

Devotion: June 3, 2020

I have to confess, the last few days have left me speechless, or if you're writing, wordless. So let me offer a word from our Bishop from today's conference mailing.

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" -Micah 6.8

As the world continues to deal with the impact of the Coronavirus, we find ourselves facing the reality of another virus that has impacted our lives and societies, damaging our souls for far too long - the virus of racism.

The tragic killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis is yet another horrendous chapter in the injustice and system of racism that exists in our culture and remains unresolved. The cries for justice and change are ultimately not in response to this most recent event, but to the reality of the virus of racism left unchecked for centuries!

I pray with those who protest this injustice peacefully as they demand change. I am moved by the witness of law enforcement and other community leaders who are committed to justice and change, as they join the protests in spirit and action. I fervently pray that agendas not aligned to the protests seeking change in our reality of racism will lose their foothold.

I must confess that I feel overwhelmed and inadequate in how to respond and even to lead in the times we are experiencing. My spirit is heavy, and my soul mourns. Yet I know this - I must lead in the injustice of racism. I must acknowledge my privilege, confess that at times I have been complicit in racism and say enough is enough; our God calls us to a different way.

I commit to increasing my efforts against the virus of racism and I call on every follower of Jesus Christ in the Upper New York Conference of the United Methodist Church to do the same. The change we need is deep, it is systemic. We must continue to work diligently to change the systems that allow racism to continue.

Within the Upper New York Conference we have been calling one another to do the work of "Imagining No Racism." I am deeply appreciative of the work and leadership provided by the Upper New York Conference Committee on Religion and Race for the resources they have developed and the ways they seek to equip us. I urge all of us to engage those resources and begin to lead the way in destroying the virus of racism. There can no longer be excuses for why this is not our work to do. I join several of my colleague Bishops in recommending that every white leader, clergy, and lay purchase and read the book: *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2018) by Robin DiAngelo. Not just to accomplish reading a book, but to be better equipped to lead the church in eliminating racism.

As the Church of Jesus Christ, we must also respond to a call to repentance within our own lives regarding racism and issue that call throughout the land in the name of Jesus Christ. Racism is sin! It is sin that perpetuates injustice. It is sin that maintains systems of oppression. The only solution to the reality of sin is a heart, mind, spirit and life transformed by the person of Jesus Christ! In these days, as the Church of Jesus Christ, let us make sure our allegiance is to the

Gospel of Jesus Christ and nothing else. It is only the truth of the Gospel and the person of Jesus that fully drives out darkness, changes hearts, heals wounds, and sets us free!

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr once said, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that". The love of God through Jesus the Christ is the answer and it's our call to boldly offer Jesus to the world around us. As we celebrate Pentecost, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit has equipped and empowered us to be witnesses of the transforming truth and reality of Jesus. Our world needs the Church of Jesus Christ to boldly live our mission in word, action and deed.

May I say yes! May you say yes! May we say yes!

Grace and Peace,

Bishop Mark J. Webb