

May 31, 2020

Jesus wept

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Does my heart break? It is most certainly broken.

Jesus once said, “Blessed are those who weep, for they shall be comforted.” I confess that I feel neither comforted, nor blessed today.

What I do feel is outraged that George Floyd, who was created in the image of God, was treated as less than human, his life snuffed out like an insignificant candle.

What I do feel is heartbroken that yet another black family grieves the needless loss of a loved one, and that the ugly scab of racism in America has been torn off yet again leaving me to wonder if it will ever heal.

What I do feel is weary that the wilderness through which we’ve been wandering just got deeper and more disorienting.

What I do feel is frustrated that the many men and women who serve in law enforcement with integrity and pride will once again be stained by the callous and horrific actions of a few.

What I do feel is hopeless that every time we seem to take one step forward on the road to racial reconciliation, we seem as a nation to take two or three steps back.

What I do feel is impotent, powerless to do much of anything about it. Powerless to make it right. Powerless to protect my brothers and sisters of color. I don’t know what to do.

What I do feel is ashamed that I have used all of that as an excuse to not do more. The prophet Micah wrote, “*The Lord has told you what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God*” but I’ve fallen short. We all, as a Church and as a nation, have fallen short of God’s call to seek justice and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

That’s a knot of emotion that I don’t know how to untangle. And when I’m knotted up like that my

natural instinct is to do something, to jump into action. And I know from conversation with many of you, you’re feeling the same way.

But I believe that the first thing we need to do may not feel like doing much of anything at all. And it’s what we’re doing today. Lamenting. Sitting with our pain and discomfort and confusion, and crying out to God. Crying out for wisdom. Crying out for healing. Crying out for peace. You and I cannot fix what is broken in America today without the transformational power of the Holy Spirit to work in human hearts, including our own.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, a day when the Church around the globe celebrates the power that God has poured into God’s people for the work of God in the world. Without that power our work will be as illuminating as a candle without a flame.

And so today we lament. We give voice to our pain. We give it God. And we ask God for all we need to do, all that God is calling us to do. Lament may not feel like doing anything, but by naming our pain before God, and inviting God into our pain, our pain is transformed into hope, hope that fuels action.

And second, we need to listen. We need to listen to the voices of our black and brown brothers and sisters, even when their words are hard for us to hear. We would accuse a doctor of malpractice who sought to treat a patient without ever bothering to listen to their complaint, let alone who argued that that patient’s experience wasn’t valid. And yet that is exactly what many white Americans have done time and again throughout our nation’s history. We cannot fix what we do not truly understand.

I’ve been convicted by these words from Father Richard Rohr,

“We need both compassionate action and contemplative practice for the spiritual journey. Without action, our spirituality becomes lifeless and bears no authentic fruit. Without contemplation, all our doing comes from ego, even if it looks selfless, and it can cause more harm than good. External behavior must be connected to and supported by spiritual guidance.”

Today we cry out and we listen. And then soon, very soon, we must act, responding to God’s call to do justice and love kindness. Next week in worship we’re

going to hear from a few of our black neighbors and talk about the kinds of steps we can take to make a difference.

A couple of closing thoughts.

Please don't let the news coverage of looting and the destruction of property distract you from the real issue. These few evil opportunists do not represent the majority who are exercising their right to peacefully protest. The fires that are burning are needless and sinful, but the real fire that needs our attention has been burning for hundreds of years in our culture, the fires of injustice.

Parents, please talk to your children about what's happening. Most racists didn't graduate from racist college. They learned their attitudes and biases at home through observation. The same thing is true of disciples of Jesus. If you have teenagers, ask them what they think, how they see things and how faith is calling them to create a new future. And if you have younger children, let me encourage you to read to them and discuss the finest textbook ever written on the topic of prejudice, Dr. Seuss' *Star-Bellied Sneeches*.

Finally, you'll no doubt have noticed that I'm not speaking to you from inside my home today as I usually do. One week ago I never could have imagined that my city would be front page international news, and throughout this week I have struggled to hold onto hope. And so here I am, outside, where just a few months ago the ground around me was frozen and hard as iron. Everything seemed dead. But now? Now life and growth are nearly as thick as the gnats in the air.

I'm outside today because I needed to be reminded that with God nothing is hopeless. The power that brought the earth back to life, the power that resurrected Jesus from the dead, is the same power at work in you and me, and through us into this world that today seems dead in injustice, mistrust and brokenness. And so we live in the hope of new life.

Would you join me now in a time of confession...

Gracious God, we thank you for making one human family of all the peoples of the earth and for creating the marvel of human and cultural diversity. From the bondage of racism that denies the humanity of every human being and the prejudices within us that deny the dignity of those who are oppressed, free us. Forgive those of us who have been silent, who have been content to call ourselves "not racist" but have not actively pursued justice for all. Cleanse our hearts,

heal our cities, empower your churches with your Spirit to work for justice and peace until that day when your Kingdom comes and your will is done on earth as it is in heaven. This we ask in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.