

As a Christian, and as a minister of the Gospel of Christ, I urge us to think carefully about the values we aspire to as a community, the values we want to see in others, live up to in ourselves, and raise our children to embrace. And the first place to look to identify our values is in the types of communication we categorize as either socially acceptable or not. What we speak through words or symbols matters because speech comes out of the abundance of our hearts; the words and symbols we might use or deem appropriate reveal what we truly value, what we truly prioritize. Determining whether a form of expression at a public, family event is either appropriate or profane has the very power to guide the direction of the morality of our community. The tongue is like a rudder; it may be a small instrument but it can still turn the whole ship.

So, the essential point I exhort people to consider is not whether you have the right to what you speak, but whether or not what you speak *is* right. For my fellow Christians, are we careful that the speech we accept brings glory and praise to God, or do we approve of speech that - even if unintentionally and ignorantly - curses human beings who've been made in God's likeness? My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

I am here today to call out the profanity of hatred, the sin of violence, and the evil of racism. Therefore, I am here to name and proclaim the profanity of one symbol in particular because of its current

and historic weddedness to white supremacists and the evil legacy of racism, violence, and hatred.

Now, I know an awful lot of people try to challenge that connection between the confederate flag and racism, as if it's something that people who don't understand history are just making up. But after a terrorist killed 9 innocent people attending a Bible study at a historic black church in South Carolina 2 years ago, after he confessed to meticulously targeting our black brothers and sisters at this church because of its historic involvement in civil rights and abolitionist movements, after it was discovered that he had written a manifesto of white supremacy that he published on his web site, is there anyone who would be stumped if they had to guess which flag he gripped firmly in his hands in the photographs that were posted on his web site? Do I even have to say that it was, of course, the confederate flag? Is anyone honestly confused or surprised that he would identify with it?

Whether you like it or not, there is one symbol that has been near and dear to the heart of white supremacists for generations – and that is the confederate flag. You don't see pictures of Rosa Parks waving the confederate flag, but the lynch mob; you don't see Martin Luther King, Jr., a southerner himself, waving the confederate flag, but the segregationists of Jim Crow South; You don't see the freedom riders waving confederate flags, but those who bombed them.

I also hear a lot of people talk about their good intentions, about what *they mean* by the flag – as if what you mean by a symbol changes what it means within a broader social and historical context. No, our intentions do not scrub away the profanity of hate. It does not wash away the use of this symbol by defenders of the institution of slavery, defenders of segregation and institutional racism in the era of Jim Crow South, of the KKK and other white supremacist groups that we don't even have to read about in history books: newspapers printed this very day in our country, in the year 2017, describe the thousands of white supremacists with confederate flags who showed up in Charlottesville, Virginia yesterday.

For Christians, our opposition to the sin of racism, our utter condemnation of the evil of white supremacy, needs to be clear and unambiguous. We must join in solidarity with the counter-protesters of Charlottesville, with anyone who might amplify this prophetic message of truth and justice. This ought not to be difficult for those of us who claim to be Christian. Scripture tells us in Colossians that since we've been raised with Christ, our old self has died and our new self is now centered in Christ. Our identity is not in our culture or heritage, our sentimental attachment to images, or even in our fondness for expressing rebellion or freedom; No, our identity is centered in Christ alone and Christ allows no room for racial supremacy. Jesus teaches us to seek to serve, rather than to lord power over others. Jesus teaches us to love our

neighbors as ourselves. Jesus teaches that whatever we do to those who hurt, we've done it to him. Christ himself has been the victim of people waving confederate flags. Jesus himself was enslaved, chained, and whipped in the confederate states. Jesus himself was bombed by white supremacists among the 4 young black girls who died at their church on a Sunday morning in 1963. Jesus himself was struck and killed by a car yesterday in Charlottesville.

If your brother or sister is distressed because of your means of self-expression, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your sentimental attachment to a flag destroy someone for whom Christ died. Is your sentimental attachment to a flag more important than our brothers and sisters for whom that flag quite clearly represents a legacy of violence and hatred? Is that flag really worth clinging to when you are holding onto it alongside white supremacists and neo-nazis? Again, the critical question we must ask ourselves is not whether or not you have the right to display this flag, but whether or not it *is right* to display that flag.