for a minute we are still left with inequalities that demand action from God's people.

Imagine with me for a moment a world in which all of us with resources actually sought first to usher in the Kingdom of God. We finally put our worries over money, home mortgages, comfort, and security into the Lord's hands. We stop practicing that dead and useless faith that says "keep warm and well fed" but does nothing to alleviate the physical suffering (James 2:14-26) beyond selling fruit at a cornerstore. Imagine that we all move into, or stay in, this community. Not simply the more palatable streets, but we take over places like Mack and Bewick. Imagine that we stop seeing the 48214 as a stepping stone but a rock on which to build. We stop making practical earthly decisions

and start deciding to advance the kingdom by investing in this community through dining at local restaurants, shopping at local stores, restoring or tearing down dilapidated homes, and starting new businesses.

Imagine now that you overcome the mutual distrust and actually get to know your neighbors. These men and women are not like the ones you live around now. 98% of them are black. The average income and savings is laughable compared to what you are used to. The houses are worth a fraction of those in your neighborhood. These men and women live much closer to the edge of financial collapse. Imagine that instead of saving money doing things yourself you hire some of them to mow your lawn or paint a room or clear out your back alley. Imagine also that you begin using your connections at work to find out what jobs are available and pass along this information to your neighbors. You help them prepare the right resume and give them tips on the interview. A neighbor is hired. It is the same thing you would have done for your old neighbor, but now a family that was on the brink is brought into a place of stability.

Now imagine putting your kids in Detroit public schools. Would you be able to sit back any more and mock the deplorable state of the education system or would you feel compelled to get involved? What if we all did that? Would twenty active members of the parent teacher association at Nichols Elementary bring positive changes to that school? Imagine the impact on the hundreds of under resourced black students that your kids would be in school with. Is that worth your effort? What would it take for us to leave behind that world of comfort and educational pragmatism to battle for racial justice on the front lines? Am I asking too much of you or your kids? Remember Christ's words in Luke 12:48 "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

For those who are black and/or under resourced, imagine with me a world in which there is hope both spiritual and physical. Imagine a place of opportunity rather than oppression, where motivation and hard work reap rewards in this life and the one to come. Imagine that when an opportunity for work comes along you set aside your history of being passed over and disappointed and do everything in your power to get that job. Imagine a place where your every last cent is not spent drumming up an identity based on clothes or shoes or cars. Imagine a place where you can rest in Christ. Imagine a place where your white brothers and sisters in Christ are no longer oppressors but friends and family. Imagine a place where you can let go of your distrust and accept help when needed. Imagine being able to accept criticism from other races without dismissing it as racially motivated. Imagine a world where women can trust and encourage their husbands to lead their families. Imagine a time when you are fully committing yourselves to being refined through Christian discipleship and are filling leadership roles in the church instead of reveling in immaturity.

Family of God, will you commit with me and my family to praying and living out such a vision? Will you commit with me, not to gentrification, but to intentionally and radically using your God given resources to join and build a community that is racially and economically diverse. No more 90% one or the other. Will you commit to fighting for

racial and social justice, especially when it hurts? Will you accept your call as a child of God to work justice and recreation all for his glory? There is no better day than today to accept that call and there are few communities in the US in more need of it than this one.

Isaiah 58 NIV 1 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. 11 The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. 12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

Our God is good and just. We are his hands and feet and he expects us to be about building his kingdom and bearing his image. That means we are called one and all to pursue justice. It is not something we can pay someone else to do for us. Following Christ means carrying a cross. It is not comfortable or sexy, but the reward for such a life is great. Nothing will bring you more joy or satisfaction. Family of God, do not leave here and settle back into status quo. To do so would be dangerous. You were made for so much more.