

Your Right Hand, O Lord, Glorious in Power

Exodus 15:1-6; Mark 5:21-43

January 21, 2018

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(Delivered at Union Hill Primitive Baptist Church)

Dr. Mitchell Walker, Dr. Larry Davidson, and other members of the Greater Huntsville Interdenominational Ministerial Fellowship, thank you for partnering with the Southeast Clergy for this service of Christian unity. Dr. Oscar Montgomery and members of the congregation, thank you for hosting our service and providing special music. Mayor Battle, thank you for being here. Chairman Strong, thank you. And all of you, members from north Huntsville churches, members from south Huntsville churches, people from all across this fine city, thank you for being here.

Am I the only one who believes what we do here this afternoon is not just important but very important? Surely not. Surely many of you, like me, have images of Charlottesville, VA, seared into your memory. Surely most of us are painfully aware of the division between north Huntsville and south Huntsville. Surely all of us are aware that race relations in our city and state could be better. Yes, what we are doing this afternoon is very important, for we come together across denominational lines, racial lines, bursting through that invisible line between north and south Huntsville to declare that we are one people united as sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ.

Here's what I believe. We can't control what happens in Washington, DC. We can't control what happens in New York City or London or Moscow. We can't even control what happens in Montgomery. But we do have some control over what happens in our churches and our communities. Good things happen in our churches and communities when a few people stand up and say, "Let's do this. I'll do a part. You do a part. And together we're going to cause something good to happen."

That's what I believe, and here's what I would like to see happen. I would like to see churches in north Huntsville and south Huntsville form sister-church partnerships where we get to know and understand one another. I would like to see dinner groups, three couples from one church and three couples from the other sharing dinner in each others' homes. I would like to see those churches partnering in missions, each helping the other with its mission projects. I would like to see conversations where small groups gather talk about what it's like to be a black man in Huntsville, what it's like to be a white man in Huntsville, and black or white woman in Huntsville. Not judging. Not lecturing. Just talking. Listening. Understanding. I would like to see that invisible line between north and south Huntsville melt away, so that we have simply Huntsville, a progressive southern city that models for the rest of the state, indeed, the country, what it means to have healthy communities and healthy race relations.

I ask you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, "Is that beyond our ability to do?" I think not.

We all read about a young woman who was expelled from the University of Alabama last week. What a sad story. She used the day marking the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to spew the most vile, racist language on Instagram. She's only 19 years old. I found myself wondering, "How does someone become so emotionally and spiritually sick at such a young age." As horrible as that story is, it is nevertheless laced with some good news. She and her racism were not tolerated. She was kicked out of the university and sent back to her home state of New Jersey. The university issued a statement calling her remarks "ignorant and disturbing" and saying that they do not reflect the values of the school. The girl's sorority kicked her out and condemned her actions. And then the girl herself apologized, saying, "I'm wrong and there's just no excuse for what I did."

A lot of what has been done in the south was wrong, done out of ignorance, and no longer reflects the values of our people. Here in Huntsville, let us say that racism and notions of racial supremacy do not reflect the values of this city. They are the enemy. Let us rise to say that we know a better way. And let us not forget Charlottesville, VA. Let us

remember and say, “That’s not acceptable in Huntsville, AL. That’s not who we are. We know a better way.”

I tell you, that is not beyond our ability to do!

Let me remind you of this. The God of the book of Exodus, the One who divided the Red Sea and saved the people of God, that God is with us. And with that God, nothing is impossible. So let this be the beginning of new, redemptive relationships throughout our city. And with Moses, we will sing God’s praise, “Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power—your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.”