

Dear Church Family,

I wanted to share with you some thoughts I have about the current state of America. The Bible tells us in Isaiah 32:7 that the gift of righteousness is peace. To be righteous is to live in a way that is morally correct. Micah 6:8 famously says that the Lord requires of us that we: do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. Therefore, to be righteous is to act or seek justice. To be righteous is to show mercy and seek mercy. To be righteous is to walk with God in humility. These are the keys to peace.

I know I am painting with a broad brush, but the truth of this is undeniable. Peace is only attainable where there is justice, mercy and humility. Peace is only attainable when we seek to follow after God. Think about this in a personal, individual way. Do you have peace in your mind when you are deprived of justice? Do you have a tranquil spirit when every misstep you make is met without mercy? Do you feel a satisfaction in your life when you are overcome with pride and arrogance? Do you feel in equilibrium when you also feel worthless, taken advantage of, disrespected or unloved? I know I don't.

Justice, mercy and humility are the keys to peace. It becomes even clearer when we think about them from a positive standpoint. What joy we feel when a wrong is made right. What relief we feel when a person forgives us of a mistake. What a great comfort comes to us when we overcome our pride and work to repair a relationship. What a feeling of value we have when someone treats us as an equal, respects our self-worth or shows us how much they care.

This is how I understand or make sense of the violence, anger, despair, and destruction we have been witnessing all over this country. We have an extreme lack of justice, mercy and humility that has boiled over. We might be able to bring order to the riots with force. We might be able to change public discourse with a new event that takes away our attention. We might be able to make things seem like they are back to normal with a few meaningless changes; but we won't truly have peace without justice, mercy and humility.

In America today, there are many who face injustice on a daily basis. So many people are treated differently based on their race, their education, their economic status, their gender, their religion, their appearance, their sexuality, their culture, or their age. A great injustice is made every time a person is deprived of access to a good education, every time a person is treated as having less inherent value, every time a person is given inferior healthcare, every time we make assumptions about a person because of their race, gender, religion, or class.

America is quickly becoming a country that shows no mercy. We have laws, policies and procedures that leave no room for mercy based on situation, circumstances or repentance. Zero tolerance policies issue the same punishment no matter what. I think we can also see the lack of mercy in America in social media. Individuals can have their whole careers or all of their life's work taken away by one bad post on social media. We show no mercy even if that one tweet is counter to everything else we know about a person. So many are afraid to speak out for what we think is right because we fear using the

wrong words or being misunderstood. More mercy would lead to more conversation, more community, more working together, more repentance and change.

I often think that humility is the key to a way forward. Everyone needs to be treated as if they have value and self-worth. Everyone needs to treat others as if they have value and self-worth. We need to see that we personally have value and self-worth. We need to see that pridefulness blinds us to the true state of the world. In some ways, I cannot see the true extent of injustice because I don't want to admit how much of my success is due to being a white, straight, Christian, male who grew up in an upper middle class home. My pride wants me to look at a homeless person and say that their homelessness is their own fault and it could never happen to me. My pride wants me to look a poor person and say that their poverty is their own fault and my financial situation is due to my hard work. My pride wants me to look at a person who calls out injustice and say that they are trying to find excuses for their own failures. My pride wants me to see the events of horrific violence over the past few weeks and say it is just the work of a few bad actors.

As Christians, we have much to do. It begins by each one of us committing ourselves to behaving justly, to offering mercy, and to living with humility. It extends to each one of us seeking justice, demanding mercy, and working to assure that others are treated with the value they deserve. Justice, mercy and humility are truly the path forward to peace.

In Christ,

Rev Steven Brand