

SPEAK UP!



Scripture:

Ezekiel 2:1-5

¹He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. ²And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. ³He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD.” ⁵Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

Mark 6:1–13

¹He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. ⁴Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” ⁵And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹²So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



SPEAK UP!

We are called to be like Ezekiel and Jesus. We are the disciples of this day who are to teach others the ways of Christ, to cast out demons, help the sick, and to speak up and stand for righteousness and justice.

As it says in Ezekiel 2, O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak WITH you. ²And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. ³He said to me, "I am sending you to them. ⁵Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them."

How do we know when the Lord is speaking with us?

The answer is: When you are speaking the words that mean so much to God that he repeats that message over and over again in the Bible.

The powerful dominant message from the Bible is first and foremost LOVE. And when you speak words of love, forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing, you are speaking the words of God.

Secondly, when you are doing as God (through Jesus) commanded, to love your neighbor, and when you are working to accomplish what the prophet Micah said in chapter 6 verse 8. He commanded that we promote justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Then you are doing the work of God.

Third, when you are boldly helping the oppressed, protecting the vulnerable, serving the poor, and showing hospitality to the outcast, giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, and water to the thirsty, you are doing the work of God.

WELL DONE

There is no doubt, if you live your life in this way, God will say to you when you meet your maker, "Well done good and faithful servant!"

In our passage today, Jesus is helping the disciples realize that it will not be easy for them to be prophets on his behalf. He anticipates that they will meet people who reject them. And rather than speaking until they are blue in the face, he tells them to just shake off the dust from their shoes and move on. Sometimes we have to do that.

When the demons of hate, discrimination, racism, and violence possess people, so that they become irrational and shoot innocent Bible study

group members, or set fire to churches, then it is often worthless to try to reason with them. So instead we must focus on how we can help the victims.

It is also important to speak up and stand beside the oppressed to show a holy force of love in the wake of hate. We are called to not sit back quietly, but to speak up and stand beside the victim to prevent this type of violence from ever happening again, anywhere.

MITOCHONDRIAL EVE

Why? Because God commands it and this is your family that is being killed and abused! These are your people who also had the same mother as you. Yes, we all have the same mother. Her name is Mitochondrial Eve.

In human genetics, Mitochondrial Eve is the matrilineal most recent common ancestor (MRCAs), in a direct, unbroken, maternal line, of all currently living humans. She is estimated to have lived two-hundred-thousand years ago. This is the woman from whom all living humans today descend, in an unbroken line, on their mother's side, and through the mothers of those mothers, and so on, back until all lines converge on one person. Because all mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is passed from mother to offspring without recombination, all mtDNA in every living person is directly descended from hers.

And our mother Eve is from the continent of Africa. This science is complementary to the Biblical story of our origins. The Garden of Eden was described as being in Northern Africa. Hence, we are all related to Africans!

That must be why the smells and the tastes and the people of Africa make me feel so at home! When ever I travel to Kenya my soul seems to tell me, "You are home."

A DIVERSITY OF SKIN COLORS

Now a quick reminder about why we have a diversity of colors in our human skin. Dark skin has more melanin which is a natural sun screen. If you could choose to have the most resilient skin, you should choose the skin with lots of melanin, because it protects from the sun's rays and skin

cancer. We don't all have dark skin anymore because as humans migrated out of Africa to the northern regions, they needed to absorb some Vitamin D from the sun because there wasn't as much sun as there was near the equator. So to survive in places where the sun had less intensity, humans adapted with whiter skin to help absorb the vitamin D.

Isn't biological adaptation to the environment an amazing process? Yet, some people don't recognize the inherent advantage of having more melanin. Instead they have arbitrarily decided that darker skin is inferior.

That racist attitude is the root cause of massacres like in Charleston, and the burning of the eight churches and the death threat letters to the black women pastors this past week.

So why are people still racist to the point of violence in this country when we know biological differences are related to minor biological adaptation? One reason is a lack of education or just plain ignorance. There is not enough science education about ethnic diversity. The confederate flag wavers don't realize we are all related to each other as one global human family and that there is no such thing as a superior race. The Southern Poverty Law Center has developed some new Teaching Tolerance classroom resources that offer free lesson plans for exploring topics like race and ethnicity, gender equality, and sexual orientation with students. So the next generation should be less intolerant.

WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS

Remember that the Apostle Paul said to the church in Galatia, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This is a main teaching of the Bible.

Yet the psychological reason for bigotry is a tough one to combat. The people with low self-esteem and little to hope for in their lives are often looking for someone else to blame for their lack of success. The powerless people who are not secure and happy in themselves look for someone vulnerable to pick on to get a momentary feeling of power and superiority. They are your classic bullies.

Put a bunch of bullies in white robes and you have the Ku Klux Klan, who publicly gathered at the South Carolina statehouse after the confederate flag was taken down last week. And after that meeting, churches began to burn.

None of your friends are like this, right? You might think you don't know any one who is racist or violent, but all of us have the potential. Many of us who were raised in the fifties and sixties and before were subtly taught to be prejudicial towards those who are different.

DEMEANING WORDS AND MESSAGES

When I was about eight years old, I remember asking my mother what the "N" word meant in the rhyme we sang sometimes at recess, "Eenie, Meenie, Miney, Mo." Wasn't that horrible to repeat such a demeaning rhyme? I am so ashamed today to say I actually sang that as a child when we were choosing between things! I had no idea at the time that I was singing a rhyme about slavery and by saying it I was promoting prejudice and injustice.

Another subtle message I heard as a child was when my father would read about a robbery in the newspaper. Sometimes he would read the story out loud and comment that even though the paper didn't identify the suspect's skin color, he would say it was probably black. When I challenged him on that one day, I said, "Dad! How can you say that when your best friend at work is black?" He said, "Oh, he's different!"

PREJUDICE AND RACISM

Prejudice and racism have caused enormous suffering across history; it is very important to try to understand how they work. Prejudice and racism both refer to a negative view of one group of people based solely on their membership in that group. But in reality, race is merely a social construct. It was first used to categorize people in the early part of the 18th century to rationalize slavery in this country. Back then they did not know about DNA and the results of the human genome project that proved all humans are 99.9 percent genetically identical.

When a child learns to be prejudicial towards others it is due to the way they were socialized at home through observation of family behavior, as well as informal interactions with friends and in settings like schools, and businesses. These experiences foster a sense of the "ethnic self"

through which children learn how to interact with others.

No child is born to hate or discriminate. They learn it from the adults around them. So by the time I was in college, I knew it was wrong and I was determined to not be racist. I had a friend who was African American; she was on our dance team at Northwest Missouri State (not far from Ferguson, Missouri). Her name was Jessica, and she was gorgeous. But one day she told me she was quitting the team. Some people had been harassing her and calling her Jungle Bunny. She just couldn't take it anymore. I was so mad because I believed our dance coach should have spoken up and protected her. So I quit, too.

Racism comes in many forms and shapes. There is a funny video on YouTube that makes good points about the assumptions we make about Asian people. I am even more attuned to these assumptions now that I have a daughter-in-law who has Japanese/Korean ancestry.

Can you imagine having to live your life thinking that your skin color or the shape of your eyes repels people? When I was a therapist I worked with a seven year old boy whose mother had a Puerto Rican background. This gorgeous curly haired boy had a long deep scar down both his arms. He wouldn't tell me what happened so I asked his older sister. She told me such a sad story. She said their mother always complained that he looked too dark. So he poured bleach on his arms to try to be white. He got third degree burns on both his arms.

SOME GOOD NEWS

But there is good news! A study from the National Institutes of Health about *The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of the United States* predicts that with the current trends of ethnic mixing there will be a generalized increased awareness and acceptance of multiracial ancestry. This will reshape racial and ethnic boundaries in the coming decades. As we truly become a "melting pot" of people in the United States, the article concludes that "the boundaries between and within groups will begin to erode."

This gives us hope for the future! We all can make our world better by making friends with people of other groups. Positive emotional experiences with members of different groups reduce negative stereotypes. Having close friends

from different groups builds your awareness of what it is like to walk a mile in their shoes.

A close relationship promotes identification with the other person and with the groups they belong to. In other words, your friendships with other people become part of who you are. And that is what we are to be: All One in Christ Jesus, loving your neighbor as yourself.

As disciples of Christ, we have a big job to do. Speak up and stand alongside, and advocate for equal rights for those who are oppressed no matter what the reason.

Maybe they are oppressed due to their skin color, or their sexual orientation, or because they are disabled. Your job as a bold disciple of Christ is to welcome, promote healing, and help provide justice for the least of these. Can you do your job? All of us will benefit because the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words still ring true, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Benediction:

Be a prophet among the rebellious prejudicial people in the world. Help them hear God speaking up through you.

And remember the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he said, "The ultimate measure of a person is not where he/she stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy.

The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige, and even her life for the welfare of others."

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forever more. Amen



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July 5, 2015**