

**Sermon from Charlottesville**  
**Pastor Dean Jurgen, Lititz Moravian Congregation**  
Matt. 15:21-28; Galatians 3:23-29 LMC 8/20/17

Perhaps the greatest theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Karl Barth, gave instructions to the preacher: “Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.” ie. Look through the Bible like you’d look through eyeglass lenses to be able to see and understand what is happening in the world.

And we all are asking, “What in the world is happening?” -in Charlottesville, in or society and in our souls.

The newspaper tells of the darkness of our days; the scriptures shed light to dispel that darkness. There is a light that can overcome the darkness; there is no darkness that can overcome the light.

But getting along with each other has never been easy. We humans have always found it to be challenging to get along peacefully with those who are different than us.

It began when Cain killed his brother Abel because he was different than him. Violence against those that we don’t like, even for childish reasons, has continued all through history.

Most recently, in Charlottesville when racist hate groups marched, chanting Nazi slogans, waving Nazi swastika flags, the KKK waving confederate flags to tell of their support for the values of the CSA, a society which considered African Americans 3/5ths of a person.

Their angry, hate inspired words turned into violence, culminating when a 20 year old drove his car high-speed into a crowd... because they were different than him... inferior to him, he thought. He didn’t know them, but it seems that he had hate in his heart for them, and 32 year old Heather Heyer was killed, as well as two state troopers in a related accident, and 19 others were injured.

I share with you some thoughts with the hope that we who follow Jesus will renounce the sin of

racism, and embrace the gospel of Jesus... the good news that sheds the light we all need.

In times like this, it is not a Christian option to keep silent. Dietrich Bonhoffer, the German pastor who was executed by the Nazis for speaking up against their evil, said “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil; not to speak is to speak; not to act is to act.”

And so I share with you the greatest good news in the midst of the tragic news, for the Lord is still speaking... the Lord is still guiding us to walk in peace and love with each other.

Close your eyes for a moment. Recall what you saw, on screen, of Charlottesville last Friday and Saturday.

Torch lit march...

Confederate battle flags and Nazi swastikas carried defiantly through town...

Nazi helmets, white supremacist emblems on shields...

Angry people, screaming people...

Wild may lay, fists flying, hatred overflowing the streets...

Picture it... now picture it happening *here*, on Main Street Lititz... Lititz Moravian Church. How do you feel? Afraid? Angry? Bewildered?

Now picture Jesus walking into the scene. What does he do?

Open your eyes. I expect most of us would have an answer to what Jesus would do. Jesus would be non-violent... he would call for peace... he would confront with a look to the soul of an angry person, not the swinging of a fist to hurt anyone.

Turn the other cheek, he tells us, when someone hits you. Love your neighbor, he urges, no matter who they are, no matter how different they are from you. Be one of the blessed peacemakers, he says, for theirs is the Kingdom of God. Love one another as I have loved you... all of you, for God

so loves the world and everyone, *everyone* in the world.

So we envision Jesus coming in love for us all, for his love has no limits. But today's gospel lesson pictures Jesus in a startlingly different way.

Were you shocked to see how apparently cold and rude Jesus seemed to be?

And, I shudder to say it, did you get the feeling that Jesus even seemed to be racist? A Canaanite, or also called Syrophonecian woman pleaded for help for her daughter... she was an outcast, one of the ethnic group that was despised by the Jews. She begged Jesus, the one who she believed could help. And Jesus is silent, seemingly ignoring her.

The disciples told Jesus to send her away, for she was a pest... and she was one of *those* people they detested... she was not Jewish, she was not worthy, she was, in their eyes, 3/5ths of a person.

And how did Jesus respond? He spoke words that easily might have had her give up hope. He said that his ministry, his purpose, his kingdom was only for the Jews, not Gentiles, outsiders to God's chosen people. Like this woman.

She probably heard the disciples tell Jesus to get rid of her, but she doesn't give up. She persists "Lord, help me" she pleads. And then he appears to be rude and demeaning, telling her it is not right to take the children's food (children are the Jews) and give it to the dogs (a name to put down her ethnic group). He seems to be drawing a very tight circle and keeping her out.

If the story stopped there, she'd be lost... and *we* would be lost. But we don't know the tone of voice he had, for that makes a difference. We also don't know if he was speaking to this outcast woman or if he was speaking to his disciples, to teach them a lesson about God's love without limits, to show his disciples how hardened, how prejudiced they were in their attitude toward outsiders.

I think that's the key to understanding this encounter: it's that Jesus intended his words to be for the disciples, to teach them a lesson. He was treating (mistreating) this woman the way his disciples would have treated her.

He wanted the disciples to know that prejudice and racism are sin. He wants us to know that too. He wanted to teach the disciples, *which include us*, how God loves even those we don't... God loves the foreigner, the outcast, the ostracized, the despised, those of different religions, cultures, races.

God loves those we would choose not to love, because of national pride, exclusivism, the lie of a false sense of superiority. But the bottom line is that we should love as God loves... without limits.

Sing with me the one of the first songs we learned in Sunday School:

"Jesus loves the little children,  
all the children of the world;  
Red and yellow, black and white,  
They are precious in his sight;  
Jesus loves the little children of the world."

Listen:

Jesus has no outsiders.

And with us there should never be either.

Whenever there is, we need to repent.

White supremacy is anathema to Jesus.

For he calls us to love and serve our neighbor, whether they be red, yellow, black or white;

homeless

gay

muslim

immigrant

Jewish

Drug addicted

Atheist

Disabled

Peter says in his sermon in Acts 10, his first sermon to the outsider-Gentiles, that God does not show favoritism. And Paul, who was once Saul, the hateful, violent persecutor of the church, wrote in our Galatians passage that the differences between us make no difference in our standing with God.

We are male and female, slave and free, Jew and Greek, and we are white and black, young and old, wealthy and poor, but these differences do not make anyone superior to others. God made each one of us, red and yellow, black and white, in the

image of God, and when we think our color is God's color; when we think our privilege is God's will for us; when we think God loves us more than anyone else, we need to repent.

For the truth is that *all* lives matter. And if we ever have just a thought that black lives matter less, then we need to repent.

Most of us here are white, which makes me wonder, can we talk about white privilege without making some of us uncomfortable? Probably not. But let's be glad when we feel uncomfortable with our white privilege, for then we are seeing ourselves more honestly. For we who are white Christians need to be more Christian and less white.

The psyche of our nation has been disturbed by the stench coming from the hate imported into Charlottesville. This public display of bigotry looked like we were looking at hell on full display... and we were. And what shocked me is that this kind of hellish display used to be filled with anonymous men in hoods. Now they are in full display, dare I say proudly marching and chanting, as they prepared to go to battle.

Meanwhile there was a large contingent of clergy, of all faiths, wearing stoles, vestments and clergy collars, who on Saturday shared a sunrise prayer and commissioning service to stand face to face with white supremacists. As insults and threats were shouted at them, they knelt and offered prayer and song:  
"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

I have shared enough words. I have trusted that the words shared are pointing us to Jesus, who wants us to pray and work for his will be done, so that earth will be like heaven, instead of the hell we have witnessed. There's so, so much more to talk about; I feel that we have just scratched the surface.

"So, what?"  
So what are we to *do*?

- 1) I have spoken of repenting. There's only been one who walked this earth that didn't need to repent.

We repent of the notion that we think racism is someone else's problem and concern. When one sister or brother suffers, we suffer.

- 2) We become better informed about systemic racism in our education systems, in our judicial systems, in our policing systems.

Read books like *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, and two books which we have had book discussions here *America's Original Sin* by Jim Wallis and *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson.

Go to a Lancaster African American Heritage Tour (bulletin).

- 3) Be a witness for what is good and right and true when you are with someone who speaks as if black lives, or LGBTQ lives, or muslim lives or Jewish lives matter less.

Here's one way to do that.

My freshman year at Moravian College I had a classmate on my dorm floor. Mark Zarra was from Greek heritage, and he gave serious consideration to being a Greek Orthodox priest. Mark was white, but had a persistent challenge to all of us who were white. When someone spoke something racist, against blacks, he was bold and quick to speak up. He would say, "Hey, stop that! I'm black too!"

I was shocked the first time I heard this white boy say that. But I learned to respect him, for speaking a higher truth than what meets the eye. And I invite you to join me in imitating him.

For such a witness might be just what is needed to keep one person from marching in hate... might keep one person from speeding their car into those who just hope that their little light will shine.

Sister/Brother: Love wins! So let's love without limits, as we follow our Lamb who has conquered.