

December 16, 2014

Dear Grace Church Family and Friends,

As most of you know, last week, the Senate Intelligence Committee released a report condemning the CIA program to detain and interrogate terrorism suspects. According to the report, detainees underwent waterboarding, exposure to cold temperatures, slapping and sleep deprivation. A few were subjected to “rectal feeding” or “rectal hydration,” which, I am sure, is as horrible as it sounds.

As I read newspaper accounts of the Committee’s report, and contemplated the atrocious acts done in the name of the freedom, I could not help but wonder what Jesus would say about the CIA’s program. After all, Jesus himself was subjected to “enhanced interrogation techniques” at the hands of a world superpower. What would Jesus say to the United States?

President George W. Bush has repeatedly argued the program was humane and legal. The intelligence uncovered during interrogations, he said, was instrumental in preventing terrorist plots and capturing senior Al Qaeda leaders. This past weekend, on *Meet the Press*, former Vice President Dick Cheney said he would conduct the program again “in a minute.”

While I understand their reasoning, I think Jesus would disagree. The ends do not always justify the means. How we treat people, even terrorist suspects, says lot about who we are.

I was reminded of this recently when I came across a fascinating TED talk given by Bryan Stevenson, the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a non-profit organization headquartered in Montgomery, AL. The Equal Justice Initiative provides legal representation to defendants and prisoners who have been denied fair treatment in the legal system, particularly those whose trials were marked by racial bias or prosecutorial misconduct. They work with communities that have been marginalized by poverty and discouraged by unequal treatment, and they assist advocates and policymakers in the vitally important work of reforming the criminal justice system.

In his TED talk, Stephenson said, “We won’t be judged by our [technology and] design. We won’t be judged by our intellect and reason. Ultimately, you judge the character of a society, not by how they treat their rich and the powerful and the privileged, but by how they treat the poor, the condemned, the incarcerated. Because it’s in that nexus that we actually begin to understand truly profound things about who we are.”

I think Jesus would agree.

So, who are we? What kind of people do we hope to become?

See you in church,  
*Andrew*