

*“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love.” —Nelson Mandela*

Dear Brothers & Sisters:

In my house, the word “hate” is a bad word. It only took me telling my daughter, Summer, one time: “Hate can be used as a way of being mean to another person. We should never hate anyone.” Never again have we been allowed to use the word “hate” in our home without receiving a strong admonishment from our five year old. Her favorite book is The Best Nest by P.D. Eastman. The main characters are Mr. and Mrs. Bird who are in search of the best nest. In reference to their current home, Mrs. Bird exclaims to Mr. Bird, “This is NOT the best nest! I hate it!” Whenever my husband and I would read this book to Summer when she was younger, we would change “hate” to something kinder and gentler so we wouldn’t get in trouble. Now our daughter reads the book for herself and continues to rid the story of hate.

Of course, there are times when using the word “hate” is appropriate. The Bible speaks of things that GOD hates: “haughtiness, lying, killing the innocent, plotting evil, racing to do wrong, bearing false witness, and sowing discord” to name a few (See Proverbs 6:16-19). But God does not hate people. In fact, we see Jesus go out of his way to love on those whom the powerful have been hateful toward. “What is the greatest commandment?” Jesus is asked. His reply? Love God but also love your neighbor as you love yourself (See Matthew 22:35-40). Jesus didn’t just teach about love. He embodied it all the way to the cross.

Following the death of George Floyd while in police custody, and so many others before him, I don’t have to tell you our Black brothers and sisters are crying out for justice, for an end to the hate, for the end of systemic racism. It is not enough for us to post supportively on social media or to march for a time and then go back to “business as usual.” It is not even enough to treat one another equally, to not hate. Our faith demands more of us. Our faith calls us to a higher standard—love one another as we love ourselves. Here are some ways to do just that:

1. Pray.
2. Read what the Bible has to say about love, how God demonstrates love to us.
3. Learn as much as you can about the Black experience in America. Look for upcoming notifications regarding a church-wide Netflix Watch Party of the movie “Just Mercy” based on the book by the same name authored by Bryan Stevenson which illustrates the fight against systemic racism.
4. Engage people of color, community leaders and partners in dialogue. Ask good questions and do more listening than talking.
5. Follow groups like Black Lives Matter 757, NAACP, and our local chapter, NNAACP, on their websites and social media to find ways to get involved.
6. Call out racism when you see it and hear it, but also demonstrate compassion toward, and support for members of the Black community.
7. Talk to children and youth about racism and teach them to love and be kind to all of God’s children, not just those that look and talk and believe like them. Teach them to see the value of diversity. Encourage them to point out the differences they appreciate in others.
8. In front of our church, you will find a “Black Lives Matter” banner. You are welcome to write messages voicing your love and support on this banner in the coming days.

Let us rid our story of hate.

Peace,

Rev. Melody P. Tanner