



A COVENANT ORDER OF EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIANS

The Church and Racial Reconciliation

Dear ECO,

I am heartbroken. While we continue to navigate this relatively new pandemic of COVID-19, we experience yet again the spark of an all too familiar epidemic in our country. Racism has now resulted in the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Especially this past week as I watched images and listened to audio clips, I have been simultaneously horrified, disgusted, discouraged, sad, and angry. I weep and mourn with the families of these victims and with those for whom these events have touched into generations of explicit and implicit racism.

My children are at the age where we are able to have different levels of conversations, not only about these specific events, but also the different experiences people have in our country. I shared with them what Keon Abner, Vice President of ECO's Synod Executive Council, wrote after the death of Ahmaud Arbery. It was very helpful and enlightening to us as a family. Keon said,

"Ahmaud and I were the exact same age. When I see the video and watch his lifeless body hit the ground...my heart breaks! Especially as I notice the killers standing there without any human emotion. To see someone die at your hands and you don't even flinch? This is real to me because I am always constantly in predominantly white circles and communities and the simple fact that I know some people see me and look at me the way they looked at Ahmaud breaks my heart! I do not speak as if I don't have hope but I am lamenting the reality that is to be young, male and black in our country." - Keon Abner I am so grateful for Keon's words, depth, and insight.

- KEON ABNER

Whenever I speak about the fallenness of our world, I often point out three major consequences. The first, of course, being our broken relationship with God the Father. The second being our broken relationship with our physical world (which we are certainly experiencing through COVID-19). The third is the broken relationship with one another - each equally made in God's image.

In the evangelical world, we are often very good at talking about bringing the gospel into our broken relationship with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can even do a pretty good job aiding in the physical brokenness of the world by offering food, water, shelter, and medicine.

What I am also aware of is that when it comes to engaging with the subject of racism, the evangelical church isn't ordinarily engaging very well. Or worse yet, we aren't engaging, or even having conversations, at all. Simply put, racism is wrong. It is inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the church must work against it. I love what ECO's Essential Tenets say regarding the sixth commandment, "Do not murder". We are called to: "eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death."

I humbly admit I am woefully unprepared and inadequate in this conversation. As I talk to other pastors, they also desperately want to engage in conversation and action, yet feel ill prepared to do so. Therefore, I have reached out to a new friend, David Bailey, who is the Executive Director of Arrabon (arrabon.com). Arrabon's mission is "to equip and empower for reconciliation." David has a remarkable ability to help churches move in gracious postures of listening, dialogue, and actions that bring reconciliation. I am excited that he is going to do a webinar for us (we are currently finalizing the date and time and will communicate that information to you as soon as possible). I am also working with David to find ways to bring his resources into our churches. I know that no one webinar or resource can fully equip our leaders to engage in such a challenging and complex topic. It is only a starting point.

My hope and prayer is that we can continue to wrestle together in our covenant community to take one step at a time toward racial reconciliation and prayerfully eradicating racism in our communities. I ask that our ECO family would be patient and gracious to one another and to those in our circles, as we imperfectly display the perfect gospel. I also ask that as ECO congregations, we would boldly reflect, in particular, one of the six measures of a flourishing church - to be one that normalizes risk taking. Engaging in conversation and action related to racial reconciliation is extremely risky. But it is an essential part of following Jesus. I look forward to the day when every tribe, tongue and nation are sitting at the banquet table of the Lord.

Until then, I pray that we, as gospel believing churches, would be able to partner with God and one another to bring glimpses of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Come Lord Jesus. Come quickly, Lord.



Dana
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