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## **June 2 – We Stood, We Stand, I Hope We Always Will | A Message from Jim Everette**

I along with other members of our church stood in the rain with people of all ages, races, faiths and I'm assuming socio-economic status, at the 1898 Memorial Park last Saturday afternoon. We stood together in solidarity to affirm that all lives matter to the Creator of all life and we love our neighbors, no matter the similarities or the differences. As followers of Jesus, and members of Wilmington's first Baptist Church, we have a history of being a congregation of people with diverse views and opinions united under the grace, love, and Lordship of Jesus Christ. "For better than 200 years, our church has served as a light for direction, a voice of hope, a mission of offering grace and strength for those in need, and we do these things in a lifestyle of perpetual worship of Jesus who said, "Follow me". The complexion of our church is far too pale for me, and I continue hoping that will change, but the character and integrity of the way we love God and our neighbors as ourselves is paramount for all of us.

In the wake of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis last week, our nation has been whipped up with protests, some more peaceful than others. Our city has escaped the violence and destruction to personal and public property to this point. I hope this will continue and believe it can because of some strides we have made as a city, pleas for peaceful protests, and a growing trust between citizens.

Few of us know what it's like to experience racism in our everyday lives. We don't know what it's like to have people look at us with disdain, question our motives, and suspect the worst because of the color of our skin. We have never had to have "the talk" with our young sons before they go out to school as many of my African American friends tell me they do. It breaks my heart. I believe it breaks yours.

We grieve for our brothers and sisters who, for too long, have endured wrongs that should have been righted long ago, but we don't only grieve, we must continue trying to heal the hurt and understand the differences. We have a long way to go before everyone experiences true freedom and justice for all, but thank God, our church and our city are working on it.

As a church, we have spanned some of the gap by praying with our African American neighbors, learning from one another, and deepening our friendships while serving our city beside of each other in mission efforts and social celebrations. My friend, Deborah Maxwell, is the President of the NAACP of Wilmington. In expressing her hope for the way our city manages itself during these turbulent days she says, "We have the opportunity to be an untouched city in North Carolina. Each day gives us a better chance of going through this time of turmoil as a city. People will ask, 'How did Wilmington do that?' Because we all stuck together: black, brown, white, Latino, Jewish, Christian, Muslim... we all stood together."

Rev. Becca Jones encouraged us to “stand up, right now” in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world as we worshiped together virtually yesterday. Just as the Holy Spirit united the diverse members of the first church, men and women, Gentile and Jew, young and old, slave and free, on the Day of Pentecost, it is our time to hear and respond to the prodding of the Holy Spirit today.

As a church, I know you join me as we grieve over the racism, violence, brutality, and acts of evil that persist in our nation, and around the world; this is not the way God intends for us to live together. We pray for George Floyd’s family and the loss and grief they are experiencing. We pray for law enforcement officers in our area and across America. We are thankful for them. Their job is dangerous, and they do their best to provide safety for all of us while facing great risk. There are times when their jobs cause them to make difficult decisions in the midst of great tension and emotion. We pray that they will do what is right and just. We pray for communities across our state and nation that are dealing with strife and destruction because of riots and looting. And, we pray the words of the prophet Micah that we all would live justly and for justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God until God’s Kingdom comes (KOG2ILM) on earth as it is in heaven.