

FIRST LESSON: Micah 6:8-9
SECOND LESSON: Galatians 5: 22-26
June 7, 2020

“Walking in the Spirit”
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

I got caught in a storm this week. I was walking the dogs when the skies opened. Wet I could handle. It was hot. But then it began to thunder. Where there's thunder, there's lightening. Then the winds started to whip up. I found shelter, and fortunately for me Blessing was home and she jumped in the car and came to rescue us. Being caught outside in a severe thunderstorm can be alarming. But what do we do when our entire society is in a massive storm? What we **want** to do is seek shelter. What we **want** to do is go inside and hide. But there are some storms we should not hide from. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

We have seen a black man killed by the police in plain sight of all. It was filmed. It's not the first time. And how many murders have taken place that are not filmed? As of right now there is no official centralized reporting system of police brutality. When it comes to cases in which people are killed by the police, 99% of the time the officers involved suffer no consequences. If you're unarmed and African American, the chances of being killed is 2 ½ times that of whites. That's the average. In some states it's worse. In Minnesota, African Americans are 4 times more likely to die. In Utah they are over 9 times more likely to be killed. The system is broken. But despite the obvious injustices, racism is woven throughout our culture to such an extent the majority still have a hard time seeing it. It has become background noise. But when it is the experience of every black man in America to at some point in their lives be stopped by the police for no reason whatsoever other than they are black, we have a problem. Most white people do not even know this. **Every black person does.**

And of all scriptures for the lectionary to choose right now—it gives me the fruit of the Spirit! Seriously God? Our society is a bit lacking in the fruit of the Spirit right now, although there have been some striking examples of grace in the chaos. Unity and support have emerged in the midst of tear gas and fire. A man opened his home to perfect strangers, all peaceful protesters driven from the White House with flash bombs and tear gas. They were young people of every race. He used up all his milk helping them wash the tear gas out of their eyes, and then the neighbors brought more to the back door. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control. It was manifest in that home that night. By way of contrast the fruit we tend to come up with on our own a lot of the time is discord, division and hostility.

While our nation looks like it's at the breaking point I believe we can survive this. I believe truth and justice and love can prevail, but it will take all

of us. As Christians we need to demonstrate the nature of Christ for the world. We need to do what Jesus would do. We need to respond how Jesus would respond. And while we know for a fact that Jesus did not advocate violence and would not support looting and arson, neither was he passive in the face of evil. Jesus spoke out. Jesus confronted those in power. Jesus is with those who protest, because **God is ALWAYS, ALWAYS on the side of the oppressed.**

Saint Francis prayed, “Lord make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.” We have the daunting job of bringing peace into a world in which a man can die in full view of others because a police officer knelt on his neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. We have been called to work for peace while streets burn. But if we want to bring peace, we must strive for justice. In the bible, peace is far more than the end of fighting. Peace is the presence of wholeness. We may think that it is quite impossible for us to be a channel of God’s peace in the situation we are in, but I remember the words of Jesus who said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16: 33) Christ is the source of our peace. And the cross is the answer to the sin ravaging our world. The cross is the answer to racism. Paul writes, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Racism is a sin that must be crucified on the cross. It is a sin for which Christ died.

Speaking as a white person, where do we start? With our own hearts. We have all been raised in a culture steeped in racism. It’s so prevalent we don’t even recognize it. But the Holy Spirit can help us to separate out the subtle biases, assumptions and fears that have formed the backdrop of our lives, and to reject them. Our black sisters and brothers can let us white people know when the words we say unintentionally hurt them because they come out of a racist culture and have become part of our vocabulary. How many of us have said, “I slaved over hot stove,” and not for one minute thought about what that really means? Just as we are learning to make our language more inclusive regarding gender, there are a lot of things we need to re-examine and remove from our speech around race. Even standards of beauty are based upon a white European model. I have spoken to more than one beautiful young woman who has tried to lighten her skin with bleaching agents. This is a travesty. But the radical thing about the body of Christ is that race and ethnicity are irrelevant. Social status and income have no place among us. One of the earliest bishops—a significant leader in the church—was a slave. Wherever we find in our hearts a shred of fear or rejection of “the other” for no other reason than that person is different from us, we need to recognize it, name it, and bring it to the cross.

This is going to be a long journey. It’s taken 400 years to get where we are. And yes, things have improved, but we are still far from home. There is urgency in the air right now because those who have been wronged finally have the attention of the majority. They tried everything else. They tried the legal way, the polite way, the persuasive way, the nice way, but until things were on fire, nobody paid attention. And they’re well and truly done apologizing for their existence. They are over it. And on the other hand, there are a lot of well-

intentioned white people for whom all of this is a shock. A woman said to me this week, “I have never in my life been afraid of a police officer, but my brothers and sisters are, and with good reason.” And as a pastor I’m caught between people who are bleeding emotionally because of all the damage done to them who rightly want relief now, and others who are just beginning to realize there’s a problem. The problem is we have been living in silos separated from one another. We don’t know one another’s experiences. We don’t know what it is like to BE the other. It is hard to walk in one another’s shoes. It is hard to see beyond the brokenness and recognize our common humanity.

Paul says, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” To walk is not to just go for a little wander around. We’re not talking about a stroll here. This word, *sticheo* in Greek, is a very deliberate form of walking. It’s organized walking. It’s walking with a plan. While it is impossible to dismantle racism overnight, we can’t go back to business as usual. We need to actively work for changes in the law and in how it is enforced. We need to question the poverty and disparity in our society. *It’s not hard to find!* Just visit Lamberton High School on the Philadelphia side and Lower Merion High School on the Main Line and you’ll think you’ve arrived on a different planet! But above all else what will really make a difference in this nation, is for us to build relationships with people who are different from ourselves, to break down those silos. And when caught in an absolute storm of conflict, the Spirit can give us the grace, energy, wisdom and fruit we need to move forward together, because racism is actually even more than a sin. Racial bias is actually heresy. It is completely opposed to the Christian faith because we are denying that another person is made in the image of God. We have to take the knowledge that each and every one of us is precious in God’s sight and made in God’s image, and proclaim it in our words, and in our actions. We have to walk the walk. This hour must not pass without giving birth to real change. Amen.

Micah 6:8-9

8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

Galatians 5: 22-25

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. **24** Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **25** Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. **26** Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.