



As many of you know, the Presbytery of Whitewater Valley has been immersing itself in “The Belhar Confession” this year...taking time to explore its key themes of unity, reconciliation and justice. The shared experience of reading, studying, and understanding one of our denomination’s confessional statements has challenged us to dig into the places where our American society has failed to deal with the sin of racism.

Let me be clear: Racism is a sin. It is a sin that is pervasive in its social acceptability as well as in society’s inability to conquer its pervasiveness. It is a sin that diminishes the Kingdom of God on earth. It is a sin that is offensive to a God who created all human life in the image of the Divine.

Many of us have been horrified in recent days by the events in Charlottesville, Virginia. And we should be horrified. We should be horrified that the sin of racism has once again been paraded as “free speech” and “the right to assemble.” We should be horrified that racist bullies have once again put principles over people. We should be horrified that the sin of racism has once again found expression in violence. We should be horrified that the sin of racism has once again cost human life. But perhaps more than anything we should be horrified that the sin of racism has not moved Christ’s Church to address this sin as sin.

“The Belhar Confession” (point 3) states in part:

We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

...that God’s lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;

...that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

...that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.”

The events in Charlottesville are a painful reminder that we live in a land which “professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity.” God is calling the Church to “venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation” and to lead the way in fighting back against the sin of racism. May we accept that call. And may we be guided by these words from Frederick Douglass, written in 1852: “The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced.”

The hour has come and we must not further delay...

With the sure and certain hope of the One who has the power to conquer all things, even death!

Alan Thames, Executive Presbyter