



SOUTHSIDE MIDWEEK NEWSLETTER 5.13.20

Ahmaud Arbery – Barrett

Here is what we know. On Sunday afternoon, February 23, an unarmed African-American man named Ahmaud Arbery was shot and killed while running in his Brunswick, Georgia neighborhood. He was chased and confronted by two armed white men in a pickup truck: Travis McMichael and his father Gregory McMichael. Ahmaud was shot twice in the chest and once in the hand. Ahmaud's family said he was out for a routine jog that day. The McMichaels told police they thought he was a burglary suspect. The incident was recorded on a video from a second vehicle that was also following him. On May 5, the video of the shooting was uploaded to YouTube and went viral. On May 7, the McMichaels were arrested and charged with felony murder and aggravated assault. The fact that it took 74 days for authorities to arrest the suspects and only after the video was leaked has sparked a debate on racism in our country and has caused a national outcry for justice. June could be the earliest a grand jury hears this case.

I have closely followed the details of this case. Because it is a current event in our country, I decided to share some of the above timeline with my children at dinner the other night. After hearing about the event, my William looked at his siblings and stated, "Ok, remind me never to go jogging." It breaks my heart that my youngest son may some day rethink going on a Sunday afternoon jog in his own neighborhood simply because of the color of his skin. I know how I feel about the situation but it has been hard for me to express what to say about it because honestly it just hits way too close to home. Then I came across a statement from another minister in the churches of Christ named Rick Atchley. He preaches at the Hills Church located in Fort Worth, Texas. He beautifully expressed what I have been feeling and couldn't put into words. I want to share his statement with you.

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Rick Atchley

"To my brothers and sisters of color I want to say I am so sorry. I am sorry that you live in a land where you must think about concerns and fears that never cross my mind. And to my white brothers and sisters, these kinds of incidents and stories will not change until we change the way we engage these issues. It is not enough to say we are not doing anything wrong, we must begin to say what can we do to make things right. We cannot use our privilege to opt out; we must lean in. We must use the eyes God gave us to more consistently recognize injustice. We must use our lips to call it out and we must use our feet to take a stand against it. Let me be clear, this is not a political statement. This is a declaration of the citizen of the kingdom of God. My allegiance is to Jesus of Nazareth, a dark-skinned Middle Eastern Jew who taught me and taught his church that all our made in the image of God and that all should be treated with justice and dignity and that those on the margins who are often called the least are the very ones by whom we should stand the most. So I hope you will join me in wanting to be a church who does better at proclaiming, defending, and insisting on justice for all."

I Like To Win – Kevin

I like to win. One of my favorite games growing up was Monopoly, a game with one clear winner. As our kids grew old enough to play board games, I introduced them to Monopoly. They didn't find joy in the game as I did, probably because they would rarely win. Here's what I learned playing Monopoly with them: if your kids don't want to be around you when the game's over, something has gone wrong. In my marriage, I brought with me the same desire to win. So that's what I tried to do with Mary – I tried to win. When we would have disagreements, my goal was to out-argue her with better reasons, better logic, better conclusions. The trouble came because I was a better debater than her so I would win. She didn't want to be around me following a disagreement. (Notice a trend developing here?)

I read one line in a book by Gordon McDonald which God used to confront me. Here it is: Maintaining the relationship is always more important than winning the argument (and I'll add...most every time). God had prepared me to read this line at just the right time. I was floored with this thought. I began to realize the damage I had done to Mary over the years, winning arguments but losing ground with her. God opened my eyes to what was going on and over time he changed me. I remember apologizing to Mary and listening to her tell me how she felt. That was hard to hear. To be honest, I can't think of an argument we might have where winning would be more important than my relationship with Mary. That doesn't mean we don't have any differences. It does mean that I approach my part of settling our differences much differently than I used to. I want her to still want to be around me when the dust settles. I thought this might be good for someone to hear now as you're spending more time together with your husband or wife. I doubt if I'm the only one who missed this vital principle to bring to a marriage.

A Shepherd's Prayer – Ron

Do you sometimes want to yell, "Enough!?" Enough of all of this social distancing, with restrictions on our jobs, our schools, our careers. Restrictions on our eating at restaurants, eating with family, with friends. Restrictions on our playing sports, watching sports, taking our kids to the park, to the movies, to their friend's house, and the list goes on. The restrictions prevent us from sitting with a family member who is dying or attending a celebration of someone's life. All of these restrictions can leave us feeling tired and weary. We are missing out on so much. The end of these restrictions does not seem to be clearly in front of us, either. In the moment of facing these trials, we want God's sovereign hand to turn the page, to remove us from the situation and to move us to the next page. Yet it isn't happening, at least not yet.

Jesus was certainly pushed to the limit. The Jews, who he was sent to save, did not believe him. The Pharisees and Sadducees constantly sought to entrap him. His disciples, who he invested so heavily in, could not understand his message. There were times when Jesus was very weary of their faithlessness (Matt. 17:17, Mark 9:19). When he needed their support, they abandoned him. He was killed on a cross with few friends to give him comfort. The one who surely could have said, "Enough!" chose to endure suffering for the great joy set before him (Heb. 12:2). He knew that the Creator of the universe keeps his promises.

Jesus knew that the next page in his story was certain to be one worth dying for. Soren Kierkegaard said that life must be lived forwards, but it can only be understood backwards. Do we have enough faith in our promised future to trust that our present steps are not only worth experiencing, but they are filled with opportunities to display the grace and favor that God has lavished upon us? My prayer for us this week is that our Creator and Savior will be glorified by the manner in which we choose to live these days. Because of Jesus.