

Introduction: Pg. ____

It has been a tough and tragic week. On Tuesday, an African-American man by the name of Alton Sterling was shot and killed by police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana while pinned down in a seemingly defenseless position. The very next day, another African-American man, Philando Castile, was shot by an officer outside of Minneapolis, MN during a traffic stop, apparently reaching for his ID, not for the weapon he was carrying. Then came Dallas. During a peaceful protest Thursday night, a sniper targeting Caucasian police officers killed five and wounded seven others.

The national response has been one of sorrow, outrage, and confusion. Whether you have been disturbed or driven to the brink of despair, we can all support the cries for justice and peace ringing out once again.

When trying to process these events, I found myself, like many of you, turning to news stories, cultural commentators, and social media. But one of the most helpful pieces I came across was not written within the last 5 days, but 51 years ago by a man named Martin Luther King Jr. After leading the peaceful march from Selma to Montgomery, the eloquent spokesmen of the civil rights movement delivered his famous speech, "How Long? Not Long!" on the steps of state capitol:

"I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" Somebody's asking, "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding, and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Somebody's asking, "When will wounded justice, lying prostrate on the streets of Selma and Birmingham and communities all over the South, be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men?" Somebody's asking, "When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, plucked from weary souls with chains of fear and the manacles of death? How long will justice be crucified, and truth bear it?"

I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because "truth crushed to earth will rise again."

How long? Not long, because "no lie can live forever."

How long? Not long, because "you shall reap what you sow."

How long? Not long: Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne, Yet that scaffold sways the future, And, behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, Keeping watch above his own.

How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

How long? Not long, because: Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;"

Dr. King spoke these words, not only as an advocate for his oppressed brothers and sisters, but his spoke them as a follower of Jesus Christ.

We have come to the climax of the gospel of John, the crucifixion. As we begin looking at the crushing death of Jesus of Nazareth, I believe the truths of this story speak a timely word into the events

Read *John 18:1-27*. This morning I want us to think about what it looks like to...

"Love Past the Pain" **John 18:1-27**

In this story, we are going to see Jesus continue his movement toward death. The cross is now, hours away. The pain he experienced in these hours, we can say from a cosmic and theological level was unparalleled, never experienced in the same way by any other in human history. That is why the love

of Christ, that pressed on through the pain is one that we should follow in these dark days. This morning I want to invite you to...

The Point: Follow the paradigm of Jesus for loving past the pain.

We are going to move forward in two parts, by first reflecting on the pain of Jesus in this story, and then considering how he pushed through it and what that has to say to us. As we think about the events of the past week, and as we zoom out to consider life in our broken world, we can...

I. Take heart because Jesus understands our greatest pain.

We see his pain highlighted in three experiences. The first part of our story tells us of his betrayal from one of his closest followers.

- The arrest scene was led by a man named Judas Iscariot. John has repeatedly described Judas as the betrayer earlier in the book to identify him and perhaps, to help us process the shock.
- Verse 2 tells us that Judas knew the place Jesus would be because they had retreated there many times before. The place where Judas & Jesus had shared meals together, laughed together, cried together, taught and been taught now becomes the scene of intense betrayal. This is not saying a couple of things behind a person's back. This is giving a man up to his death.
- To help us grasp the significance of this moment, it is helpful to note that this act of betrayal seemed to become the dominant note in the minds of Jesus earliest followers. When Paul, one of the key leaders in the early church, described how those who follow Jesus were to partake of the "Lord's Supper" (to reflect on his death), he described the night when Jesus observed it first with his disciples: not as "the night when Jesus was arrested" or "falsely accused and condemned to die a criminal's death," BUT as the **"night when he was betrayed."** (1 Corinthians 11:23)

Jesus was also unjustly tried by his enemies. Let's be clear: Jesus is being tried as a criminal.

- His arrest was without warrant, and these "hearings" IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, were not according to Jewish law. As we will see in fuller detail next week, John goes to great length to expose the unjust nature of these "proceedings."
- A case against a criminal was to be established by witnesses. The fact that they interrogate Jesus but do not have any corroborating testimony "strongly suggests Jesus hearing before Annas was unofficial." (Kostenberger, 517)
- He was struck in the face, another action cutting against Jewish law. This insult was only the beginning of Christ's injuries. In another account of this scene, another follower of Jesus named Matthew says: "They spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him." (Mt. 26:67)
- The Son of God spat upon. Struck. Slapped. Mocked.
- But tragically, it was not only Jesus' enemies that brought him pain, it was even his own

Jesus was also denied from a closest friend.

- Peter was one of Jesus most devoted followers. In fact, earlier in this gospel, when Jesus predicts Peter will deny him. Peter says: "Deny you?! I will die for you."
- But three times, to a servant girl watching the door to the courtyard, to a group of people gathered around a fire, and then to a relative of Malchus, whose ear Peter just tried to take off... in each in every case when they asked if he was with Jesus, Peter said: "I AM NOT."
- Can you imagine? Your closest follower and perhaps greatest friend says they are not even connected to you. Luke tells us that Jesus heard these crushing words fall from the lips of Peter. **"And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remember the saying of the Lord,**

how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly." (Luke 22:61-62)

- APP: It's easy to read this story and assume we would not be like Peter but then, we'd already find ourselves being a lot like Peter (proud and presumptuous)! When it is difficult to represent Christ among friends or in your workplace, let's remember the loyal love of Jesus. When we fail like Peter, and we deny Jesus, however explicitly or implicitly, let's remember the same forgiveness he extended to Peter, he extends to us.

Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was such not only because he saw the brokenness of our world, but also because he experienced, firsthand, in very raw ways, the brokenness of our world.

- Isn't it comforting and hope-producing that we can pray to the God who truly understands?

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16)

II. Push past the pain by loving like Jesus.

Here is the intense irony of this story: While Jesus was being betrayed, denied and rejected by people, he was going to the cross to mend every fractured relationship.

There was absolutely nothing that could stop Christ from making it to the cross.

- Jesus displays total control. He does not run from the situation though he knew "all that would happen to him," meaning, he knew he was going to die.... But
 - When Judas and the officers come for his arrest, he steps up, not back: "Who are you looking for?" Jesus of Nazareth.
 - And Jesus says: *ego eimi* - "I AM." [Expound - The last of the I Am's?? (9 in all. 7 classic statements, plus John 8:58, and now hours before his death, I am.)]
 - When Peter tried to intervene and put up a fight to free Jesus, Jesus said, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"
- In all of this, we see there was absolutely nothing that could stop Christ from making it to the cross. He went there to restore our relationship with God *but he also* went there to restore our relationship to one another.

Ephesians 2:14-16 says: **"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." (Ephesians 2:14-16)**

Whenever our relationships are rocky, fractured, or broken, we come back to the cross and find hope, because it is the cross what Jesus did there (in dying for his enemies, betrayers, and deniers) and what he accomplished there (reconciling us back to God and one another).

That is why the cross compels our pursuit of justice for people and peace with people, no matter the cost. There is a lot of discussion that will happen and needs to happen coming out of this week, but let me offer a few encouragements for how we can respond in light of who Christ is and what he has done.

Affirm the dignity of every human soul.

- Jesus died for all people. Red and yellow, black and white.
- Do #Blacklivesmatter? YES! I'll hashtag that. AND... Don't be so quick to hashtag #alllivesmatter, though that is certainly true. Even if it comes from a pure heart, it can come across as insensitive.
- If our hearts do not ache when we see another human being's life taken from them, and the aftermath for the families they leave behind, if our hearts do not break, what does that say about our hearts? I'm asking myself this question.
- These are real people. I remember after the Charleston shootings, reading the names of the victims, and just reading their names rocked me, because it personalizes it. Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, and the five Dallas Police Officers: Lorne Ahrens, Michael Krol, Michael Smith, Michael Thompson, and Patrick Zamarripa. Somebody's husband, somebody's father, somebody's son, somebody's friend

"Weep with those who weep." (Romans 12:15)

- This may mean shedding some tears.
- It may mean listening to and understanding someone's fears.
- It may mean feeling their anger or empathizing with their confusion.
- But as we process our personal pain, let me encourage us to NOT let our passion or compassion end with social media. Social media can be great. We can learn, we can listen, we can encourage one another. Simply liking or commenting on a post is a way to lift someone's spirits. But let's step our game just a little bit.
 - Let's spend some real-time, in the flesh, with people who don't look like us.
 - We live in Boston, we should all (I believe) have some friends who don't look like us and be able to talk about these important matters. Consider how you can be agents of change, bridge builders for the common good.

Start by loving your actual neighbors.

- Soccer Nights is a GREAT way to love our actual neighbors. One of the greatest motivators for Soccer Nights was not only providing an awesome service to the families of Medford, by finding an avenue (like futbol!, that is Soccer!) that would resonate with ALL different types of families in Medford.
- I love the ethnic diversity of our church, and our prayer is that will continue to increase not just among our congregation, and our Group and Team Leaders (which is happening) but also among our Pastors.
- So that's why we can get wicked excited about people from 33 different countries of origin amongst the participant families and volunteers this week (and this is just among those who shared this information): United States, Haiti, Canada, India, Nepal, Lithuania, Taiwan, Iran, Brazil, Dominican, Somalia, Pakistan, Ireland, El Salvador, Chile, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Colombia, Morocco, Portugal, Cuba, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Vietnam, France, Yemen, Iraq, Kenya, Bangladesh, China, Ghana, Cameroon, Rwanda,
- This week, you can display the counterculture of the cross. How? Here are a few simple tips.
 - **Learn names...**
 - Coaches... Kids and Parents
 - **Stop and have conversations** (with people you don't know!)

- Take a sincere interest in what interests them. This is what we do naturally, I would say, when we are at our best.
- **Meet needs. Do your job...** (offer water, help families find their way around the field, if you're on registration - do it with joy; if you're on hospitality, cut those oranges nice and straight!, if you're a coach, instruct well and have a ton of fun!)
- **Invite them into your story, our story and the story.**
 - Your story: family... hang out... CFN...
 - Our story: our church loves putting this on for the community.
 - We're a church that wants to serve Medford families and make this city greater than it already is.
 - We see it as an opportunity to display God's love in a practical way. He has served us and be generous to us, which compels us to serve and be generous to others.
 - Share why you love RHC... Talk about Transformation Station on Sunday!
 - Welcoming and encouraging atmosphere.
 - Great kids classes and programs on Sunday am.
 - Uplifting music and relevant teaching from the Bible. Our Lead Pastor is a stud. (Tweet that!)
 - Which leads into...
 - The Story: Lead with questions. Share naturally, like good friends do.
 - Do you and your family ever go to church?
 - Do you have any spiritual beliefs?
 - We don't host Soccer Nights as a ploy to get people into our space to share Jesus with them. That's called a bait and switch and it's false advertising. We serve because we love to serve. We share because that's who we are.

Remind one another of the better story... God's design for our world will win out.

- Our friendships with people of different ethnicities tells a better story of that is the result of the gospel. God has made us not just acquainted, not just friends, but one. We share our time, our resources, our emotions, because we are one through Christ.
- But not only this: Justice will come because God is a God of justice.
- Amos 5:24 - "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." That is the picture of the coming kingdom of God.
- *"How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."* MLK quote...

Conclusion:

We have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who when riddled with pain and suffering, actually embraced it and loved past it so that we could experience his love and truly love one another. Let's go and display his great love this week.

Would you pray with me?