



A Closing Word About Which Lives Matter from Rev. Adam Hamilton

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Two weeks ago today, I shared a statement from Church Council on racial justice. It has elicited a great deal of discussion among our members, which was part of the hope for the statement. A number of you have had questions about the statement since then, and I've appreciated the chance to have conversations with you. My assumption is that all of us at Resurrection care about justice (which, in scripture, is most often ensuring fair and equitable treatment for the vulnerable or powerless), we agree that racism is wrong, and we want to see our city look more like the Kingdom of God (as we pray, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"). It's been helpful to hear your questions and to engage in discussion about the statement . . .

I want to address one of the questions I've received from several people regarding the statement: *Don't all lives matter? Why did the statement single out black lives? And, does the statement's use of Black Lives Matter indicate an endorsement with one of the Black Lives Matter groups that have formed?*

All lives matter. That is a foundational part of the Christian gospel, and something that is implicit in everything we do here at Resurrection. At various times we may place the emphasis on particular groups. In 2017, following the scene of neo-Nazi's carrying torches and shouting, "Jews will not replace us," we held a city-wide gathering in our sanctuary to say, in essence, "Jewish lives matter" expressing our support for the Jewish community. In March, as the coronavirus began its spread and front line workers in health care were taking personal risks to care for others, we began a campaign with thousands of signs we placed around the city saying, in various ways, that they were heroes, that their lives mattered and as an expression of this you provided meals for health care workers. In May, I sent notes to every metro area police department expressing appreciation for them, and as we did with health care workers, we provided meals for several area police departments. This was, in part, a response to the death of officer Mike Mosher and in part a recognition of the risks the officers take while working to serve the community.

The statement on racial justice is unequivocal that *black lives matter*. It is not a statement of support for a particular organization that has adopted this phrase in its name (there are at least two national groups and many regional groups that use black lives matter to describe their organization – our statement was not intended to endorse any group), but instead it is a simple statement of truth: Black lives matter to God and they matter to us as a church.

Saying black lives matter is not a statement that other lives don't matter. It is an acknowledgement of a tragic history of white Americans saying in word and deed that black lives do not matter, or they matter less than white lives.

Tomorrow we celebrate our nation's Declaration of Independence. We have etched in our memory at least one line from the Declaration, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life,

Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” But these words did not apply to most blacks in our forming country – most were slaves and they were considered, in the words of Virginia’s legal code, “real estate.”

It would be 87 years after that first Fourth of July, before the Emancipation Proclamation would grant slaves freedom, and two more years before the Civil War ended and freedom actually came for many slaves. After a brief period of reconstruction, our nation plunged into a long period of Jim Crow segregation with its philosophy of “separate but equal” which, as we all know, was never equal. Jim Crow conveyed the same message for eight decades: black lives don’t matter, or at least not as much, as white lives matter.

This week I was reading about the second rise of the KKK – this began on Stone Mountain in Georgia in 1915. Part of their creed stated that they would, “ever be true to the faithful maintenance of White Supremacy and will strenuously oppose any compromise thereof in any and all things.” By 1924, the KKK reached its peak of membership with, some believe, as many as 6 million members including hundreds of thousands in states in the north. Kansas had 60,000 members in 1925 when the Kansas legislature courageously outlawed the Klan in the state. The Klan typically saw its membership as consisting of white Protestant Christians.

The Klan tapped into a spirit that permeated many parts of our country among people who would never join the Klan. It was the same spirit or philosophy that created new suburban neighborhoods in Kansas City with covenants and restrictions meant to ensure that home ownership in these neighborhoods would be restricted to whites. This was true not just in the midtown and southern neighborhoods of Kansas City, Missouri, but suburbs like Leawood in Kansas.

It was 80 years before Jim Crow laws began to be defeated by the courts and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. But the legacy of over 300 years of racism does not disappear overnight. The impact is seen in the wealth, health and education gaps between black and white in Kansas City. The assumptions and biases that came with three centuries of racism don’t disappear in a generation either. Many of us, as Christians who care about justice and despise racism, still carry with us biases, fears and assumptions that were centuries in the making.

Let me reiterate, the church’s statement on racial justice says that black lives matter. I don’t see this as a controversial statement. It is a statement of fact rooted in scripture. It is not endorsing any group. It is not affirming the use of violence or looting or destruction of property. It is making a statement both of fact and of the kind of church we hope to be – a place that firmly believes that all lives matter, but because our nation has a tragic history of saying or acting in ways that have implied that black lives do not matter as much as white lives, we are being clear that black lives matter. This reflects our convictions and the kind of church we long to be.

Having said that, today I want to be clear, as I have spent time praying for a young police officer shot in the head in the line of duty, that police officers matter too. Last year this young man who lay in the hospital today came to meet me to talk about faith and the work he was doing as a new police officer. Later that day he sent me a picture of himself with a child at a home he had entered where he and his partner found two kids, two and three years old, who had been left alone for hours. He wrote, “Serving others, protecting and being there for people who can’t. Trying to influence young children and to be a role model is my main goal. Just feeling the love of these children and for people was the best feeling.” I love this young man, and I believe he reflects the heart of most of the people serving in law enforcement.

Black lives matter. Blue lives matter. And yes, ALL lives matter.