

**4 Easter
April 25, 2021**

**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.**

**BLACK LIVES MATTER!
BLACK LIVES DO MATTER!**

Along with countless others across our country and around the world, we waited through the trial of Derek Chauvin for a judgment by a jury of his peers on his culpability in the murder of George Floyd. As has been affirmed by their verdict, the nine and a half minutes during which he knelt on George Floyd's neck constituted an act of murder. While it is important to remember that the actions of one police officer do not define the thousands of dedicated and responsible law enforcement officials who risk their lives daily carrying out with integrity their vocation to protect and serve, it is also essential that we recognize how this verdict speaks to a history of inequality, oppression, and fear ... and four hundred years of systemic racism.

It is not lost on me ... an old, White, male ... that I am standing in the pulpit of an historically Black Church. A pulpit that was made by Black people ... for Black people ... when they could not worship at the White church downtown because of Jim Crow racial segregation. I asked myself, if I were a Black preacher ... preaching to a Black congregation ... would I preach on the Good Shepherd we heard about in our Gospel reading this morning ... or would I preach about the conviction of a White police officer who murdered an unarmed Black man? The answer to my own question is that this morning I feel obligated to speak to this stunning event, and try to put it into the context of our faith.

Among Dr. King's many compelling words are these, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." For me, this is not a time to be silent ... I believe silence at this point is complicity ... it is an acceptance of the status quo ... of things as they always have been ... including systemic racism. We must all stand with the family of Mr. Floyd ... and the families of so many others before, and so many after ... and, say, "Stop! Stop! STOP!" This is not a time to be silent, yet I wonder how many preacher are giving a sermon about Jesus the Good Shepherd without ever mentioning ... or even thinking about ... the Derek Chauvin conviction. How many churches of all denominations will avoid the subject? How many will just be silent?

**The fact is: BLACK LIVES MATTER!
 BLACK LIVES DO MATTER!**

To all those who quibble about the use of the phrase **Black Lives Matter** ... who want to say "All Lives Matter," or "Blue Lives Matter." Yes, these statements are all true. But **Black Lives**

Matter does not mean that Black lives matter to the detriment, or negation, or denial of other lives. It means that Black lives *do matter* ... because for four centuries in this country, those lives have not mattered.

The many cases of White police officers killing unarmed Black men ... and women ... with impunity has been broken with the verdict in this case. At least once, and for the first time, a White officer has been held accountable for killing an unarmed Black person. But it has not stopped the killing ... Daunte Wright just a few miles from where Derek Chauvin was being tried ... Ma'Khia Bryant in Columbus, Ohio ... Andrew Brown in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. The circumstances are certainly different, but the results are the same ... a Black person is dead. The same question remains ... will there be accountability.

However, accountability and justice are not the same. These shootings are the horrific end of four hundred years of racism in this country, which has minimized the value of Black lives. That systemic racism has caused huge inequities in education, opportunities, health, and wealth. The reason this congregation ... a predominately White congregation ... is worshipping in this space is a consequence of systemic racism in this small city of St. Augustine.

In the 1960s, local Civil Rights demonstrations attracted national attention that affected the city's tourism ... especially the plans to celebrate St. Augustine's 400th Anniversary. Yes, Civil Rights demonstrations in our city brought about an end to a US Senate filibuster, and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Accommodations Act. Nevertheless, the White power base in St. Augustine was still the White power base, and they let the Blacks know it. The Black college on West King Street had to move out of town. Lincolnville residents could not get loans to fix up their homes. Black people could not find jobs, so they moved out of town. By the beginning of the 1990s there were only a few elderly Black women as leaders in this church.

Then, in the late 1990s, Trinity Parish offered help to St. Cyprian's by sending assistant clergy to officiate at services ... Pastor Deena Galantowicz was one of those clergy. This building was renovated, and the congregation grew and included more White people. However, in 2006 there was a schism in the church leaving a tiny remnant in this place ... mostly White. Today, St. Cyprian's is predominately White, not because we are White racists, yet it is a consequence of the racism in the history of this city.

Ironically, Trinity Parish, which came to our aid in the 1990s, had historically made Blacks unwelcomed for over a century ... sometimes passively, but sometimes overtly and intentionally. It was because Blacks did not feel welcomed at Trinity that St. Cyprian's was formed in 1893. Also ... again ironically ... St. Cyprian's became Trinity's racial safety-valve. As long as Blacks could worship at St. Cyprian's they didn't have to ... nor would they want to ... worship at Trinity. So Trinity Parish's support of St. Cyprian's was motivated by at least a smidgen of racism. We who now occupy this sacred space inherited it from our Black sisters and brothers who came before us, and we owe their legacy more than just a few words.

I believe that almost everyone here has participated in the systemic racism of this nation in one way or another ... even if we don't recognize or acknowledge it. I know I have. It is my personal awareness of that participation that fuels my passion about this issue. Some of you have heard parts of this story before, however, I think it is worth repeating.

In 1952 ... when I was just 8 ... my family moved from suburban Long Island, New York to a 46 acre farm outside of Charlotte. My father worked for DuPont selling synthetic textile fibers, had been promoted to be District Manager of the North Carolina office. My mother, who grew up in the south, wanted an idyllic setting to raise five children ... with another on the way ... and convinced my father to try farming in addition to his corporate position.

So, this urbane New York family moved into this rural Southern culture ... which included a Jim Crow mindset. Our new home was the largest house in this crossroads community, and my mother was obviously going to need some domestic help. Just a few hundred yards away was a gas station/general store. My father asked the proprietor, Mr. Jones, for help in finding a maid. Mr. Jones knew of a woman who was available, but he said to my father, "You don't pay her any more than \$18 dollars a week, because we don't pay THEM any more than \$18 a week."

So Jean ... and her three children, and her mother ... moved into a tenant house on our property. The tenant house had a front room and two bedrooms. A kitchen had been built off the back of the house. The house had a hand pump well in the front, and an outhouse in the back. In the kitchen was a wood-fired cook-stove that slanted unevenly since the footing for the kitchen addition had crumbled. The cakes that Ellie ... Jean's mother ... baked all came out lopsided.

Let's see ... \$18 a week and free housing in 1952. The \$18 in 1952 would be worth today about \$180. If Jean only worked 40 hours a week, in today's currency it would come out to be \$4.50 per hour.

However, Jean didn't just work 40 hours a week. She cleaned the house, bathed the babies, washed the clothes and hung them on the clothesline, milked the cows, fed the pigs, wrung the necks of the chickens, and cooked our dinners. From dawn to dusk ... every day except Sunday.

I was just 8 years old. I didn't understand that this was wrong. It was wrong for Jean and her family. But, it was wrong for the entire society ... it was wrong that this was the accepted culture. It was wrong that Jean's children started school ... in racially segregated schools ... a month before the White children started school. This was because the Black children could get off several weeks later in the fall to pick cotton with their parents.

I know I'm not responsible for the racism of the culture I lived with, but I nonetheless participated in it. And for years ... well into my adult life ... I just accepted it as the way things were. Well, the way things were should never have been ... and they shouldn't be that way

today. And now I am old and wise enough to open my eyes and acknowledge what was right in front of my eyes all along.

To be silent is to be complicit ... even if that silence is through passive neglect. We do not have to be bigoted, prejudiced, biased, discriminatory, or narrow-minded to have participated in this systemic racism, but, regardless of how we participated, we are still responsible for its consequences.

BLACK LIVES MATTER! It is time to proclaim that loudly and clearly. Not in just words, but in the actions all of us can take. **BLACK LIVES DO MATTER!**

For those who have lost confidence in our justice system, or whose sense of security in law enforcement has long been compromised, the judgment arrived at by the jury in Minneapolis offers ... if not a beacon ... at least a glimmer of hope. It allows all of us to imagine anew that efforts toward reform are both possible and worthwhile.

Nevertheless, my hope is for much more than just police reform. I hope that we recognize and address the deep consequences of systemic racism ... in all the institutions that we rely upon.

We speak of hope as a light because it illuminates a way forward. Its value, therefore, can be measured in our willingness to take the next steps in becoming what God dreams for us to be ... to be just ... to be merciful ... to be reconciled to one another and to God ... to become a beloved community ... to become a light to enlighten the nations ... to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers ... indeed, that is what we proclaim as the body of Christ. True hope ... whether a glimmer or a beacon ... illuminates truths about ourselves as well as it defines a path forward for us.

So, let us wade into the troubled waters. There is no escape from these issues. There is no place to hide. There is no world where we can live, learn, fall in and out of love, other than the one we inhabit. We must get about the work of living in a world that too often devalues Black lives ... and devalues the lives of all people of color. There have been and will be times when that disregard will stun us into silence ... just think of the killing of Blacks by police since the Derek Chauvin judgement came down. In these moments, we may be able to lift only half-coherent prayers and laments to God ... but we must lift them nonetheless.

It is our prayer and our responsibility to embrace hope and all that it reveals about who we are now and where God is calling us to go, especially as regards our own racial self-awareness and the systemic racism of which we are a part. It is up to us whether this and any hope simply shows us who we are or leads us to the image in which God created us ... whether it moves us from mere emotions and feelings to compelling action.

The hope we have received reveals that there is hard and important work before us. I have confidence that, with the companionship, inspiration, and encouragement of these committed

persons, organizations, institutions ... and even our government ... there is much we can and will do. May that hope continue to light our way.

As I said earlier, it is not lost on me ... an old, White, male ... that I am standing in the pulpit of an historically Black Church. A pulpit that was made by Black people ... for Black people ... when they could not worship at the White church downtown. In many respects, I have no right to be here ... but I am. And, since I am in this pulpit I feel it is my responsibility ... my sacred obligation ... to proclaim that **BLACK LIVES MATTER!** We inherited this sacred space from our Black sisters and brothers who came before us, and we owe their legacy more than just a few words. I don't know yet what it may look like, but let's get to work.

Derek Chauvin was found guilty of taking the breath away from George Floyd. The verdict in his trial has allowed people ... especially Black people ... to breathe easier ... and to breathe in a spirit of hope. In Hebrew, the word for "breath" also means "spirit," and "wind." May God's Breath and Spirit of Hope sustain us all.

BLACK LIVES MATTER!

Amen.