

"Bearers of Peace and Hope"

In the past few weeks we have witnessed protests against racial injustice across the country. In the wake of the horrible killings of George Floyd and many other African-Americans, we have realized how far we have yet to go to heal the racial divisions in our society. And this is not just a political issue. It is a spiritual issue.

As Christians we believe that all people are created in God's image, all of equal value. And the body of Christ, the church, is made up of people called from all nations and races and languages. All worldly divisions are overcome by Christ. As we read in Galatians, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Just as being one in Christ overcame divisions in society in the first century, so our unity in Christ overcomes divisions in our day. We could say there is neither black nor white, Hispanic nor Asian, gay nor straight, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In our reading from Romans 5 we hear St. Paul declare that because we are justified by Christ, we have peace with God. That peace means that nothing stands between us and God; Christ's self-giving death on the cross has forgiven all our sins and brought us into a new relationship with God. And that gift of peace with God is not only an individual benefit. It is a gift that transforms our lives and makes us into peacemakers. As Paul says in II Corinthians 5: **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;...all this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation....So we are ambassadors for Christ..."** (II Cor. 5:16-20).

Being ministers of reconciliation, being ambassadors for Christ, is not a matter of personal choice. It is part of our identity as Christians. We are called to be signs of peace and reconciliation and unity in our personal relationships, in our families, in our communities, in our nation, in our world. Right now we are being called to do whatever we can to support our black sisters and brothers, to hear their perspectives, to care for all who are hungry or sick or poor, to work for justice.

In addition to being recipients and agents for sharing the peace of Christ, we are also recipients and bearers of hope. In Romans 5, Paul declares that a benefit of being justified by Christ is hope. "And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through

the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). Christ's death and resurrection for us have made possible a whole new way of living and being.

We still struggle with our sins and our self-centeredness and our prejudices, but there is another stronger power at work in us---the power of God's love. And that all-inclusive love makes it possible for us to care for others, not only for ourselves, to overcome our old ways of under-valuing people not like us, and to allow the Spirit of Christ to change us and control us.

Sometimes we may be tempted to become cynical and think that things will never change. But we are people of hope. Christ is alive, and his Spirit is within us and among and at work in us and in the world.

On the journey with you,

Pastor Steve