

Scripture:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-18

2 Corinthians 13:11

Matthew 28:16-20

I Can't Breathe

I can't breathe, I can't breathe, please, please, please help me I can't breathe a black man pleads for his life as a white police officer kneels on his neck all his body weight crushing this man with his knee while he leans in, his hand his pocket. Other police officers standing by listening to his desperate pleas, ignoring the pleas from other bystanders to release him. Even after the cries of George Floyd stop the officers continue to restrain a non-responsive body until the paramedics come and pronounce him dead.

I can't breathe I can't breathe, I can't breathe

Those words written on the masks of protestors covering their mouths, symbolizing how black people have been silenced for all their lives.

Numerous times in the nights following the endless broadcasting of these images a song woke me - let the fires of your justice burn has raced through my mind every time I have watched an explosive protest.

My heart shall sing of the day you bring let the fires of your justice burn, wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near and the world is about to turn.

One of the reasons that song has haunted me is because on the night we recorded it for pentecost worship last week we had a brief conversation about how appropriate it was for the time but it was Thursday night and the protests were just beginning and I hadn't really watched much about this story yet and we thought maybe the words to the final verse were just a little too harsh and so because we are trying to keep things short and timely we decided we would take it out but when the song was being recorded I accidentally started to sing that last verse and suddenly it felt like I was supposed to sing it so I kept going- something spoke to me in that moment so we left it in. For days following I was so glad the verse was there because I do believe that the nations are raging and only God's mercy can deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp. The saving word that our forebears heard 'til the spear and rod can be crushed by God - who is turning the world around."

Every time I see a protest I feel I am witnessing the movement of the spirit of justice taking place. The violence, the rampage, the burning cities breaks my heart but the killing of black people because they just don't hold the same status as the white ones is crushing lives and souls, that is what is truly heartbreaking. Martin Luther King Jr. said "rioting is the language of the unheard." The fires of justice are burning, its like on this pentecost Sunday God said to the world no I mean it I will come with a mighty wind and sweep with my spirit of justice into all the nations. I have listened to many black commentators and interviews in the last week and each one of them says. We've tried the peaceful protest. Adele Halliday a United Church of Canada

general council staff person wrote “And now, I’m beyond fed up. Some of us have been demanding action for a very long time. The time for subtle changes is over. It’s time for a revolution against relentless racial oppression.”

I was being awoken in the last week but the moment that got me off the seat of observer to protestor was when I saw the photo of the one who represents the empire cause a riot so he could stand in front of a boarded up church with a bible in his hand. My blood boils as I see that picture in my head even in this moment. How dare someone hold that sacred scripture up like a weapon of empire. If you are to open that book and read it you will know that God is always on the side of the oppressed. If you took a moment to read those scriptures and if you were to follow the Jesus within them you would know that Jesus would be kneeling along side those protestors offering them food and drink nourishment for their bodies and souls.

I chose to read the passage from Ecclesiastes today because it was the scripture highlighted in the memorial service of George Floyd. For everything there is a season. I have read that scripture at many a service, I hold that scripture dear for many reasons and today I hear it again and I agree that for everything there is a season. This is the season for the world to turn. This is the season for us to acknowledge the systemic racism in North America. Not just the United States of America but in Canada too in fact across the world. It is so easy for us Canadians to say I am glad we are not like those Americans (of which I am half by the way). But we have the same history. Look at our stats they are not better. We have a brutal history of residential schools, of Japanese internment camps, and blacks making much less economically than non-racialize Canadians. Perhaps it is true that we have done more work on reconciliation and that is clear to me when I go to conferences in the U.S. and yet today videos of racial injustice in Canada are coming forward in droves.

Some of you will know that I am married to a Filipino or you might say someone who would fall in the category of a brown person, he also happens to be a former police officer in the Philippines and so I have had a very good teacher sitting beside me in the last couple weeks. I sat down with him the other day and I said I have to speak up, I have to preach about this - do you agree? He nodded his head, and so I said what do people need to know? What do we white people need to know about being a person of colour. He didn’t have to pause. He said the good news is we are all getting educated. People of every race are becoming educated and what we are learning is it’s not our fault. He went on to say in the Philippines we call it colonialism. I said yes I know about that and he said well its not just history it is all we have known. It is so deep within us that we are less than the white man that we believe it ourselves. He continued “you know how when I approach a white person at work or someone who may have a bit more authority than me I always call them sir or ma’am.” “Yes” I said I see all filipinos do that. He said that is because I have to acknowledge they are ‘over me.’ It is polite but when I do that there is always a bit of... That’s why I love my boss. The first time I called him sir he said ‘no sir.’ It means a lot to him that his white boss sometimes calls him sir. In those moments he feels equal. I have watched for 11 years how inequality can be represented in a store, at the boarder, even with friends who think they are not racist. It’s systemic it’s all we know.

I have two other Chinese friends that I have heard from in the last weeks about their experiences of racism in Canada. My friend Trixie a born and raise Chinese Canadian was stopped in the streets of Vancouver in May. A young white male harassed her with sexual comments and racial slurs when she tried to ignore him he spit in her face. She has started the movement “Health not Hate” you can look it up online. Another friend of mine who lives here in Squamish shared that before he goes into Nesters or Save On Food he sits in his car, and prepares himself with the comeback he will give if he receives a racial comment. He has more than once been told he brought covid to this country even though he is a born and raised Canadian.

So what is my point? Is this just propoganda? You can see it how you may but how I see it is God calls upon all of us to speak against injustice and speak up for the oppressed. Our black and brown brothers and sisters and calling out for help today and it is time for us to do our part in causing this world to turn. Paul calls out in Corinthians “Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.” Matthew says “go and make disciples of all nations” Jesus says know I am with you always.

Dear friends in the name of the father, son and holy spirit, creator, redeemer, sustainer, God, source of love, loves power, in the name of justice and love we pray that the kingdom of God will come here on earth so that as Martin Luther preached in 1963 "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.”

If you wonder where God is in this God is in the call for justice, God is in the call for equality, God is in the call for love. God is walking along side every mourning, desperate soul crying out I can't breathe. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr said “he who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.” Everyone of us has a different form of protest, everyone of us has a different call on our lives but today I want to remind us that God is not a God for just those who are like us. My prayer for each one of us is that we will see our black and brown brothers and sisters through the eyes of God today. Loved and cherished beyond compare.

My soul cries out.