



June 11, 2020

Greetings, Lettered Streets Covenant Church!

This morning I was drawn to 1 Corinthians 12 and Paul's metaphor of the church as a body. It's a familiar passage to many so I will quote part of the passage from *The Message*, to help us listen with fresh ears:

Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive. (1 Cor. 12.12-13)

As I meditated on this ancient passage while considering my current context, I felt both encouraged and challenged.

I am encouraged that *we who make up the diverse parts of the church*, are one in the Spirit even in the midst of crisis, even in a season when we can't gather, and yes even over Zoom. It is our common baptism, our shared faith in Jesus, and our sharing in the same Spirit and the same Communion table that makes us the church.

I am encouraged by our congregational meeting last Sunday where it invited me to think about all we have done together as a church to be a light in the darkness and a city on a hill to our community. Let's keep pressing on!

I am encouraged by the widespread participation in our worship resources from men and women and kids of all ages, singing, and reading scripture, and sharing prayers and gifts and stories.

Lettered Streets Covenant Church

P.O. Box 5645 Bellingham, WA 98227

Phone 360.920.6712 • info@letteredstreetscc.com • www.letteredstreetscc.com

I am encouraged by Marcia McEvoy and Ben Goodwin who served to the end of their term limits on the Nominating Committee and Leadership Team, respectively, and did so with such integrity, faithfulness, and skill. And I am encouraged by Ryan Wasserman who accepted the nomination to serve a second term as our Lead Team chair—what a gifted and non-anxious leader for such a time as this. And I am thrilled to have Jennifer Thomas joining the Nominating Committee and Cory Hoeger joining the Leadership Team.

I am encouraged that I am seeing Jesus being faithful to his church. The gates of hell won't prevail against the church, and neither will the Coronavirus.

But I am challenged. I recently had a conversation with someone from our congregation about the racial tension that has come to a much needed tipping point in our nation and she reminded me that while the whole body is equally important, sometimes we give extra attention to the parts that hurt. She was talking about joint pain but she was also talking about black lives, Indigenous lives, Latino lives, Asian lives, the lives of those who are hurting acutely.

If we look back to Paul's quote to the Corinthians, when one of the parts of our body is in pain, we should all feel that pain. In our own church at LSCC we have people in pain because of racial injustice. If we open up that circle to the church around the world, then we have millions of members of the Body of Christ in pain and oppression. And if we open up the circle to our shared humanity—to all image-bearers of the Living God—then we ought to feel the sharp pains of injustice.

It is my conviction as a man of scripture and Spirit, as a Jesus follower and as one ordained by Jesus to shepherd, that the church cannot be silent in the face of injustice. The priests and prophets in Jeremiah are condemned by God for preaching peace when there was no peace and for tickling ears with flowery talk when they needed to heed the word of the Lord and push back against the oppressive powers. *If the church doesn't take the lead in combatting this injustice, what group or power or narrative will fill the void that Jesus gave us to occupy?*

Pushing back against the powers of systemic racism is a life-long journey. It is not a linear journey. People don't start at one point, and progress naturally and quickly from racist or indifferent, to 'woke' or healed. The journey is cyclical and bumpy. The journey necessarily involves multiple conversions of attitudes, presuppositions, our own privilege and history, along with repentance and lament.

I am aware of the pressures life is putting on most of us right now. I am personally working longer hours than I have since the first year of launching the church. I am tired and I want you to hear that I know most of you are exhausted as well. I alluded to the prophet Jeremiah in my last paragraph and in that same book of the Bible is an admonition for godly leaders not to push the flock too hard, too fast. You have my word that I am aware of exhaustion and that I will only lead in grace and in care for the whole body. But I must remind us of this—for our siblings of color there is no choice to engage or not to engage. The very definition of privilege is the fact that I get to choose whether or not to continue on the journey. For people of color, my *journey* is their *life*.

And so, with gentleness and firm resolve, we move forward together. We recognize that some among us are farther along on the journey. We recognize, with grace and compassion, that some among us will need more help getting started. All I can do is lay the ground work and set the table. Coming to the table is up to you.

For a first step, I suggest you consider watching the film [Just Mercy](#). [Amazon streaming services](#) recently made this movie free to rent throughout the whole month of June in honor of George Floyd. The film is PG-13 but is not gratuitous in its depiction of a true story.

I am suggesting that all who are able, watch this film and then we will meet via Zoom on Monday, June 22 from 6:30-8:30. There are a set of [discussion questions](#) (written by Dominique Gilliard) that we'll use to frame our discussion.

Finally, I would be remiss as a pastor if I didn't root us in the source of our power. We can plan and watch movies and discuss books but we can do

nothing of lasting fruit if we are not inspired, empowered, and transformed by the Holy Spirit. Please be in prayer for the Holy Spirit to convict us and bring us to repentance as we seek the good of the whole body.

May the peace of Christ be with you,

Chris