

SERMON THE WEEK AFTER THE HISTORIC ELECTION OF BARACK OBAMA
ANTIOCH COMMUNITY CHURCH
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
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NOVEMBER 9, 2008

SCRIPTURE: GALATIANS 3:23-29

TITLE: "OBAMA, THE ICCC AND ME"

"THIS IS NOT ABOUT CLASS NOR
COLOR, RACE OR CREED/ MAKE NO
MISTAKE, IT'S THE CHANGES, WHAT
ALL THE PEOPLE THEM NEED."

Those are some of the words of Cocoa Tea (a Reggae singer from Jamaica) before the election of Barack Obama.

If he is correct...then what are the changes we need? How does it relate to the ICCC? Me? You?

Let us go directly to the obvious...this was indeed a historic election with the first African American elected to the highest office in the land and it will make him one of the most powerful persons in the world. This happens just some 143 short years after the ending of the Civil War in America. This happens when we still struggle with racial and economic injustice.

So we have bridged the gap. Race relations in America have stabilized. Prejudice and bias on the streets, in our schools and in the workplace has ended and it is over! Really?

Someone forgot to tell the folks in Missouri City, Missouri it was over. Just a few weeks ago (after Barack Obama defeated Hillary Clinton in the primary) close to Kansas City in a small Missouri town which houses the smallest school district in the state the following took place.

It was a Tuesday evening, just before midnight, an Interracial husband and wife and their two children were awakened to a loud voice in their front yard at Missouri City. The voice said, "N.....(and used the word which I refuse to say) lover. I'm going to kill the N.....lover, your wife, your children." The man beat upon their door and shouted other obscene threats.

That man (their neighbor) is now in Jail awaiting action on a Hate Crime charge. A group of us held a Rally of support in Missouri City for the family who were the victims. We are awaiting the outcome of the charges. In the meantime we prayed and gave support to the family. We also prayed for the man charged who was a victim of his own prejudice and hatred.

Prejudice and bias on the streets, in our schools and in the workplace has ended and it is over! Really?

The day after the election members of Antioch Church (snowbirds living in Yuma, Arizona for the winter) greeted their neighbor who was just arriving for the winter from Branson, Missouri. Some-

pleasantries about the trip were exchanged and he said to our member Jeri, "Well how does it feel to have a N.....(and he used the word which I still refuse to say) elected as President of the United States?"

Bless her heart she responded much calmer than I would have. After she told him about her Grandson who is Black and serving in Iraq and who speaks 4 different languages and serves as an interpreter for our government...after that she wished him a good day...went back into their home and prayed for this man who was a victim of his own prejudice and hatred as much as the man from Missouri City.

Prejudice and bias on the streets, in our schools and in the workplace has ended and it is over! Really?

No it is not over! It has come a long way, but it is not over.

The 3rd Chapter of Galatians and verse 28 reads "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus." Those words need to be the focus of our efforts as individuals and as a community of faith. If we are faithful to God's call and share this Good News with others around us then our lives and the lives of our community will be better. Perfect? No, but better.

I remember in Seminary the words of John Wesley (Founder of what is the Methodist movement) of how we are to "strive toward perfection." Our truth is found in the striving. If we ever quit striving then prejudice, bias, hatred, and economic injustice will win.

Will we succeed in bringing everyone to "strive toward perfection?" No, but to forgo the effort to try is to allow prejudice to win.

One of the reasons I love the ministry of the International Council of Churches is because it is a "striving" movement. From its inception it has sought to build bridges instead of walls. It has sought to work in harmony across racial and gender barriers.

We are a ground breaking movement in American church history, but our work is not finished. Fields still need to be plowed. Seeds still need to be planted. Our world yearns for a harvest of love and acceptance. We have been blessed by God because those pioneers ahead of us stepped out in faith that the Gospel was right. We are all equal in the sight of God. To stop the work and say now that we have elected an African American president we have arrived and can rest is to allow the hatred that still lurks in the corners to come out because our guard will be down.

It would allow the man to stand in the yard and yell the slurs at his neighbors or worse...No, No, No we cannot allow it...not if we are committed to Galatians 3.

Finally a personal plea to continue to live as the ICCC has led us and Cocoa Tea has said..."make no mistake it's the changes, what all the people them need." The change of minds and hearts to truly rejoice at the election because in America and as the Gospel says "we are all one..."

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I grew up in West Texas a place and time where we were divided by colored waiting rooms and white waiting rooms at the bus stops. Where the drinking fountain for coloreds was around the back. Where the man at the Dairy Queen would only serve the coloreds at the back door and then only if he felt like it.

It was a town divided into three sections. They called them...Mexican town, Queen City and the Whites in the middle. Not only did the divisions happen in the bus stations, the Dairy Queens and city boundaries, but worse yet is they separated us as people from one another because of skin color. If you were not white then you were inferior. I grew up believing that.

My daddy used to tell me when you leave high school and go on to college and play football you may have to play against "those people." He told me that (and he would use the N.....word which I refuse to say) they have weak shin bones so if you get in the game hit them in the shins and it will be over for them.

Then I got in my first football game and was hit in the shin (ouch and double ouch) it hurt so bad and I thought later after the pain was over, wait a minute something is not right. I mean I was white not black...if I hurt maybe we all hurt the same. Hold on here...could it mean that other than the color of the outside of our bodies we were really the same?

The answer for me came quite clear years later, when in the military, an African American man from Chicago saved my life. I would discover our hearts were the same. My heart began to change. I realized I loved my Daddy, but my Daddy was wrong. I vowed to live a life of change and try to be an example for others. I would yearn for and work for Galatians 3 to become everyone's goal in life. I wanted my children to say, "I love my Daddy and my Daddy was right."

I would become involved in The Southern Christian Leadership Conference led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Years later (which brings us to today) I would cross paths with this movement called the ICCC and discover a whole host of others in church who strive for and live in acceptance of others. I am at home.

The icing on the cake is the historic election of Barack Obama, just a few short years after the Civil War in America when a Free Black Man by the name of Martin called us to freedom and gave his life doing so...and an African by the name of Nelson suffered through fall of Apartheid...

I cannot imagine what joy African Americans must feel at this moment...how much greater than my joy as someone who has never suffered the kind of injustice they have, but who has been "striving" all these years to bring change.

I have found Jesus...I have seen Galatians working...I became a part of the ICCC...YES I AM HOME!!!

I invite you to come home with me!!!