

**“Free at Last”
April 7-8th, 2018**

- Honor the Memory of Dr. MLK Jr.

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was all about freedom. He wanted everyone to stand together...united...equal and free.
 - About 3/4th's through his “I Have a Dream Speech” he said:
 - *“I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be plain and the crooked places will be made straight, “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”*
 - He was quoting [Isaiah 40](#) and his heart was that all of us would see the glory of God by being humbled and aware of each other!

- We have come a long way as a nation. There have been many strides made in the last 50 years.
 - But there is still work to be done...in our nation, in our church, and in each one of us as children of God.

- So, to honor Dr. King’s legacy of a quest for freedom, I want to talk about Diversity...
 - There’s a number of different kinds of diversity... Socioeconomic, generational, gender.
 - But this weekend I want to talk about Racial Diversity.
 - In an attempt to Open Up our Thoughts & Minds!!!

- “I need your grace...” – I have the Lord’s grace...
 - This is a big complicated subject.
 - People are afraid to talk about it bc they will say something wrong.
 - I’m not afraid to talk about it, but I’m still growing & learning a lot about this subject myself, so, if I don’t say something quite right or if I even say something wrong, I’m asking you to give me grace!

- This is a hot topic & There's no way to talk about all the issues in one message & there's no way to talk about all the scriptures in one message.
 - We could do an entire series on this topic...
- Jesus talked about this subject...
 - Jesus came for every one of us! He died for everyone!
- Jesus was Jewish, He came to the Jewish people, but he crossed racial barriers often.
 - Samaritan woman, Canaanite woman, Roman Centurion man.
- **MONEY CHANGERS STORY –**
 - It's not a money story, it's a racial diversity story.
 - God gave specific instructions that a part of the temple should be reserved for those who were not a part of the Jewish religion.
 - God wanted there to be a place for everybody.
 - The religious leaders didn't like that, so they had the money changers placed in that specific spot!!!
 - Money changers served an important purpose: You would buy sacrificial animals to offer to the Lord.
 - They were in the wrong place b/c they were blocking anyone who was a gentile (non-Jews).
 - It was racism!!!
 - It's about the most passionate we see Jesus in his entire 3 years!!!
 - He was angry, b/c his house had been built to be a house of prayer for all the nations!!!
 - Not just the Jews!
 - B/c to God we are ALL INSIDERS!!!

Mark 11:17 "And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

- "Nations" – means "Ethnos" or Ethnic Groups!!!

* The biggest issue: is a **Lack of Understanding. On all sides!**

- Most of us grow up around a singular race, so we don't understand the others!!!

- MY STORY – I grew up in a primarily white world, so there were things I just didn't understand!

- I have had to educate myself!!!

- I have had to ask my black friends & Hispanic friends to tell me their stories!!!

- Over the last 15 years, I've had to work to educate my head with my heart & the heart of Jesus!!!

- WRITING KTE - MEMPHIS MEETINGS

- 2 ½ HOURS IN MY OFFICE

- I didn't understand until I walked around the other side & listened to their stories!!!

* I don't know what it's like to be **followed in a store** because of how I look... But my friends have.

* I've never had to have the **discussion with my teenage boys** about what to do when a police officer approaches you. But my friends have.

* I've never been in a room and thought, **I wonder if I'll be accepted.** But my friends do all of the time.

- When we sit down with someone we love, respect & know, It's no longer history, an argument, a choice of words or a protest, it's personal.

- All of us need to be willing to walk around to the other side and hear some things that may make us uncomfortable but be willing to hear them so that we can grow and we can learn!!!

- A MAN IS LAYING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD ILL. 3 options:

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- 1) Walk around him.
- 2) Yell at him and tell him to get up.
- 3) Ask him why he's laying there!

- It's easy to look on and think, *"You're free, just get up and move on."*

- That doesn't help them get free because we haven't slowed down to see where they are coming from!

- As Christians, we have a responsibility to not just walk around people who are hurting for whatever reason... but to bring freedom to others...

- To LOVE & LOVE LOOKS LIKE LISTENING!!!

- If we have a heart to understand, then we will begin to understand.

- I doubt there are many of us who would admit or even be open to thinking that we struggle with racism, but I want to open our eyes to

3 ways that Racism can manifest in our lives:

1. Hate. We hate someone for the color of their skin.

- This is completely against the Bible & the teachings of Jesus.

1 John 4:20 "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen."

2. Superiority. We believe one race is better than another.

- That is completely against the teaching scripture.

- We were all created in the image of God & no one person is better than another person.

Acts 17:26 “From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.”

- If you put someone else down for any reason, you are putting down someone who was created by God!

3. Prejudices. We have prejudiced opinions toward another race...

- That cause us to stereotype, form opinions, make decisions.

- To pre-judge.

- Don't judge a book by it's cover.

- I don't want us to feel condemnation right now. Yes, feel conviction, but not condemnation.

- This kind of thinking does not come from God, but it came from somewhere! Maybe it was our...

- **Family of Origin.**

- **GREW UP IN A HOME – PUTTING OTHERS DOWN, RACIAL SLURS, JUDGMENTS**

- **Culture.**

- **Our culture says, “You need to be a part of the In Crowd!”**

- **You have to put others down to be cool...**

- **Bad Experiences.**

- **Negative experiences with someone from another culture.**

- **They are valid, but we can't live based on them, we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**

- **We have to let the Word renew our mind!**

? How can I start to deal with it in my life?

- It's a process and it's a progress.

1. Be Honest.

A. With yourself.

- Don't try and justify & get defensive.
- Don't try and rationalize and excuse.

B. Be honest with the Lord. Pray and ask him to change you!

- You can be free from this wrong thinking.
- The dirt of discrimination can't be washed away by natural means, it's supernatural.

C. It can only be washed away by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives & in our minds.

- You can be a part of bringing freedom and a heart for diversity to others, but it starts with honesty!

2. Be Intentional.

A. Let's cross over racial barriers & build relationships w/ people who are not like us.

- Who come from a different background than we do.

B. This is what Jesus did.

C. We are people without excuse... b/c we are a part of a church that is diverse.

- Walk around to the other side.

3. Be Uncomfortable.

A. If this makes us uncomfortable, that's good!

- But we are not bound up or stopped by our discomfort!!!

B. 1ST TIME DRIVING A CAR ILL.

- We didn't let our discomfort stop us.

C. I have been uncomfortable in these settings but I'm learning and submitting and listening & I'm better for it!

D. SEE COLOR!!! Hear their stories. Recognize & understand that there are multiple sides to the Brochure!!!

- Be okay w/ being uncomfortable if you don't understand something or if you may have believed something that is actually wrong.

4. Be Careful.

A. With our heart.

- Proverbs 4:23

B. We have to watch what we listen to, laugh at, what we judge, how we joke, & in our thought life.

Revelation 7:9 “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

- Jesus prayed “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...”

- He wanted God's will in heaven to be done here on earth!

- That's a diversity prayer!!!

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

- The world will know that we are His disciples by our LOVE!!!

- The greatest tool we have is LOVE!!!

***** I don't want this moment to go by without acknowledging that there may be some here today who have been affected deeply by this in your past or your present.**

- You haven't been shown this love and for that, I'm sorry.**
- I want to challenge you to forgive those who have hurt you.**

- In Dr. King's "I have a Dream" speech he knew forgiving would be hard because this reality hurts. So, he said to the thousands of people on the steps that day...

- *"Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred."***
- So, in honoring him today...lets choose to forgive and not hold onto hate or bitterness ourselves.**
- It was wrong. But God wants you to be free from the hurt inside as well!**

Church - It's up to every one of us personally to begin to monitor our hearts & be the change we want to see in our nation and our world.

- What Jesus began, and what Dr. King represented so well, we now have an opportunity to continue, which is LOVE and FREEDOM!!!**

Salvation/Challenge – maybe you've come in today and you don't know this kind of love...or you feel challenged today to love at a deeper level than ever before!

Let's pray together...