



THE BRUTAL SLAYING OF GEORGE FLOYD: A PASTORAL RESPONSE

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Jesus began and ended his ministry with a clarion call to justice. The first time got him thrown out of a synagogue; the second time got him killed.

In Jesus' inaugural sermon at his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus cried,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:16-19).

At first, Jesus got a polite hearing. But once he told the locals that certified outsiders were beloved of God, too, a mob sought to push Jesus to his death from a cliff (Luke 4:29-30). By the grace of God, he escaped, but Jesus persisted in his message of God's radical welcome and justice for all (Luke 11:42).

Then at the end of his ministry, Jesus orchestrated a loud and shocking disruption of the commerce going on in Jerusalem's temple. The fleecing of the poor and exclusion of outsiders, all in the name of God, was intolerable to him (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46; John 2:16). Yes, Jesus died for the sins of the world, but speaking historically, it was his challenge to the entrenched power and privilege of the temple establishment that got him killed.

Now, in the wake of the brutal slaying of George Floyd, a handcuffed, defenseless black man at the hands of callous police officers, I feel Jesus' demand for justice stirring in my soul. I can't imagine someday looking him in the face after staying silent in the face of an outrage like this.

And, of course, what makes Mr. Floyd's tragic death so horrific is that it is one in a seemingly endless string of black people wantonly killed by law enforcement officers sworn to protect them.

Worse still, our black and brown fellow residents, neighbors, colleagues, and family members know that such unjust treatment at the hands of law enforcement and the criminal justice system is the symptom of a much deeper and more pervasive problem: all the ways people of color keep landing at the bottom of the proverbial ladder to the top, from being over-represented in low-paying, dead-end jobs to getting sick and dying from COVID-19 at much higher rates than whites due to greater exposure and lack of access to the best healthcare.

It is sad that the fierce but mostly peaceful protests that erupted in the wake of Mr. Floyd's death have been overshadowed by outbreaks of vandalism and violence. Such ransacking of our inner cities is a tragedy, too, especially when so many minority-owned businesses, along with others, are destroyed and the many honorable, conscientious law enforcement officers are ridiculed and attacked for the sins and excesses of others.

Even so, this outbreak of lawlessness must not be allowed to blind us to the deeper pain and betrayal, hopelessness, and rage of so many people of color in our country. They feel the American dream has left them behind due to educational, economic, and cultural barriers that many of us refuse to acknowledge or address or even see.

So what are we to do as a people of faith in the crucified and risen One? How do we show we hear the anguish of our African-American brothers and sisters and stand with them in their demand for change? How do we bear witness to Jesus' brand of love and justice in a world where our first, deeply inbred impulse is to protect our place and privilege?

For those of us wanting to join Jesus in his quest for justice for all God's children, here are some ways to get started.

- Get educated about what institutional racism is and how it operates. If you find yourself mystified by the outrage and protests erupting in our country, it's time to learn more about the ugly reality of racial inequity.

Toward that end, here are some resources vetted by our church's Racial Equity Task Force:

BOOKS

Dear White Christians

by Jennifer Harvey

https://www.amazon.com/dp/0802872077/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_dp_U_Vh.BDbWEB4TXR

White Fragility

by Robin DiAngelo

https://www.amazon.com/dp/0807047414/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_dp_U_cj.BDb477FX64

PODCASTS

Seeing White — Scene on Radio

Produced by Center for Documentary Studies, Duke University

<https://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/>

VIDEO / FILM

Race: The Power of Illusion

https://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm

The Knollwood library has this CD for members to use; the video can also be viewed via NC Cardinals library resource with a valid library card.

- Attend the next Sunday School class at KBC on "Raising White Kids" (for parents and grandparents). Or take a bag lunch and join in KBC's "Faith in the City" lunch about inequities in our educational system (once these offerings resume in the fall). Or join the next book discussion group sponsored by KBC's All God's Children ministry team. Recent titles explored include *Waking Up White* and *Trouble the Water*.

- Participate in one of the Racial Equity training events our church has offered in the past and will offer again. For one such opportunity on July 9-10, click here:

<https://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/eventReg?oeidk=a07egr74r813533d98d&oseq=&c=&ch=>

- Listen to black leaders give expression to their own plight and pain, rather than defaulting to comfortable and familiar commentators, politicians, and other opinion shapers.

For example, here is a May 31 panel discussion of local black leaders discussing the current crisis:

<https://www.facebook.com/curtis.friday/videos/3002088553201140/>

- Use whatever financial and political capital you have to lobby for fair, just laws and opportunities for all, starting with your own spheres of influence and then working for and voting your political convictions.

Whatever one's political party or persuasion, surely all followers of Jesus long to see this great nation more fully realize its promise of "liberty and justice for all."

- Patronize minority-owned businesses, when possible, as a way of investing capital in black communities.
- Volunteer in a ministry, non-profit, or community group that helps and partners with the underserved such as Kids' Café or the Bolton Food Pantry. This will put a face on the challenges many people of color face in our society.
- Pray for God to turn the violence, tragedy, and pain of recent days into a new opportunity for God's love and justice to flourish in our world (Romans 8:28). As Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Thankfully, I am blessed to belong to a congregation of people far more knowledgeable than I about racial inequities in our community and nation. But I'm learning and growing as I go, challenged first by Jesus and then by his firebrand followers trying to take what Jesus said about justice in his place and time as the Gospel truth for our place and time too.

After all, the Master said, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48). That would be me: I have been given much.

So I am honor-bound by my love for Christ to respond, as best I can, as he would were he here in person during this time of national outrage and crisis.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob".