

My siblings in Christ,

I write to you first with a confession that it is only now, following riots, that I am responding to George Floyd's death. On the one hand I could say that I'm tired of responding: Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd. It happens so often that I've run out of words and my words seem to do nothing. I am confessing this because it is my privilege that allows me to be able to claim fatigue and hide behind powerlessness.

But the riots shook me out of this. Rev. Dr. King once said, "A riot is the language of the unheard." Language of the unheard. Today we celebrate Pentecost, that day 2000 years ago when the Holy Spirit descended upon the people enabling them to speak new languages so that everyone could understand each other. It is a day of new languages and listening and understanding. In his speech, King goes on to ask, "What is it that America has failed to hear?"

We have failed to hear a lot. Today on Pentecost, as we survey the destruction of buildings and businesses in Chicago, and cities across this nation, I ask you, what is the Holy Spirit enabling us to hear today?

I hear pain. I hear anger. I hear unrest. I hear grief. I hear frustration. I hear a desire for something different. What do you hear?

I don't always immediately know the next right step. But I do know what the end looks like. Jesus shows us. Over and over again in scripture he talks about the Kingdom of Heaven, which basically flips everything we know on its head. In Matthew he says, "the last shall be first and the first shall be last." Archbishop Desmond Tutu calls this vision God's Dream.

Pentecost is also the day that we remember we all have gifts to give which helps God's Dream come true. When I think about next steps, I think about what would move us closer to God's Dream. I pray that we can all discern our gifts so that we can continue on the way.

May God's peace and justice be with you.
Brittany

PS: I also wanted to share the words of our colleague retired police officer Rev. Jacques Conway. He shared these words with his district this morning.

I can't just sit on the sideline and shake my head in disgust because of what I saw happen to George Floyd nor can I ignore the shameful response from the president of these yet to be United States or the non response of the church, I and others are called to serve. I truly feel torn and saddened for my sisters and brothers, who's swore to serve and protect all persons, yet they are facing both verbal and physical abuse because of the actions of a select few from the very people these officers swore to serve. This I promise is the most troublesome times of their careers. And even before this traffic incident occurred, more law enforcement officers across this country have died by suicide than by the actions of others. I know and have witnessed this reality from the role of a current police chaplain for both Federal and State officers and as a retired officer for a local police department.!

Here we are again dealing with another tragic case of violence against black men and women in America at the hands of those who took an oath to serve and protect. No person of character or common decency can watch the video footage of what police did to George Floyd without being horrified and angry. This current president, however, has done nothing to ease our fears and pains, but instead has advocated violence against protestors, rather than condemning those who caused this murder.

Today it's George Floyd but earlier this month it was Ahmuad Arbery. Others that died at the hands of the police include Breonna Taylor, Botham Jean, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Freddie Gray, LaQuan McDonald and many, many others who's name's and lives were not valued by those who swore to serve and protect.

We must keep remembering their names and honoring their lives. We must keep seeking justice for their families and for the families of those whose tragedies weren't captured on video. How? By fighting to end police brutality, institutional racism, inadequate health care and inequality in our public education system. Moreover, if we walk in privilege, we must not turn a blind eye. We must speak truth to power. This should not be optional. In the life of a true Christian believer, this should be personally mandatory.

In the words of Martin Luther King, "History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appealing silence of the good people".

My sisters and brothers, if your mission and ministry does not include justice for all, quality education for all, access to healthcare, activism and action - change will never come. We will instead find ourselves standing in empty houses of worship following missed opportunities to make a difference in the lives of those our God has called and equipped us to serve. I plea with everyone of you, we can do more together than alone. Our Savior chose twelve servants so that the work and message could be multiplied. Together everyone can achl eve more. Our time under God is now because when Jesus returns, our time is up.

We must find ways to stand in solidarity with our communities both near and far. This incredibly egregious offense continues to be a shocking and painful reminder of how systems are often designed to hurt black and brown people. The current public outcry and protests reflect a loud cry of deep inward pain, anger, and fear. In the words of Martin Luther King, "riots are the language of the unheard." Hurt people often hurt other people. Moreover, this comes on top of hundreds of years of historic and acute trauma upon black and brown communities.

On a personal note, as a long as black men, women and children, those on the margins, the disenfranchised, the rejected, the forgotten, the unprotected, and the poor, who can not breath, I too will not breathe easy. The status quo will never be good. Let each one of us participate in the change we desire and not accept fear and apathy as our reality. Your brother and servant in Christ. Jacques

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