

## ***“Hand in Hand One Day”***

Genesis 2:4b-7, Psalm 8, Matthew 28:16-20

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On Tuesday I went to the clergy march in Minneapolis. We had been invited by the Black church leaders of the Twin cities. Many of us had been waiting for our cue, and so hundreds came. The march began at the place of George Floyd’s death—38<sup>th</sup> and Chicago. There was a circle of flowers with notes, stuffed animals, and protest signs.

As a sign of support, the white clergy were to follow the lead of the black church leaders of the community. It was a silent march. No rousing speeches or prayers or cheers or chants. No songs. There was an overwhelming presence of deep grief and helplessness. The Spirit garbled, bent, slain. I went hoping for guidance...for spiritual direction.

It was stifling hot, muggy. The air didn’t move. Nothing seemed to be moving. Just weary, tired leaders walking, heads down, a few words exchanged with those who knew each other. The silence spoke volumes. The silence of masked religious leaders with the wind knocked out of them; six feet apart, marching a funeral dirge with no second line.

One thing was loud and clear though: Our black leaders are tired. A fatigue beyond what any words can express. Tired of trying to lead us to justice, tired of baring the weight of racism and towing the rope to systemic change; tired of asking and pleading and begging for us to see and understand. They are tired of burying another of their sons and daughters...dying on the pavement, a knee to their neck, calling out for their mother.

George died calling out to his dead mother. Scared. Asking for breath. The one gift only God can give being smothered out by a system that I was always told was there to protect us. And now all of that is split open, bleeding, suffocating truth. One question that I for the first time find myself asking because it never occurred to me until

Tuesday at the march, walking behind the clergy of the black community: Who has their back? Who has their back???

White clergy came to march behind them, but if those black and brown brothers and sisters turn around a week from now, a month from now...will we be there? Time and time again has shown we will not. We show up and drift away. We listen, but will we stay for the hard work that must be done? We stay at the sidelines safe, compliant; for now at the television. We might cry, we might listen in over dinner, we might even pray...but at the end of the day our Black Brothers and Sisters are mostly left alone to deal with a system that doesn’t have their back...a system so entwined with racism that it’s hard to read. We’re protected by a system created to protect slave owners and colonizers.

It continues to protect our property today—keeping us safe and entitled. Our cities racial divide between home ownership is one of the greatest in the nation. Its crude, it’s crass, it’s not even close to the world Jesus had taught us to believe in and work for.

Today’s scripture is the great commission. Disciples are sent to spread the love of God to the world...no nation is to be excluded from the Good news. One translation tells us to *obey* Christ’s commandments: to love one another. The other tells us to *teach* it. Whether we are *obeying* or *teaching*; it doesn’t matter. I believe it still leads us into the streets. It still leads us into the fight. It still begs us to join together. Love is not a passive thing. Now we are asked to prove it. Because in the past, we’ve shown we aren’t always to be trusted.

I went back to that spot where George Floyd breathed his last on Thursday after watching the funeral on TV. I had to gain more clarity as to where the spirit leads us from here. I don’t want to leave my colleagues to fend for themselves again.

The MN Conference has confessed in at least two Zoom meetings that I've attended that they have not done the hard work of creating relationships with our Black communities of faith. When crisis erupts, these hard truths come; we don't know how to support each other because there is no relationship to support. The relationships aren't there. We aren't the only ones. This was strikingly apparent to me at the Minneapolis clergy march which had clergy from more denominations and affiliations than I could count—plus rabbis and Imams and Eastern Orthodox priests.

2000 years later, the truth of God's love and goodness, has gone to every nation and every neighborhood: black, brown, golden, white. Now what? We each hold that truth. My faith is founded on it. Now where does it lead us? In this case it lead me back to the heart of the beast. I went on Thursday and so did Rev. Jesse Jackson. Showing up unannounced to speak to a young mixed crowd: black, white, brown, every shade, every texture...we were there. Fists up, flowers spilled like a carpet. We said his name "George Floyd!" over and over as if it might be forgotten. There were signs and an overflowing box of letters to the family. A bowl shaped like hands full of little woven trinkets that read: You matter. Reminding us all: What we do matters. If we listen, let them know we are listening. Write letters to the paper, protest, put up signs, sign petitions, do trainings, send donations, do art and post it. It might not matter to you, but it does matter to those on the ground with a knee to their throat...and to the black clergy leading the march and the communities they serve.

After the clergy march, a woman from the neighborhood came up to me. She wanted to know which church I served. I said: The United Church of Christ in New Brighton. We talked only a very brief moment, but she asked again. "What church do you serve?" It was important to her that we showed up—that some church out there in the burbs cares.

So when those clergy turn around a week or month from now, how will we let them and their communities know we are still there? How will we tell them, "here we are!" The church; the gathered body, possibly still six feet apart, but together. We are still here—bringing about the goodness of God and God's creation intended for you and me, and us all. When the riots cease and the protests and the national guard go home, what then? Systems will tumble, systems and nations will fall, police departments will be disassembled and reassembled, and buildings burned will be rebuilt, but God's love is eternal. It cannot fail. It breathes in you and me and no knee can knock it out forever.

Echoing the words of Al Sharpton, I have to believe that when George was calling to his mother it was because he saw her coming. And because of this we can be assured there is a love that is stronger than this hate...it was put into this world at the beginning of time as creation emerged from the darkness and Jesus came to remind us it's here for us all. Psalm 8 reminds us that creation was intended to be good for us all from the very beginning as God breathed that first breath of life into us.

So as our black brothers and sister continue to cry for some relief; for someone or something out there to have their back. Let us raise a fist and feel the wind of God's breath upon us and in us: pushing us, pulling us together. It's going to take more than one visit, more than one march, more than a speech, but that is the nature of God's love—it's relentless. That's the true nature of the Spirit never ceasing—always moving, breathing, shaking us in the stillness of a hot spring day. Even in the silence, if we listen, it's there asking us to join together—*We shall Overcome; we shall walk hand in hand*: today we stand behind you so that one day we can stand together. One day we will sing together in a city and nation better than this one, but for now let us sing...from each living room, neighborhood, and kitchen:

(Amy sings first verse)

*We shall overcome, we shall overcome,  
We shall overcome some day;  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some  
day.*

*We'll go hand in hand, we'll go hand in hand,  
We'll go hand in hand, some day;  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we'll go hand in hand  
some day.*

*We are not afraid, we are not afraid,  
We are not afraid today;  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we are not afraid today.*



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