



Jeremiah, as depicted by Michelangelo from the Sistine Chapel ceiling

Greetings!

Please Read [Jeremiah 17: 5-10](#)

This weekend the Cincinnati Bengals are playing in the Super Bowl. It's been a long time coming for Bengal's nation. Win or lose we are proud of our team.

While we are proud of the Bengals, we should remind ourselves that the NFL is big business. Each franchise is worth billions of dollars. Individually and together they are major players in the sports entertainment industry in the United States. But the NFL has some serious problems around race and equity. The casual observer will notice that several large markets have dominated the sport for decades. *USA Today* reported in 2020 that while more than 60% of players are persons of color, the board rooms, ownership, quarterbacks, and in particular, head coaching positions are dominated by Caucasian men. While not universally true, it is very noticeable. And the NFL knows it could do better. Recently, [Coach Brian Flores brought a racial discrimination lawsuit](#) against the Miami Dolphins and the NFL. In his suit Flores cites repeated failures by front offices and NFL ownership to take seriously racial equity in coaching to match the racial makeup of players on the field

Consider this:

- Four franchises – the Arizona Cardinals, Cleveland Browns, Las Vegas Raiders and Tampa Bay Buccaneers – are responsible for 32% of all the Black and brown coaches and GMs hired in the past 30 years, while Atlanta and six other teams have not had a single person of color in either of their two most important positions.
- Ten franchises have hired more than one person of color, accounting for 62% of the 40 Black and brown coaches and GMs hired since 1990. The Browns lead

the way with four, two coaches and two GMs, while the Buccaneers, Cardinals and Raiders have had three each.

- The Atlanta Falcons, Dallas Cowboys, Jacksonville Jaguars, Los Angeles Rams, New England Patriots, New Orleans Saints and Tennessee Titans have never had a person of color as either their coach or general manager. ([USA Today](#))

The passage from Jeremiah offers a word of justice that isn't just for "church" ears. In fact, the prophet worked for God and the government, in a sense, by offering a word for the public. Reading the prophet this week offers a word to a world that is caught up in the Winter Olympics, the Super Bowl, and the Ukraine crisis, but also carries with it the history and pathos of previous generations. While times may change, the call for God's justice never moves. God is always going to stand on the side of the creation. God created the world. God created all races. If it is inconvenient for us to understand – please read verse 10:

I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

So what testing for racial equity might God be doing these days in our midst, even in a Super Bowl week? Consider the uproar about constitutionally protected protests by NFL players of color and others who "took a knee" during the national anthem. Kneeling was to get people's attention and offer a call for justice. The epicenter of that controversy was placed on two players who called upon their faith tradition to stage the protest and to speak out. Their names are Colin Kaepernick and Eric Reid of the San Francisco 49ers. Both were silenced. Kaepernick lost his job. When asked by reporters why they did this, Reid replied in a [New York Times op-ed](#):

"We chose to kneel because it's a respectful gesture. I remember thinking our posture was like a flag flown at half-mast to mark a tragedy."

The tragedy that the players were addressing is racism and our penchant in this country to not address it individually or corporately. Many were very upset about their display, and perhaps you were? But a closer look at the power of symbol and meaning is needed.

Patti and I have flown a US flag from our house daily in good weather according to the guidelines prescribed by [US Flag Code](#). The flag is an important symbol to us. But symbols represent things. There is this pledge to the flag that we learned in school and it ends "with liberty and justice for all ." Symbols like the flag carry values and meaning, such as service, sacrifice and maybe even death for the love of country. But are there not persons who have made similar sacrifices and suffered injustices because of the color of their skin, their accent or the spelling of their last name? Is their sacrifice at the hands of discrimination any less of a sacrifice for our country? Is there room at the table for those who sacrifice for all for the whole of culture? And when someone calls the status quo into question it can be a jolting experience to those of us who live in the status quo. But what a gift to be questioned out of our complacency!

The prophet Jeremiah is well within the Judeo Christian tradition. Spend some time

this week re-reading the prophet to see what God requires and not just what we are willing to accept for ourselves. The prophet's work is often a hard read and many discount it, even as his own generation struggled with the ethics of faith and practice that the Lord called people to hear through his mouth. In the Christian tradition, we have built our faith in Jesus on these foundations.

The season of Lent is nearing. After 32 years of ministry and a lifetime in the church, I don't understand how you can celebrate Easter without the Season of Lent, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, but many try. Look at our participation levels in our churches, they tell us a very hollow story. Our people don't have a grasp on faith and tradition, self-reflection and self-denial, just as our nation is wrestling with very similar things. We cannot be spiritually strong if what we say and demonstrate with our actions do not match. In our nation we cannot say, *liberty and justice for all* if we do not strive in all areas to make it so.

Many say our nation is a work in progress. May it be so. Let's do some work NFL! May we all do some work!

Peace,



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