

August 30

Racist Policy, Not People (Freed From: Personal Attacks - Freed For: Anti-racist Systems)

Scripture: Matthew 25:34-40 Mary Johnston, Reader

“34Then the Lord will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Creator, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40And the Lord will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

In the past three weeks of this sermon series “Living Liberty: A Christian Call out of Racism,” we have discussed being created by God in freedom so that we most fully reflect God in our living. We have talked about being freed from living an expectation too small for us, and being freed for exploring many and various ways to live out God’s love in relationships with one another. We have spoken to the multiplicity of God’s creation being the model from which we are all freed from conforming to binary concepts such as right/wrong, male/female, light/dark, and are freed for living within a fuller spectrum of being, discovering and learning from one another, while creatively participating with God to expand all that is. Last week we spoke to the importance of language itself, and how we use it to frame the realities we live in. Intentionally choosing our language to shape what we see and experience frees us from passively conforming to the status quo, and frees us for creating new stories, with multiple realities for acting in ways that promote abundance of life all around us.

Having taken the time to explore these theological frames for claiming our identities within creation, we now have some language and processes for stepping out into the world, making decisions, and living out who we are called to be. As the outcome of God’s creativity in the world, we ARE the Divine in our relationships with one another. We are the incarnation of God’s multiplicity, God’s compassion and mercy, and God’s unbounded grace and forgiveness. Accepting all of creation as good, we are called to nurture and protect, preserve and respect, all that is. Acting in this way is not a political agenda, it is a theological calling. We are acting in faith that being loved beyond our wildest imaginations frees us to love in response. We don’t love our neighbors because our culture pressures us to, but because it is a response to God’s love for us. In this response, we are freed from our fears and resentments, and freed for loving others, through building networks of policies and programs that treat one another, and the world, with acceptance, respect, and care.

In a letter written by Dierdre Bagley, President of Lutheran Volunteer Core, to her colleagues in Minneapolis after the killing of George Floyd on May 25, we can hear our callings to reach out in this response to God’s love. She writes,

Social justice is personal. It is my life, lived out today, with you. It is what you and I say to each other, how we say it, what we do to each other, and how we do it, how we take care of each other, and how we don’t. On a larger scale, being personal simply means it is George Floyd’s life, lived out until this

week, with you and I as his caretakers, the laws both formal and unwritten for his protection. It is what we said to him, how we said it; what we did to him, and how we did it. It is how we took care of George Floyd, and how we didn't. How we will take care of tomorrow's George Floyd, and how we won't. This is as personal as social justice gets. ... our experience should not be what it's like to work for social justice, but what it's like to need it.

We were not there for George Floyd, or for the many others who have been sacrificed to our apathy toward the inequalities of our systems and institutions. And, often in response to the pain, we blame each other, pointing fingers, instead of embracing the hard work of confession and restoration. We are being called in these times, as the disciples were called in theirs, to stand up and live into the identities God has given us, not the cultural or nationalistic labels we throw at one another. In this calling, we are freed from blame and personal attacks that destroy our communities and are freed for the tearing down of exclusive policies, while beginning new, more collaborative, networks that allow us to grow together.

Walking in faith, with our Christian values and beliefs framing our activity, is our response to God's love and our stewardship for the earth. Each of us following differing paths, but all paths, within the arc of justice and peace. We are being called to see and name our complacency toward the injustices in our world, and to do the work to repair the harm and help prepare new ways forward. Dismantling White Supremacy is our responsibility and our Christian calling out of racism, and there are many and various ways we can step into this calling, both individually and through community. Because we are the ones in control of the institutions that got us to this point, we are the ones responsible for breaking them open.

Ibram Kendi, in his book *How to be an Antiracist*, gives us some suggestions for taking these steps. The first step is recognizing racial inequality as a problem of bad policy, not bad people. To move forward together, we cannot inflict personal shame or blame, but rather work to investigate and uncover the racist policies that cause racial inequality, while inventing antiracist policy that can eliminate it.

Let us work together, with God, and with one another, to live out of the liberty in which we are created to build an abundant life for all. Kendi writes, "...if we ignore the odds and fight to create an antiracist world, then we give humanity a chance to one day survive, a chance to live in communion, a chance to be forever free." (pg 238)

Amen.