

**2 Pentecost  
June 14, 2020**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

This is the Second Sunday of the season after the Feast of Pentecost. This season of Pentecost runs from now until the last Sunday in November which begins Advent. Roman Catholics call this season "Ordinary Time" ... "ordinary" as in ordered, but also as "normal."

There is nothing "ordinary" or "normal" about the time in which we are living. A global pandemic ... massive unemployment and economic distress ... and the protests of racial inequality and injustice following the killing of George Floyd.

The people of St. Cyprian's have responded well to the COVID-19 crisis. From what I hear from you, most people are remaining in their homes except for necessary trips to the grocery store, doctors appointments, and pharmacy. When in public, you are wearing masks, sometimes gloves ... and/or using hand sanitizer and washing hands often ... and you have been keeping social distance. So far, we have been fortunate and no one in the congregation has tested positive for COVID-19. From all I can gather the people of St. Cyprian's are being responsible and staying safe during this health crisis.

You have also been very generous in your support of those ... inside and outside the congregation ... who are feeling the economic consequences of the COVID-19 shutdown. At the Ecumenical Food Pantry we are providing groceries and other items to families living with food insecurity, and we continue to provide meals to the area homeless through Dining With Dignity. Through the Vicar's Discretionary Fund I have been able to assist people with utility, rent payments, and medical expenses. I appreciate the generosity of all those who have contributed to help those most vulnerable during this shutdown.

The COVID-19 crisis and its economic effects are major issues for the world to face. However, we are now facing another major issue in our society and politics ... the racial inequality and injustice of systemic racism brought into our acute awareness by the killing of George Floyd.

The presenting issues are not new. Racial inequality and injustice long precede our history as a nation. While there has been social change over the four centuries since enslaved Africans arrived in America, the underlying reality of racial disparity and discrimination in our society and institutions persists. Every social metric bears that out, whether one looks at educational opportunity; wealth distribution; employment; access to healthcare, housing, and food; poverty demographics; or incarceration rates. We can allow ourselves to be distracted by details and how to interpret them, but the reality is clear. There is a huge disparity between the lives of

white people and people of color in this country. And, the issue is much larger than can be fixed with Band-Aid solutions. It is systemic ... and we are part of the system.

This week I had to drill a hole in the floor of the church to access some wires. The dust from the drill smelled like turpentine ... the floor is made of old growth heart pine ... and it is 120 years old. This church was built as a consequence of Jim Crow segregation policies over a century ago. That pungent scent of fresh cut pine from a board that is 120 years old is no different from the systemic racism that has been a part of this society, this Southern culture, and the racial politics of this city for much too long. We, who now occupy this sacred space, have a holy responsibility to not only be stewards of the building, but to carry forth the pilgrimage that this time is calling us to.

In spite of all the anti-racism and social justice trainings I have participated in, it is in moments like these, when the hurt, resentment, anger, and expectation that we can be a better society, break the surface, and are demonstrated in widespread protest, that I am most vulnerable to looking at myself and taking a more honest account of my own role and responsibility as a citizen and a Christian. For me, as a person of considerable privilege ... racial, social, economic, intellectual, and vocational ... it is a soul-searching task. For all who are white, privilege means rarely if ever having to consider the color of their skin in the varied experiences of daily life.

St. Cyprian's is one of the oldest Black Episcopal churches in the state of Florida. Although this present congregation is mostly white, we owe our existence to the blood, sweat, and tears ... and the faith ... of those who preceded us in this holy place. I believe that this church ... and this congregation ... is being called in this time of social unrest ... to address systemic racism ... inside our own walls, in this neighborhood of Lincolnville, in our City of St. Augustine, and in our state and nation. What that will look like .... how we will address this critical issue ... I'm really not sure. However, it has to begin by recognizing the what, when, and how of systemic racism ... then we can own our responsibility ... and then begin to look for options to address the extraordinary social, political, and economic changes that will be required to move to a place of racial equality and reconciliation.

Because I am one of those in a vulnerable population to COVID-19 ... 76 years old. and living with two auto-immune diseases ... I have chosen not to protest because of social distancing ... as much as I would like to be on the front line. However, I'm talking about more than just an hour-long protest and go home. My concern is how we as a community of faith can address our role in making a lasting difference in the lives of those around us who are people of color. Black lives matter. Yes, all lives matter, but right now our focus is on the disparity between white privilege and black scarcity.

St. Cyprian's was founded in the 1890s by black people who were not allowed to worship in the white Episcopal church on the Plaza. This church building was a product of the generosity of a white woman who purchased the land and materials to construct it. The labor was contributed by black workers who were employed to build the white resort hotels in St. Augustine. They gave their skill, energy, and sweat ... and their passion, faith and souls ... to make this church ...

St. Cyprian's ... a safe, holy and sacred space for people who were discriminated against in their daily existence.

These 120 year-old walls hold the joys and tears ... the laughter and angry words ... the warmth of close relationships, and the pain of the loss of loved ones. These are not just beautiful wood walls. They have absorbed the spirit of every person who has entered this space ... and the Spirit of the divine presence of God from all the soulful prayers of the faithful in this holy vessel. The world outside for most of those black people over the past century and more has been troubling in many aspects. St. Cyprian's was a safe place to encounter the holy.

To many and perhaps most people of privilege, the mention of racism elicits a defensive reaction. The notion that a society is racist, wherein one race possesses privileges that another does not, falls on the ear as an unwelcome self-judgement, though not necessarily unwarranted. When I share a reflection of my own personal struggle ... for example ... I am struck by how much energy is focused, in some replies, on self-justification or defense and abdicating responsibility for change. Of course, I am at one level quite sympathetic to that, as I know how hard it is to look in the mirror, especially as a white privileged male. For people of privilege, such a reflection often induces guilt.

The power of evil wants the privileged to be hobbled by guilt. It knows how readily guilt can result in denial and avoidance, or lead to self-defense, deflection, and projection. Jesus challenges and encourages us, however, to ask how we might use our privilege to effect change. He asks how can we employ those same things that the power of evil would use to separate us from one another, to bring us together. By his own words and the example of his life, he challenges us to use our positions of privilege, whatever they may be, to advocate for, quite literally to join voices with, those whose voices are not heard ... to balance the scales of justice ... to level the playing field of opportunity ... to equalize access to services and resources ... and to make what is probable for a few to be possible for all. By the prayer that he taught us, Jesus appeals to us to make on earth the kingdom of heaven. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done."

The model that Jesus gave us is that of sacrifice. In the Eucharistic Prayer we ask that we might join with Jesus in his sacrifice. We offer to give ourselves back to God, over and over again, that God might receive us and do a new and more holy thing with us. That is what sacrifice means: to make holy, from the Latin *sacer* (holy, sacred) and *facere* (to make). Our self-sacrificial gift requires a willingness to change, to become new, to be made holy that the God alive in each of us, as God was alive in Jesus might be working through us, and the world might be made new.

And so, we must ask God and one another how we can use all that we have been privileged with ... voice and audience ... resources and intellect ... creativity and authority and power ... to make the changes God is dreaming of for the world. Just as the power of evil will do all it can to persuade us to defend our privilege, God will relentlessly challenge us to spend it on behalf of God's beloved, those who are without exception or exclusion included in God's grace ... especially those most vulnerable. God calls us to demonstrate without ceasing the love that

lifts all to the same plane, and to protest, to testify publicly, by what we say and what we do, to the same love that defines everyone as God's treasured and beloved child.

In all that you do, be encouraged by the example of Jesus and inspired by God's own spirit of holiness to lift up your voice, roll up your sleeves, and give yourself to the new thing that God is always doing. Pray that this moment of racial awareness and responsive social change might be fertile and not futile, and that we, as agents of God's justice and mercy, might be bold and not belligerent, peaceful and not polarizing, vital and not violent, and humbly willing to march in the other's shoes.

I have much, much more to say about this ... about the promises we make in our Baptismal Covenant ... about becoming a beloved community ... about the work we have in front of us. But, I want to end with first a statement made by the Right Reverend Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis, and then with a prayer.

Bishop Baskerville-Burrows is the granddaughter of Shinnecock Indians on one side and sharecropping descendants of slaves on the other. She made these remarks in a virtual meeting of canons and bishops of the church on June 8.

"For whatever reason, talking about race, building bridges, having friendship groups that looked the like Benetton ads of the 1980s has been my lot for over 40 years. And I'm tired because I've spent my life pushing away and unlearning the messages that whites and black can't be real family and friends, but too many white folks won't do the work of unlearning those same messages. I'm tired of the burden white supremacy places on me and the black and brown people I love. I'm tired of black folks bearing the symptoms of white sickness. This exhaustion is not two weeks old or global pandemic old. Black and brown people spend our lives learning to live with the exhaustion of white supremacy as a survival mechanism...

"Now is the time for acting. For doing the work of unlearning bias against black and brown people. Our everyday choices from where we buy groceries, to what we read, to how we adorn our sanctuaries, to where our money goes, to how we vote all add up. It all adds up to a world where people and systems are activated to value and support all of God's children no matter what they look like or where they come from and every choice moves us a little closer to God's dream. Not just the American dream—God's dream. So let's get to work, church. The time is now. Thank you.

Let us pray.

Loving God, in Jesus you were bullied, beaten, and killed. You are always on the side of those whose souls or bodies are mistreated. While I cannot be present with my body at the protests right now, I stand with all those who stand up for justice. Uphold them. Keep them safe. Grant us courage to stand beside all who are harmed by the violence of racism with our bodies, and in our prayers. Give us the words to speak out for those whose breath has been taken away.

Enkindle in our hearts the fire of your love that together we might end the plague of racism that has infected our nation. Amen.

Amen.