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Joshua 24:1-2a,14-18, Psalm 34:15-22, Ephesians 6:10-20, John 6:56-69

May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen. Psalm 19:14

I wonder how many of you, like me, find yourself facing a dilemma these days? Watching instances of discrimination and violence against non-whites leaves me both angry and distraught. It is tempting to feel discouraged and powerless; after all, what can I do? I am only one person.

As a follower of Jesus, I believe God is calling me to something more. Just look at today's lectionary.

In our first reading we are asked the pointed question "whom will you serve?"

The Gospel implores us to follow Jesus that we might gain eternal life.

While those are both compelling readings, it is the letter to the Ephesians that speaks loudest to me.

Be strong in the Lord... Put on the whole armor of God ... fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace... take the shield of faith ... Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Those are powerful words. Words, I dare venture, have been used to defend, or worse to justify war in the past.

But upon careful inspection you will see that what they are imploring us to do is not fight each other, but to proclaim the gospel of peace!

Shane Claiborne is a peacemaker. In his book *Common Prayer: A Liturgy For Ordinary Radicals* he says this about the gospel of peace:

Peacemaking doesn't mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight, but the pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free. Peacemaking is about being able to recognize in the face of the oppressed our own faces, and in the hands of the oppressors our own hands. *Common Prayer A Liturgy For Ordinary Radicals p 58*

I love this concept. Peacemaking is more than folding our hands in prayer, but it does not require that we subdue the evil one with sword or with rhetoric.

I have experienced many situations in my life when I have faced injustice and been so stunned by its appearance that I have been struck speechless, until many minutes or hours passed and it was too late to really have an impact on the situation.

I was recently in a local physician's office. At one point the doctor started speaking about his son and how the teachers at his son's school spend too much time talking about diversity. How he chose not to live in the city so that he didn't have to deal with that.

At the time, I said nothing in response. But if I followed Shane Claiborne's definition of peacemaking, I could have simply responded that I appreciate the beauty of diversity. I did not need to call him out on his veiled racism, but I also did not need to allow it to go unchecked.

About a month ago I had the privilege of being a deputy at this year's General Convention of The Episcopal Church in Austin Texas. While there, I had a conversation with a fellow deputy from our diocese. We had just attended a hearing on a resolution concerning the opioid crisis in our country and how the church should respond to it.

My fellow deputy shared with me that she was very angry with the church. That "her people" have been victims of opioid abuse for decades and this church has had nothing to say about it, but as soon as it becomes a white, middle to upper class problem, suddenly we have an opinion on it.

My response to her was this - "you have every right to be upset with this church, because you are absolutely correct in that observation."

Wow! Talk about White privilege!! As soon as I heard that come out of my mouth, I wanted to take it back!! Who am I to give her permission to be upset!!!

What I should have said, and what I deeply felt was - 'I never thought of that before - thank you for showing me a side of this situation that I have been blind to.'

I have always thought of myself as progressive and non-racist yet both of these instances demonstrate that I have contributed to the continuation of racism.

Dr Luther Smith Jr., Professor Emeritus of Church and Community at Emory University writes "All of us are responsible for the persistence of racism. The failure to be involved in addressing racism is also to be guilty of perpetuating it." *Living into God's Dream p 4.*

I believe God is calling us, calling **each** of us into beloved community. A community where differences are recognized and valued, not criticized and used to divide. A community where all faiths are honored and

respected, not belittled and judged. A community where civil discourse is practiced with open hearts and open minds. A community where all citizens are treated with dignity, where forgiveness is practiced sincerely, where humility and gratitude are the rule, not the exception. A community that truly loves one another and all of creation.

I hear God's calling to put on the whole armor of God and to act.

The armor that I wear does not consist of chainmail and helmets. I have acquired quite a collection of tee-shirts that declare where I stand on equality, or immigration, on science or human rights. They are great conversation starters and I love to watch the reactions of folks who read them as I walk by. People often stop me and tell me how much they like them, or ask me where I got them!

We often think, there is little we can do when facing a large dilemma. If like me, you have benefitted from white privilege but do not fully understand it, you can begin by educating yourself. I have put together a list of authors who have been instrumental in my rudimentary understanding. I would first and foremost recommend Michael Eric Dyson's [Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon To White America](#).

What else can we do?

We can join a community group that works to dismantle racism or invite people to form a spiritual group. This parish is participating in the Diocesan Learning Community initiative - perhaps this is where God is calling us to go in the future? Let's talk!!

Regardless of what we do, we need to speak with honesty and with love. Our silence is complicity. Our "politeness" is agreement. We do not need not be confrontational, but we must speak up and speak out when those around us make statements that are racist in nature. Being prepared with a response is a good place to start. "Sir, Madame, I disagree. I have learned a great deal about myself and the world by being open to the ideas and faiths and traditions of others."

I want to close today with the words of our beloved Presiding Bishop, The Most Rev. Michael Curry. These words are on one of the most recent additions to my armor.

Death does not have the last word  
Hatred does not have the last word  
Violence does not have the last word  
Bigotry does not have the last word  
Sin, evil do not have the last word  
The last word is God and God is love.

Amen.