

June 3, 2020

Dear Friends,

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, we are now in a moment when as a nation we have been reawakened to the ever-present, 500-year long, persistent sin of racism. Moments like these have come before, but often after a short while the nation returns to sleep. I am hoping and praying that we might stay awake, and that concrete change might ensue.

I woke long before dawn this morning, thinking about the peaceful protest in Boston last night (I watched on TV), with the blessed diversity of people standing together in solidarity. So too, I was pondering recent conversations I've had with persons of color and the mixture of deep pain and cautious hope that was shared with me; and conversations with white people who are struggling with how to address certain family members and friends who in their fear of confronting truth are saying and posting terrible things. I was praying about how to respond as your pastor, and what came into my mind was to simply do what pastors do: pray, open the scriptures, and lift up Jesus and his call to stay awake and to follow.

There are two scripture passages that I have been led to share. The first is Lamentations 5:28

My eyes shed streams of water
Over the ruin of my poor people.

I came across these words on Sunday afternoon when I walked from church over to the Brandeis campus and sat for a moment in front of the Holocaust Memorial there. These words are God's words, etched in stone next to the names of concentration camps. God who created each person, God who came up with the idea of diversity, weeps whenever one group of people are pushed into poverty, fitted with a yolk of oppression, targeted for aggression, killed. It was not lost on me that I can walk to this memorial calling me to stay awake and remember the murder of Jews on European soil, and I can easily return to the museum in Watertown calling for the remembrance of the Armenian genocide on Turkish soil; but there is no such place in my vicinity that invites a remembrance of slavery, calling me to stay awake to the ongoing reality of racism evident in the systematic oppression, mass incarceration, and frequent deaths of persons of color on *this* soil.

South Africa has squarely faced Apartheid, gone through a truth and reconciliation process, and a measure of healing has resulted. Rwanda has squarely faced genocide, gone through a truth and reconciliation process, and a measure of healing has resulted. Germany has squarely faced the holocaust leading them to abolish the death penalty in 1949 with the understanding that the state must no longer be involved in any murder; and a measure of healing has resulted. The US, however, never can quite muster up the courage to look squarely at the deep, systemic nature of our Apartheid of people of color, nor our genocide of indigenous people. Let us not be afraid of facing this! A measure of healing and new life can come if we wake up to our disease, if we will endure the pain that comes when the scab is pulled off the festering wound exposing it to the light, if we will address not just symptoms but the root causes. How will we stay awake?

One way we stay awake is by continuing to listen and learn, not looking away. I call your attention to the following list of resources: [Here](#). (Also available on the “Resources” tab of our website). In particular I highly recommend the movie “Just Mercy” that is available for free during the month of June, as it powerfully displays the systemic nature of racism. Also, I lift up “*White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*”. If you are already familiar with this writing, I invite you to read it again noting what is still persistently true over 30 years after its release - 30 years! I, for my part, in an effort to continue to address the racism in my own self, have recently ordered, [How to Be an Anti-Racist](#), by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi on the advice of a colleague, and will be tuning in to “Dear White People” on Netflix on the advice of someone else. If there is a book, podcast, article, film, etc. that you would like to discuss or lift-up, please let me know.

The second passage of scripture I am led to share is Isaiah 9:2-7:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

This is a text of hope. This is what we read each Christmas Eve as we gather to celebrate the incarnation, God coming into the human story in the person of Jesus. Jesus comes for this! Jesus comes to shed light on what has been kept in darkness for too long. Jesus comes to lift the yoke of oppression off tired shoulders. Jesus comes so that with the establishment of justice and righteousness, the war against those who have been trampled will come to an end. And Jesus calls us, members of his body, to share in his work.

I encourage you to engage this hope; and speak it. Still we may have other emotions like fear, or anger, or hurt, or confusion; but let us speak hope. Of course, seriously confronting systemic racism won't be easy or pain free, the cross never is; but we can be assured that Jesus will show up; and when Jesus shows up evil is confronted, hearts are warmed, and healing comes. Speak hope, “It’s going to be OK to really face this, because Jesus will be in it.”

I pray God's blessings upon you in whatever emotions and burdens you are carrying in the moment. I pray that the God who knows your uniqueness will guide you as you choose what to read, watch, and follow; and determine whose council to listen to, and shoulder to lean on. And I pray God's inspiration will be at work within you in the moments you risk speaking - striving to speak truth in love.

May God comfort and strengthen those who are suffering. May the Holy Spirit lead us, the Church, to give bold witness to our shared humanity and to proclaim that God's tears stream not only for those lost in years past in other lands, but also for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others whose deaths go unreported. May God's kingdom of justice and righteousness, for which Jesus lived and died, come on earth; and may we be wide-awake partners in whatever ways Jesus calls us.

Faithfully, Pastor Maehl