

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Sermon

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On March 31, 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King was in Washington DC. He preached his last sermon at the National Cathedral. Four days later April 4, 1968 Dr. King would be gunned down at a Memphis hotel and riots would break out across the country. Here we are, again. His text that Sunday was taken from the book of Revelation, "Behold I make all things new, former things are passed away." His title, 'Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution'. Dr. King began that sermon with a story about Rip Van Winkle. What we usually remember is the fact that Rip slept 20 years but Dr. King saw something in that story that is almost always overlooked. When Rip Van Winkle went up that mountain he saw a picture of King George iii, when he came down the mountain 20 years later, it was a picture of our first president George Washington. And in the words of Dr. King, "He knew not who he was". The most striking thing about Rip Van Winkle is not the fact that he slept 20 years, it's the fact that he slept through a revolution. "While he was peacefully snoring up on that mountain," said Dr. King, "a revolution was taking place that would change the course of history and Rip knew nothing about it". "Many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change," said Dr. King, "yet they fail to develop the new attitudes, the new mental responses that the new situation demands. They end up sleeping through a revolution to that I say, awake. Oh, sleeper, rise up, let Christ shine on you."

It's been a week. It's been a couple of weeks. It's been a couple of months. It's been a year. I don't think any of us has ever lived through anything like this. None of us could have imagined on January 1, 2020 what the future would hold. We find ourselves fighting two viruses as a nation; the novel Coronavirus COVID-19 has infected millions of people, killed hundreds of thousands. We grieve the loss of life and the loss of livelihood that has affected millions more. Unfortunately, there is a virus that is not so novel.

On Memorial Day of all days, a white police officer put his knee on the neck of George Floyd for eight minutes and 46 seconds until George Floyd could not breathe. Racism has reared its ugly head. Once again, it reminds us that we live in a fallen world. It reminds us that you and I were born on a battlefield between good and evil, so much pain; so much anger so much confusion, so much frustration. This, my friends, is a teachable moment if we would learn the lesson. This is a reset moment if we would repent. God is waking us up. God is shaking us up. I said this three months ago, I'm going to say it again. This is a Hebrews 12:27 moment, "Once more, I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens." Why? So that what cannot be shaken will remain. God is shaking our false illusion of control. God is shaking, our false sense of security. God is shaking our false sense of identity. God is shaking our false narratives. God is shaking our false idols. Let me be blunt, racism seeing one race of people as being inferior or superior is a false identity. It is a false narrative. It is a false idol. All of us equally created in the image of God a little lower than the angel said the writer of Hebrews crowned with glory and honor all of us invaluable and irreplaceable.

Here's what I believe. If we are humble enough, oh, God help us. If we are humble enough to repent of racism, and bold enough to believe for reconciliation, God is going to shake generational sins, God is going to break generational curses. Would you believe with me today, that God is going to do it? Pastor Mark, are you watching the news? Every night because it fuels my intercession, Lora and I are kneeling. Every night, Lora and I are getting up climbing those stairs along with hundreds of you into an upper room, where we are praying that God's kingdom would come and God's will would be done.

I am watching the news, but I'm also reading my Bible. And my Bible tells me that we do not wage war as the world does. Our weapons are not carnal. They have divine power to demolish strongholds. What strongholds are you talking about? You know what I'm talking about? It's strongholds of pride. It's strongholds of racism. It's the strongholds that have held us back from our true destiny as people as a nation. The strongholds are not out there. They're in here and in here, in our minds and in our hearts.

If you live in the DMV, can I recommend a book? 'Chocolate City' It's a history of race and politics in the nation's capital. Why? Because if you're going to demolish strongholds, you need to know what they are and occasionally you need to know where they are. Did you know that the National Archives are built over a city block that was one Center Market where slaves were bought and sold? Long after the Emancipation Proclamation, still 122 pages of black codes, codes that imposed a curfew on people of color, disallowed black businesses. Black children weren't allowed to swim in the Anacostia River, weren't allowed to sit on the benches at Center Market weren't allowed to fly kites. Those codes were eventually abolished, but it's a lot easier to change laws than it is to change our hearts.

We need to know that on June 11, this coming Thursday, June 11, 1787, James Wilson and Charles Pinckney proposed the Three-Fifths Compromise. Slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person. God, forgive us, God help us God, heal us. Cosmetic surgery isn't going to cut it. Behavior modification isn't going to get us where... Virtue signaling is going to set us back. We need something more than that.

I have a friend Bishop Walter Harvey, who says you have to see different before you can do different. We don't see the world as it is we see the world as we are. All of us have filters and that's the challenge with a message like this, thousands of you watching this and so I am trusting the Holy Spirit to take the words that come out of my heart and allow you to hear my heart. I'm praying that you would have ears to hear and a heart to receive. To my black brothers and sisters I'm white. I am who I am. I don't know what I don't know, if you knew how unqualified I felt right now. But I remember someone saying once that God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called. I know that this is a moment for those of us who are white to stand up, to step up and to use our voices to proclaim truth. And I want you to hear me I want to be an Aaron and a Hur to heavy hands I want to bear the burden. I want to lend my hands and lend my heart.

We had planned on kicking off a series this weekend called 'Unshaken'. It'll have to wait. The Book of Daniel will still be there next week. I want us as a church family and I know some of you are joining us

for the very first time. Well, welcome and we have a seat for you right at this big table called National Community Church. And I want us to have what I think is a hard conversation but if not us who? And if not now, when? Listen, you may not agree with everything I'm about to say. Can I let you in on a little secret? Sometimes I don't always agree with myself, okay? As soon as I am omniscient, I will let you know, but I would not hold your breath. I reserve the right to get smarter. And I want you to know Lora and I are on a journey, like every one of us.

Now, I have taken a few shots over the past couple of weeks, and it's actually a little bit of crossfire coming from a couple of different angles for things I've said or haven't said. And part of me hesitates, even saying it because I am not looking for a sympathy vote. The day that I am pinned to the ground with a knee on my neck you can feel sorry for me. What makes me sad is I see so many people retreating to their echo chamber. I hope our faith is not that fragile. This is not a moment to shut down. This is a moment to lay down our pride and say God purify my heart, purify my motives, purify my anger, purify my grief, purify it all and help me see the way that you see. If we would humble ourselves if we would put pride on the altar of love, His kingdom would come with so much glory and so much power and so much grace and so much goodness. Can we believe together for that? Here's the challenge that we face. If you're white, you can watch what happened to George Floyd and experienced righteous indignation but you can turn the channel. I have friends who can't turn the channel. They can't flip a switch. It is re traumatizing every time it happens.

Here's what I know for sure God is pruning us. God is purging us. God is purifying us and it's painful, but it's necessary. Well, Pastor Mark, you talked about this three weeks ago. You talked about it last week. I mean, can't we talk about something else? Not right now? No, we can't. Well, we already repented. Listen, we need to press in right here and we need to be in this moment and say spirit of it. If we don't learn the lesson, we're going to be right back here in 52 years. Can we believe for our children and our children's children, that God would break this curse and set us free? Listen, there are so many things that we care so deeply about at National Community Church. Listen, I echo what Deb Porter, one of our leaders at our Capitol Hill campus said a couple of weeks ago. She said, "You don't go to a breast cancer march and say colon cancer matters too." This is a moment where we lean in.

Now I don't pretend to have all the answers. I don't even know all the questions. I don't pretend to have all the solutions. I don't even know some of the problems. But here's what I want to do. I want to cast a vision for reconciliation. I want to lay a theological foundation. And I want to challenge each and every one of us not to sleep through this revolution, but to step up and step in.

In the sermon I cited at the outset, Dr. King said something you've heard quoted 100 times. "We must face the sad fact that 11 o'clock on Sunday morning when we stand to sing, we stand in the most segregated hour of America." It wasn't meant to be that way. Ephesians four, "There is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there is one God and Father of all who is overall in all

and through all." And that makes us black and white, Asian and Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander. That makes us brothers and sisters.

Last weekend, we celebrated Pentecost with a night of prayer and worship. By the way, Sunday night 15 hands, saying I want to follow Christ. Welcome to the family. God pours out His Spirit timing impeccable. Why? Because it's one of three pilgrimage feasts. On the day of Pentecost people from all over the ancient world would make their way to Jerusalem at least 15 ethnicities, 15 language and what does the Holy Spirit Google translate? Translates the good news of the gospel into the native tongue of everybody listening. Listen, we need the Holy Spirit to Google translate once again, and I'm talking about all of us that speak English. We're not hearing each other. I think instead of translating, we talk louder and louder and louder. Listen, you can't. You can't understand if you don't stand under, if you don't humble yourself long enough to listen, don't talk over right now. Stand under and see if God would give you a revelation.

I know, it's easier to go to a church where everyone looks like you, thinks like you, like you. We are not that church, somewhere around 75 ethnicities at NCC. You know what that means? That means we need the Holy Spirit to Google translate. I think it can be harder to love people who aren't like you but that's what the gospel is all about. Love your neighbor as yourself. That's not just geography. It's not just the person who's next to you. You can't love me if you don't understand me, my history, my personality, my ethnicity. Love is a package deal. Multicultural is our history it goes all the way back to the day of Pentecost and multicultural is our destiny. Without a vision the people perish.

We find ourselves at a moment in history where we need leaders to lead. How? By casting a vision of what can be and what should be. Let me cast a vision and this vision is really a revelation that John had on the Isle of Patmos. Revelation chapter seven, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude, that no one could count, from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Ethnologists estimate 650 ethnic groups in the world, linguists estimate 6500 languages in the world, all of them standing around the throne, casting their crowns and lifting their voices. Salvation belongs to the Lord our God and to him who sits on the throne glory and honor and power and might belongs to you. What a moment! That is our destiny, every ethnicity worshipping God in its own way, every language worshipping God in its own words.

That is a revelation of what reconciliation looks like. There's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. Why? Because we are one in Christ. One what? One body. And that's where I want to do a little ecclesiology. I want to remind us of whom we are and why we are as the body of Christ. Listen to me. Racial unity is our apologetic to a world that is broken and divided to a world that is polarized and racialized and politicized. The culture isn't going to solve this for us. The government isn't going to solve this for us. This is our responsibility as the body of Christ. Why? Because he has called you and called me to be a minister of reconciliation.

Please hear me right now. It starts with right relationship with God. You can be in right relationship with God. Listen, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus."* Do you want right relationship with God today? It starts with repentance, and that vertical repentance, listen, when we're in right relationship with God turns into horizontal reconciliation. It's the cross of Jesus Christ.

In I Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul likens the church, to the body of Christ. It says, *"The human body, it has many parts but the many parts make up the whole body."* Now listen, we tend to think of function eyes that see and ears that hear, we think about giftedness. That isn't where Paul goes; he takes a hard right turn. He says, some of us are Jews, and some of us are Gentiles, some of us are slaves, some of us are free. Paul goes right to ethnicity and socioeconomic status and says we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit. We all share the same spirit. Please hear what I'm about to say if you're taking notes, jot this down. It's simple, but it's important. Spirituality is shaped by ethnicity. Not just a good thing, a God thing.

I'll never forget Lora and I 20 years ago made our first trip to Ethiopia. It ranks as one of the most amazing worship experiences of my life because I don't know pretty sheltered. And we walked into this church and there are thousands of people. And I've never seen joy like this in my life. And listen, I think that the socioeconomic status of most of the people there would make our poverty look like luxury. I've never seen joy like it and by the way, I've never seen anybody worship with more physicality. Now listen, I kind of grew up my only workout growing up as a kid in a more traditional church was holding the hymnal kind of, you know, doing curls with that hymnal, but then I started going to a charismatic Pentecostal church and eventually I kind of got up to here and got up to here and then sometimes you get really excited kind of give it one of these. And, and so listen, I move a little bit. Whew? I don't skip the gym. I got a workout while I worship.

Now, question... Is one of those ways of worshipping right? And wrong? Is one of them better? Or worse? Or is it possible that both of them are an expression of praise through a personality through an ethnicity in a way that puts a smile on the Heavenly Father's face? God is bigger than the denomination you grew up in. God is bigger than your ethnic expression of worship. God is bigger than the language you speak. God is bigger than the part you play in the body of Christ. Maturity does not equal conformity that's called legalism. Maturity results in diversity. You have the freedom to be you; I have the freedom to be me. But here's the key, you plus me equals we, we, and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and it's called the body of Christ.

We think function and giftedness God sees it as this beautiful family of ethnicities. What does that have to do with racism? Racism is more than a false narrative, more than a false idol. It's false theology. Listen, to not love as a part of my body, my body, the body that we're part of someone who is of a different ethnicity is like hating yourself. It's like hurting yourself. It makes no sense at all not biblically

or theologically. Multicultural is our history, is our destiny, is our theology. The question is, is it our mission? Or are we going to settle for something less than what God originally intended? Are we going to take the easy way out? And I go back to Dr. King, "Cowardice asks the question, is it expedient? Expedience asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question is it popular? Conscience ask the question, is it right?" And you and I both know, it's right. There comes a time when one must take the position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must do it because his conscience tells him it is right.

And that brings me back to the body. How strange it would be if the body only had one part. Yet that's how a lot of churches look. Birds of a feather flock together. I can't say to the hand I don't need you head can't say to the feet I don't need you. To my black brothers and sisters, I need you. To my Asian brothers and sisters, I need you. To my Latino brothers and sisters I need you. We need each other. Some parts of the body that seem weakest are most necessary. The parts that we think are less honorable and I think Paul's referring to some private parts right here says we treat with special honor. And here it is, we carefully protect those parts.

Now, I want to talk about that for just a minute. I think this is a moment for us to carefully protect the parts of our body that are hurting. Listen when I tore the anterior cruciate ligament in my knee, when my intestines ruptured it's not like I could just go about my business and the rest of my body could ignore it. No, my body had to rally around the part that was hurting. And I think that this is that moment for the body of Christ. And so, I want to say to those of you who are hurting, we are with you. We are for you. Now want to be careful, we aren't you. Let's not play that card. Let's not pretend that we think we know.

Let me just go off on a tangent right now. The book Job, as long as Job's friends were listening, they did fine. Then they started talking. What did they do? They started offering advice based on their experience, but they aren't the one who experienced the trauma. We have lots of opinions about other people's pain. Don't interpret their pain through your past. I think that's called prejudice.

This week Lora and I listened to a podcast, friend of ours, Christine Caine interviewed Dr. Anita Phillips, a mental health advocate counselor. It made us think made us cry. And she talked about her approach to counseling. Now, this will be familiar to some of you who are in that field. It's trauma informed counseling. Listen, you have to approach people understanding the pain that they've experienced. If someone has been bitten by a dog and there is a fear of dogs. Listen, I don't care how friendly your dog is you've got to approach that person understanding the trauma. That's what love is. I think we have got to take a trauma informed, approach and understand the hurt and understand the history that we have. That is called being the body of Christ.

I'm out of time. What do we do now? What do we do now? Well, I think the things I'm talking about don't happen overnight. Now I know this for sure we better stay grounded in God's word. We better keep climbing the stairs to that upper room and praying. We better keep putting on the garment of praise for

the spirit of heaviness. But I want to share some of the strategies some of the ways that we're trying to mobilize as a church NCC.re/reconcile. If you're a parent, we're going to do a parent share event on faith and race. So many of you are having difficult conversations we want to have you have those conversations and believe that they're going to be redemptive. We're going to be launching 'Be the Bridge' small groups. Our staff is going to go through that study. We're going to continue to gather in the upper room, listen, we'll keep mentoring, we'll keep having reconciliation lunches, but we got to double down right now.

Dr. King said the hour is come for everybody. I'm gonna ask it again, if not us, who? If not now, when? So much more I want to say, so much more that needs to be said. I'm going to give Dr. King the last word.

"There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society."

We are here for such a time as this for such a place this to stand in the gap to be a house of prayer, a house of healing, a house of reconciliation for all people. It's time to turn up the love and turn down the hate. Turn up the righteousness and turn down the rhetoric. Turn down the fear, turn up the faith, turn down the pride and turn up the humility, turn down the violence and turn up the gentleness, our posture, so critical right now. We're going to operate in a spirit of humility. We're going to operate in a spirit of gentleness

II Corinthians chapter 10 verse one, that's how we make our appeal to the world. That is the beginning of demolishing the stronghold. Don't sleep through this revolution. Lead it, be salt and light, be light and love, be the hands and feet of Jesus, be the peacemaker, be the minister of reconciliation, be the hands and feet of Christ to a hurting world.

And finally, family I want you to know, your love by God and you are loved by us. And the invitation that Jesus extended thousands of years ago it's an open invitation to for you, you can feel it. You hear him calling your name right now. Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden. Jesus takes a trauma informed approach to us and says, "Listen, my yoke is easy, my burden is light". Would you give your pain? Would you give your hurt? Would you give your sin? Would you give your past and your present and your future? Would you give your life right now to the Lord Jesus Christ? Would you surrender your life to His Lordship? Would you be reconciled to God in this moment through Jesus Christ? If that's you, if you're at our online campus, would you just raise that hand right now? Listen, we want to help you take that next step in your journey. Our prayer team is ready and waiting to pray with you and pray for you. And our worship team is going to come and lead us. Our worship team is going to come and lead us.