

June 12th, 2020

Dear All,

As protests continue, coronavirus cases climb, and the stock market is plunged back into uncertainty, I've been thrown back on some fairly central, foundational things. First to say, unequivocally, that the Church, when it is true to itself and to its Lord, is always on the side of the oppressed, the vulnerable, and the victimized. This means that we cannot finally put any stock in our security or satisfaction, because in this world those are zero-sum games, where to keep my own is to deny someone else's. Better to seek it for those who do not have it, and so discover my own wrapped up in theirs; by which point I care more for them than for myself, and can offer my own back to the One who gave it in the first place. That is the miracle of grace, and the mystery of love.

Second, despite our best intentions, there is nothing we can do to fix or otherwise resolve our situation, whether of racism specifically or mortality more broadly. Yet there is much work for us to do. The Gospel of Christ is one of reconciliation, but this is costly: it entails our own vulnerability to one another and to God, starting by telling the truth about the injuries we have caused, the injuries we have benefited from, and the injuries we are implicated in; then the hard work of asking forgiveness, and pursuing that Justice that makes mercy possible -- which is to say, God's justice, a justice that creates a future rather than merely controlling fear. Much of the pain is in the impossibility of evasion, the impossibility of a return to "life as normal" (normal is the problem, not the solution!). And yet this is precisely where the Gospel enters: not to make possible a miraculous escape, but to sow life in the midst of death -- death not just in the spiritual sense either, but in the very literal sense, on which much of our world, its wealth, and even its peace is built.

Of course where the rubber meets the road is not in the opinion pages or the blogosphere, but in your heart and mine, in our own relationships with our friends and families, at work, and right here at St. Mark's. It's in this light that I'm inviting you all to two upcoming events. **First, a panel discussion at 5pm on Monday night, June 15**, put together by the Episcopal seminary at Sewanee, the University of the South. [Click here to register](#): it's free, and the panelists are wonderful -- clergy and scholars among them, including the Rt. Rev'd Carlye Hughes, bishop of Newark. They'll talk about racism in their own specific contexts, and in the Episcopal Church more broadly. **Second, a parish-wide Zoom conversation at 7pm on Tuesday June 16**; see The Weekly Lion email for a link, or email the Church office to get one. This will be a chance to debrief not just from the panel the night before, but to engage with one another in a guided conversation about race, white privilege, and our own context here at St. Mark's.

I hope as many people as possible will join us for both events; if you can only make one, please try to make it for the parish conversation on Tuesday. The only way we can do this productively is for as many people to be present as possible -- and to be present in patience and humility, ready to listen and to learn. We'll send another reminder, with some guidelines for conversation, in a further e-blast before the events.

With love and prayers--

Yours faithfully,

Fr. Blake+