

Pentecost 2020
 May 31, 2020
 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry
 11th Bishop of the Diocese of Michigan
 “I CAN’T BREATHE”

I propose to show that because we who are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit we can no longer allow black and brown sisters and brothers to be hunted and killed, so that those hearing this sermon will see and show to others, the patterns and systems that exist in our communities to justify the killing and disregard for black and brown people.

I can’t breathe, and they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.
 I **can’t** breathe. And they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.
 I can’t **breathe**. And they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit; these two things cannot exist together, they cannot exist together.

George Floyd. Say his name.

We cannot be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and crush the life out of another.
 We cannot tolerate a world, where videos reveal one and we choose to pretend other.

We are either one or the other. Who are we? Good people of the Diocese of Michigan? Who are we?

A beloved colleague said to me, as we discussed the death of George Floyd, “It’s not just one bad police officer, a bad apple gone rogue,” she said with flat affect, “They just hate us.”

Breonna Taylor, an EMT, asleep in her own bed, shot and killed by police, who entered her house, looking for someone who did not live there.

Ahmaud Arbery, hunted like prey and murdered by two white men while he was simply out jogging.

Remember **Botham Jean**, he was a 26 year old accountant for Price, Waterhouse, Coopers. He lived in Dallas. In September of 2018 a Dallas policewoman came home after a long shift, entered Botham Jean’s apartment, thought it was her apartment, pulled out her gun and shot him immediately, because she thought he was a burglar. She was in his apartment. He was killed in his own home just for being there.

Laquan McDonald—shot 17 times by police in Chicago as he was walking away from them, holding a penknife.

I could keep going, but perhaps I’ve gone too far, perhaps now you’re inclined to no longer be listening, because you’ve heard it before, or you’re overwhelmed and there’s a

pandemic, you didn't do it, you're not racist, you don't say the N word. You're not a police officer, you don't own a gun, and these are all one-off situations, which in your mind do not form a pattern.

But this is what I know, because that is what I used to believe. This is what I have come to see and understand. White people in our communities and country are treated differently than black or brown people. White people in our communities and country are treated differently than black or brown people.

Said one former parishioner who happens to be African American said, "Oh yes, I am always followed in department stores, I guess the management is trying to make sure I don't steal anything." Said another, "Yup me too, always." Said a priest of this diocese, "I always buy something when I go into a store, even if they don't have what I'm looking for, I don't want to be accused of shoplifting." Are they paranoid, or could it be that it's a pattern and it's real. Could it be white people don't see the grace we are afforded as we move through the world.

We don't see the pattern, because as one columnist said, "It's like asking fish to tell you about water and birds to comment on the air." If you happen to be white, like me, it is very easy to be skeptical of such injustices, because they do not reflect the world in which I live. How can this be? How can the world be so very different for me?

But then we see: A knee on a neck. Then we hear: "I cannot breathe."

It becomes very clear.
And it takes my breath away.
And I cannot breathe.

They were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Then there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house. Divided tongues as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability, (Acts 2:2-4).

That day has come. That day is here. That day is now.

In a spark, in a moment, on that festival day, humanity is reborn.

Culture, class, religion, nationality and race, it all lapsed, ceased to matter, in that time in that moment, as they hear each other speak in their own language and they understood, they understand. The barriers, the walls, the deep wells of misunderstanding recede and suddenly the sacred fact that each and every one of us is made in God's Holy image is undeniable. It is irrefutable. It is fact.

On that Festival day, blest day hallowed forever, With the walls gone, half-baked narratives washed away, replaced with the truth of our humanity, our shared, sacred humanity, breaking the kingdom of death.

Whether you are blond or brown, when we see ourselves, when I see me in you, God in you, God in me, when we see each other as we are, filled with God's Holy spirit, it is then so much harder, to unconsciously or consciously make you other than me, a monster to me.

On that day, when the violent wind of the HOLY SPIRIT blows, bright in the lightness of fire, humanity was reborn, pouring on all human souls infinite riches of God. People were able to see and hear themselves in each other, they understood each other, in that moment, on that festival day.

That is a day hallowed forever, that is a day to which we must now return.

My friends, make no mistake, a violent wind is again blowing through our country. The violence today is real, the anger is out, protest, terror and fear are on the prowl. How we act, how we respond, will determine whether it is a wind of chaos and destruction or one filled with the scouring power of the Holy Spirit, stripping our sins of passivity and complicity.

A scouring wind that will once again as it did ○ so long ago, eviscerate the barriers that blind us to our common humanity, a wind that will fill us so that we will with our money and time support our sons and daughters as they prophesy, we will with our money and time create places for all of young people to have visions and dreams, that we will listen and learn, read, and analyze and begin to connect the dots that create separate and incredibly unequal worlds, so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

May we be the ones that make it so. Join me this Wednesday, June 3 at 7:00 on a Zoom call to take our next steps of change.

Hear what the spirit is saying to God's church.

To READ

"It's natural to wish for life "to just get back to normal" as a pandemic and economic crisis upend everything around us. But we have to remember that for millions of Americans, being treated differently on account of race is tragically, painfully, maddeningly "normal" — whether it's while dealing with the health care system, or interacting with the criminal justice system, or jogging down the street, or just watching birds in a park. "

~Barak Obama

Recognize that in the same way saying "slavery is a necessary evil" (Thomas Jefferson's words) was acceptable by many in 1820, the same way saying "separate but equal" was

acceptable by many in 1940, choosing to not condemn white nationalism, the fact that [black people are 2.7 times as likely to be killed by police than white people](#), the fact that [unarmed black Americans are roughly five times as likely as unarmed white Americans to be shot and killed by a police officer](#), that the fact [the black imprisonment rate for drug offenses is about 5.8 times higher than it is for whites](#), etc are acts of overt racism in 2020.

[75 Things White People can do for Racial Justice](#)