

From the Pastor's Desk

June 4, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the pastor and spiritual leader of our faith community, I must confess to my Advent brothers and sisters who are black, brown, or contain more pigmentation in their skin than I do, that I am personally sorry that I have not spoken up and spoken out against the horrendous and egregious act that led to the murder of George Floyd on Monday, May 25.

As of the time of writing this letter, **11 days have passed** and I have not publicly denounced the actions of Officer Derek Chauvin, who killed Mr. Floyd by keeping his knee on his neck for **8 minutes and 46 seconds** (or the three other Minneapolis Police officers who stood by and watched a fellow officer kill another human by asphyxiation.) I cannot imagine the suffering that George Floyd experienced during these last minutes of his life.

I have not spoken one word of condemnation. You would think that after **15,840 minutes** since this horrible murder, I, as a servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, would have had sufficient time to gather my thoughts in order to say something (anything) . . . but I have remained publicly silent.

I am ashamed of my silence, because in my silence I have remained just as complicit as the 3 police officers who stood by and watched George Floyd be murdered by a public servant who had supposedly taken an oath to protect and serve all members of the community.

So, once again I apologize to my Advent brothers and sisters of color. For, as your pastor, I have let you down in the very moment that you needed me the most. I have remained silent when you have needed me to speak up. I have stood by passively on the sideline, when you needed me to exhibit a modicum of courage to step out and stand beside you. I am sorry and I ask for your forgiveness.

As the pastor and spiritual leader of our faith community, I confess to my Advent brothers and sisters who are white, that I am personally sorry that I have not spoken up and spoken out against the horrendous and egregious act that led to the murder of George Floyd on Monday, May 25. I have not led by example. I have not embodied the Gospel of Jesus Christ that commands us to do more than say prayerful phrases like “We ask your guidance in creating spaces for helpful conversations around the issue of racism.” This is a well-written, politically correct prayer but we are beyond that now.

It is time for action. It is time to hold our public leaders and elected officials accountable. It is time to no longer accept the excuses of a few “bad apples.” It is time to no longer be satisfied with any excuses, whatever they may be. To borrow a phrase from Martin Luther King, Jr., it is now “Time to Break the Silence.”

More importantly, it is time for us, as Advent Lutheran, to return to our roots and to remember our DNA as a mission congregation. From the very beginning we have been a community of Christians engaged in the fight for social justice and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a leader in this movement. ***We all know this.*** This is who we are.

I know many of you have been waiting and wondering when, or if, I, as your pastor, would find my voice, speak out without reservation, and publicly take a stand on social justice issues that the Gospel is crystal clear on. How many passages of Scripture do I need to exegete to know that Jesus is opposed to racism and white supremacy?

I did not intend for this letter to be a declaration, but that is what it has morphed into.

Today, as your pastor, I am unapologetically committed to stand with you and to use the authority I have been given as a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ to speak out publicly at all times against all forms of injustice and to work diligently to create a world that begins to look more like the reign of God that Jesus spoke about.

By the waters of baptism, we all share in this communal call ***to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.*** So, I ask each of you to join me and to hold me accountable to my commitment and to encourage me to walk with you into those places where I would much prefer to remain silent and stay on the sideline.

Surrounded by thousands of others, I marched with my 17 year old daughter (and several other youth from Advent) at the protest in uptown Charlotte on Tuesday. As we marched together, with our signs held up and our voices chanting together the names of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, I wondered what new names we will be saying this time next week or the week after but most assuredly soon. (I am a realist and at the same time I am hopeful. I guess that makes me a hopeful realist.) However, it was an important reminder that striving for justice and peace in all the earth is not a sprint, but a marathon.

As the body of Christ in the world, we will continue to work toward what God has accomplished in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus is our peace. Through the cross and in his flesh he has broken down the dividing wall and put to death the hostility between all people and created in himself a new humanity (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Your brother in Christ,

Pastor Ward