



Christ Presbyterian Church, New Haven

## CPC Covid-19 Update

10 June 2020

Dear CPC Family and Friends,

We find ourselves at an extraordinary moment in history where perhaps more than any other time in American history (other than the civil rights era of the 60/70's) the issue of racism is everywhere around us. In our present heated context, all of us are asking the question—what can/should I be doing, and what should the church be doing? My purpose in this communication is to answer that question along with inviting you to do three things. But before I get there, let me start with some very important context.

About the ministry of the church, our sacred text from God speaks to her divine purpose:

*For the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature personhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:12b-16)*

One of the great challenges in times like these is that we can easily get “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,” albeit with a sincere desire to faithfully steward whatever opportunity the social context might represent. And to be sure, we must never forget that one of the explicit goals of the gospel that wants to reconcile humanity to God is the related goal to remove the curse of Babel (racism) such as to be “one” humanity in Christ across the walls of racial hostility. This is both evidenced at Pentecost and indoctrinated in Ephesians 2:15-16:

*that Christ might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

Paul wrote in a context of a racial divide infecting Christian unity that was arguably as much if not more toxic to the vision of the gospel in that day as it is even in our day. Racism, in all its manifestations, is a very serious sin in scripture. One could make the case that it is the most frequently addressed sin of the New Testament as related to the Jewish and Gentile divide (e.g. “*ethnos*”/race). And to Paul’s argument, it gets to the very heart of the gospel. (This is not to “rank” sins. It is only to say that as a sin, it was of particular importance to the gospel ministry as it arguably is today.)

And here again, the context is ripe for both good and evil wherein Christians, however well intended, can be easily tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine that would co-opt the present momentum in ways toxic to the gospel. So, what to do?

**First**, we should never forget that Christ *is* enough—that only in Christ is there the power sufficient to be reconciled to God and to one another starting with the forgiveness of sins. Only in Christ is there the power to deliver us from evil, all evil, including the curse of Babel and the evil of racism. All other earthly powers are at best able to restrain the evil, only the gospel can kill it! To put it bluntly, you want a solution to racism—the only complete solution is the gospel of Jesus Christ! We must therefore be very intentional about making the gospel of Jesus Christ our primary goal in whatever we say or do. Nothing ought to compel us or repel us from doing or saying anything save Christ! Along these lines, the church must be discerning as not to get co-opted by moments of great social upheaval and fervor in a manner that result in her being “of this world” as the Ephesians passage warns. And to be clear, the church can fail at this in one of two ways, both related to the church being politicized.

The church is as much politicized when she plays *to* politics as when she plays *against* politics. To say something because it is politically or socially “hot” is as much to be co-opted by political agenda as to not say something because it is politically “hot.” Again, to say or do something in a manner that plays into partisan “winners” and “losers” is to act “political” whichever partisan side happens to be most popular in ones own social context. Our aim is to see all people of all parties reconciled to God and one another in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ always transcended politics—you can’t find a whiff of partisanship in Christ’s ministry or in the ministries of the apostles, and there was great partisanship in Christ’s day, but it was simply boring compared to the wisdom and power of the gospel that they were working with to change the world.

So here first thing is to be intentional about making the gospel of Jesus Christ first. If and when the church speaks or acts, she must do so without any regard to the political context, but the perceived opportunity relative to the gospel of Jesus Christ and in a manner that doesn’t burn the bridge that can lead someone to Christ. Think about that! I can speak against abortion, racism, etc. in a way that seeks to condemn an abortionist or racist in a politically motivated context (the bridge is burned), or in a way that seeks to save an abortionist or racist in a spiritually related context (the bridge is standing)—and clearly we know the way of Christ on this matter:

*God did **not** send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17)*

*In the words of Paul, “Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1:15)*

**Second**, there are moments when for the church to vacate public discourse is in effect to deliver the world over to darkness in the absence of gospel witness. I believe we are faced with such a temptation now. That is, in an attempt not to be co-opted by competing agendas that are perhaps either contrary to or even beside the clear teachings of Christ in scripture, we opt out of participating in an event or discourse. But then our opportunity is lost for witness both in solidarity with what we believe is a Biblical conviction against racism, but also our witness to the power of the gospel alone to resolve the problem of racism. Such was the tension presented to many of us “lead pastors” of “Bridges of Hope,” and then again our church session this week, pertaining to a scheduled march this Sunday. At the end, both BOH and our church session has decided on the side of being a bold witness for the gospel and to participate in **this Sunday’s** march for **Prayer, Protest, and Peace**. The march will begin at noon at the **Varick Memorial AME ZION Church** and, following several rounds of speakers, will march to the New Haven Green for scheduled prayers.

It must be said that CPC or BOH is not responsible for anything whatever is said, both by the speakers or by those publically praying, as neither CPC or BOH was “at the table” in planning this event. With that said,

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***we invite all members of CPC, according to their own conscience and/or ability, to participate along side of other CPC/BOH brothers and sisters in the event. For the sake of our witness, if you own a BOH t-shirt, please wear it. Also, we would invite you to carry a sign with the words “Made in God’s Image, Restored in Christ.”***

Again, no shame or guilt if for whatever reason you feel it is not for you to do. Such events will pose a threat to social distancing—you should bring your mask. For those who are in health-related risk themselves or who would possibly bring risk upon others who are at higher risk, you should consider not coming! If you do come, the parking at Varick could be difficult and the crowd within the confines of a street walk may make social distancing difficult until you reach the green, such that you may want to meet at the church and walk to the green of New Haven to join up with the march at that time. You could probably leave the church around 12:15 or so and be on the green in plenty of time to join the march. Otherwise, some may want to join the march from its origins and would need to leave the church in enough time to get to Varick at Noon. Either way, look for the blue shirts and join together with BOH. We will also have supplies available at CPC to make signs around 11:45am.

**Third**, we have been thinking through ways to seize the moment in terms of having a more intentional discussion and dialogue on the issue of racial reconciliation. Toward that end, there is a course being offered (free) by the East Harlem Redeemer church in NYC entitled “**Learning to be Antiracist** that we have decided to take advantage of. From a course description, “this class is designed as an aide to help congregants move beyond a simple acknowledgment that racism is evil, to engage with what it means to become **actively antiracist**. While learning to be an antiracist is really a lifelong commitment, this class could be considered one tool on your belt.”

The class will consist of a webinar and various suggested readings. The Webinar begins **tomorrow (Thursday 6/11) at 8 PM** and will continue for the next three Thursday evenings at the same time. **You are invited to join other CPC’ers at the church for the next four Thursday nights, starting tomorrow.** Doors will be open at 7:45pm and a brief open conversation pertaining to each webinar event will be offered after each webinar event. We will limit the number of participants at church to 60 people and will practice the protocols as already published for our weekly worship service. Please RSVP here: <https://www.paperlesspost.com/go/vVqNpr3cv33booC50RR1>

**Finally**, let us be in serious prayer for the **peace and purity in our church** and a united gospel centered witness to our community. There are great temptations during times like this to not temper our words or thoughts such as to spark all sorts of divisive thoughts that work against the very unity of the body of Christ that our crusade against racism seeks to cure. Wouldn’t it be strange while seeking to knock down the walls of hostility caused by racism, that we erect walls of hostility caused by political partisanship and/or generational differences in how we are processing it all? With our transcendent convictions and the reality of Christ’s Holy Spirit in us all, we have a great opportunity to experience what so much of the world longs to experience—unity with diversity! We must seek to be humble, just(fair), and merciful at this time more so than ever in how we speak and act. Again in the words of the prophet—“Seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.”

I am most affectionately,

Preston Graham

*Senior Pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church*

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