

Justice...Please, please, I can't breathe!

Pastor Edward Conway, D.Min.

Introduction

The violence against people of color has stunned the nation. The deaths of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, Breonna Taylor shot dead in her own home by three white police officers in Kentucky, and Eric Garner choke hold by police in 2014 reveal the systemic violence against African Americans. Frequently, videos are posted, like Christian Cooper in Central Park, NY, where the police are called on people of color. In 2019, African Americans made up 13% of the population yet represented 25% of victims killed by police.

George Floyd was a person with a faith in Christ and a heart to serve. He said, "be the change you want to see" (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/may/george-floyd-ministry-houston-third-ward-church.html>). The video of his death screams out for justice. The video footage shows Floyd cuffed, body face down on the street, with a white police officer's knee pressed into his neck. The officer keeps his knee on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes while Floyd is begging for his life, "My stomach hurts. My neck hurts. Some water. Please, please, please, I can't breathe. Please, man... momma, momma, I'm through". The officer Derek Chauvin has been fired and arrested for murder. Three other officers have been fired. Floyd's death has unleashed a wave of sorrow, anger, and demands for justice across the U.S.

Reflection and Response

1. Pray – We pray for God's comfort for the family and loved ones of George Floyd; for justice (Rom 12: 9-21).
2. Affirm – We affirm that every person is made in the image of God, "imago dei". On the last day of creation, God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). (cf. Romans 3:22-23; Gal 3:28-29; Rev 5:9-10; 7:9-12)
3. Motivation – Our motivation flows from the character and goodness of God. "He has told you, O man, 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?" "The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern" (Proverbs 29:7; cf. 21:3 Jam 1:27).
4. Action - In the Gospels as well as Acts, we see Christians ministering to the poor and marginalized, even challenging societal structures that weigh down upon them (Matt 9:35-38; Luke 10:25-37; Acts 3-4; 5:12-16). In the Old Testament, God instructed the Israelites to care for the foreigner and alien (Lev 19:34). They were to extend grace and acceptance regardless of race or nationality (Deut 1:16-17; 10:19; 23:7; Jer 22:3).

Challenge

In our post-Christian culture, many including government officials view the church as "non-essential" to the functioning of our communities. Frequently, the church is viewed as the source of social problems even as corrosive, divisive, and the source of injustice. We have a unique opportunity to expand the Kingdom of God, but it starts with a heart transformed by Jesus Christ – our heart and behavior should reflect God's heart and values (Phil 2:1-18).

Watch this video (link below) featuring four local pastors who share about themselves and their own experiences of racism in Massachusetts. Reflect upon and answer the following questions: "What is racism?" "I want to work toward racial justice; where do I start?" "As Christians, what are some of the things we have evidently MISSED in scripture that would challenge our current posture of inaction and encourage us with a new posture?" "What training in anti-racism should white parents give their white children?" "How does our individualistic society shape the way we think, the way we view scripture, the way we understand racism?" "Have I properly grieved, as a first step? Have I loved my neighbor? Have I told the whole truth?" <https://www.facebook.com/nscbchurch/videos/243605206933232/>

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from the Birmingham Jail