

Trinity Sunday June 7, 2020

In this extraordinary time, in the midst of the ongoing global pandemic and now the racial strife that has been laid bare in our nation with the brutal killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, to name but some of the most recent victims of anti-Black violence, in this extraordinary time, it is fitting, I believe, to spend a few moments listening to the thoughts of our leaders for some guidance and direction. First, our own Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Shannon MacVean-Brown wrote to the congregations in Vermont this week:

The circumstances of the pandemic and the current unrest have brought this nation to a place where we can no longer deny the brokenness of a society that is built on the subjugation and oppression of many while a few control most of the economic wealth. The church must call out this systemic callousness and disregard for the dignity of human beings. We must realize that striving for justice and peace will make us uncomfortable and challenge many to give up their privilege.

In the midst of this brokenness mentioned by our Bishop, it is too easy to be distracted and to lose our focus. Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington D. C., spoke to this matter in her opinion piece published in the *New York Times* this week:

In a crucible moment of life or history, it's important to keep focused on what matters most, lest the moment pass and we miss a transformational opportunity. [The Rev. Dr.] Gayle Fisher-Stewart, an African-American

Episcopal priest [in Washington] who refuses to suffer white-supremacist fools gladly, wrote this week, “I hope the outrage over the continuing abuse and destruction of black lives is as great as the outrage over the president holding a Bible in front of a church.” To that I say, amen. Let’s keep our focus where it belongs.

Finally, I believe that the last word should belong to our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, speaking about the protests in response to the racial violence, he wrote:

It is part of the fabric of American life. But we need not be paralyzed by our past or our present. We are not slaves to fate but people of faith. Our long-term commitment to racial justice and reconciliation is embedded in our identity as baptized followers of Jesus. We will still be doing it when the news cameras are long gone. That work of racial reconciliation and justice – what we know as Becoming Beloved Community – is happening across our Episcopal Church. It is happening in Minnesota and in the Dioceses of Kentucky, Georgia and Atlanta, across America and around the world. That mission matters now more than ever, and it is work that belongs to all of us.

Prayer: Most merciful God, as we come before you today in worship, may your Word enlighten our hearts and strengthen our faith, that we may carry out your mission of racial reconciliation; this we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend.

I certainly cannot imagine that if you have listened to my sermons in past years on Trinity Sunday, or even if you know that I have a certain fondness for some of the more obscure points of Christian teaching, that of course, I do find it important to preach about the meaning of the Trinity for our faith. I believe that this is perhaps even more urgently the case this year, as in just the first half of 2020 we've seen a once in a lifetime event like the coronavirus pandemic and now we are witnessing a greater degree of civil unrest and social protest than we have since the turbulent decade of the 1960s. But like I said, this is all in a compressed time frame and has occurred just in a matter of a few months. First, of course, the pandemic necessitated great changes in all of our lives in order to flatten the curve and keep as many healthy as possible, and thank God, we saw incredible leadership and responsibility from almost all our citizens. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, there is still the unimaginable toll of over 100,000 of our neighbors dead and the deep, widespread economic devastation left in the wake of this global pandemic. As the pandemic runs its course in our nation, we saw the deep racial disparities in our health care system, with Latino, African American and especially Native Americans dying at rates often twice that of the white community, and as I mentioned last week, that even holds true for Vermont as well. This inequality in our healthcare system is then very much related to the other events dominating our headlines, the civil unrest unleashed by the death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department, a judicial murder carried out callously, but caught on camera,

that seems to sum up the complaints of a great majority of our African American sisters and brothers about their treatment by white society. But the question for us, for you and me, today is, how does our understanding of God as the Holy Trinity have anything to say to us and our world about these great challenges of 2020?

Many of you have heard me say in years past that the best definition I know of the divine Trinity was developed by Prof. Christopher Morse of Union Theological Seminary in New York City (and he was my advisor too!). Professor Morse wrote, the Trinity is one being with another in a spirit of love and freedom. One being with another in a spirit of love and freedom. This is who God is for us: there is the unity, one with another in a mutual spirit, and there is the three-ness of the fullness of divinity. But most deeply, there is a relationship, a relatedness at the heart, at the very depth of the divine; the character of the one who calls all existence into being is to be related, to be drawn together in that spirit of love and freedom. God brings all creation into this relationship, and the creation account of the Hebrew Scriptures gives a special sense of humanity's distinctive character in that we are created in the image and likeness of the divine, which indicates to me that the relatedness of divine being, the call to bring all together in that spirit of love and freedom, that is what we are called to be at our core as well; this is how we best reflect and bring to the fore the divine within ourselves. Indeed, Jesus tells us to come together in the unity of God, and to love one another and share that spirit of love. This is the Trinity in action; and this is what I

see happening in our nation today. As the African American community has spoken out strongly against the injustices and inequalities they face daily in our nation, and as white people and others have heard and responded to this call, it seems to me as if in the tragedy of George Floyd's anguished plea, "Please, I can't breathe!" Together we are taking a collective breath to find the ways in which such a brutal murder will not take place again. Already the judicial system is ensuring that there is real and swift accountability for law enforcement, and there is a greater awareness of absolute necessity for our nation to live up to our ideals of "liberty and justice for all."

Change, of course will not come quickly, certainly not quickly enough to satisfy the urgent pleas of our younger generation, but the four century history of enslavement and discrimination based on white supremacy is beginning to change, and in the words of the old Sam Cooke song, "I know a change is gonna come." I am hopeful, even in the midst of all the unrest, chaos and confusion, I am hopeful that we are seeing in the change that is coming that the divine image and likeness that we bear, that we can gather together, one with another, in a spirit of love and freedom, is the direction in which God now guides us, opening up our eyes to become the ones God has created us to be. As the voices of the oppressed are heard, as the more and more in our nation are aware that all should be safe and valued, that yes, black lives matter, as we hear that plaintive cry, just as important now as the plea of George Floyd in his dying agony, the change will come as hearts and souls are opened up to that divine image, as we gather on with another in

that spirit of God's love and freedom. This means, of course, dismantling the systemic structures of white supremacy, it means that we must continue and expand the legislative and regulatory changes that still continue to bring inequality to our country on the basis of race. But, as I said, I am hopeful because I hear that the cries from the streets are being met in some cases by a thoughtful response in our government: for example, our Governor, Phil Scott, made a statement on Monday that is a call to action here in the Green Mountain State to work to ending systemic racism in our state agencies, and as Gov. Scott said, this racism is a virus that infects our state as well and is just as deadly as the pandemic we face, and therefore, as the governor put it, words are not enough, we must take action.

Our faith, a faith the God is the Holy Trinity, that God Almighty our creator and redeemer, draws us into this divine relationship of love and in that love frees us to stand one with another in the fulness of life. As our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminds us, this work, God's mission for the Church, is to keep praying and working toward racial reconciliation, seeking the Beloved Community, as Dr. King envisioned it, becoming a Beloved Community in that spirit of divine love and freedom. Perhaps the words of the apostle Paul, words imprinted in the Bible the President waved for the photographers and TV camera crews, but left unsaid, these words are a fitting conclusion for our meditations on the depth of faith that God so graciously gives us in revealing that the death of divine life is the Trinitarian relationship of love and freedom: "Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree

with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Amen.