

In the mid 1990s, When I was in my 20s, I lived in a charming studio apartment in a lovely renovated house on a very attractive street in a trendy neighborhood of Boston, right across from a public housing project, which is probably why I could afford it. I liked the juxtaposition of upscale comfort and grit. I liked the "diversity." The gunshots and car alarms at night did not really bother me that much. I walked through a pretty rough alley to do my laundry at the laundromat in the middle of the projects, with all the Puerto Rican moms. Some of my friends were a bit nervous for me. I think they may have thought me naïve. I think they may have been right. Eventually I got a washer in my little apartment. And, of course, I never got to know any of my neighbors in the projects. It felt righteous to be so near, but my relationships were in the other direction.

Comfortable white Christians are scared and sad right now. We should be. Because we are failing to love as Christ has commanded us. We talk about it, usually with the best intentions, but we don't do it where it's most needed. We tend not to spend time building relationships with people of color and really listening and learning how we can be allies and let go of our power and privilege for the sake of those relationships and the people we come to love in them.

Of course, Black people are, as always, probably *more* scared and sadder, as well as angry, as they should be. We are seeing a lot of tension between order and chaos in the wake of a particularly brutal police murder of a Black man. It's not new. It's a tension that has existed in western European society for hundreds of years and in the US since our founding. It's written into our Constitution. Black people are scared of police and vigilantes and powerful white society that was built literally on the backs of their ancestors. Everyone is scared by the chaos that sometimes erupts, predictably, from such an unholy situation. Good white Christians don't know what to do, so we give in to control and the cycle of fear and objectification of others continues.

Christians are called by Love to rise above the chaos, not with control and order but with love. Love does not oppress. Love does not destroy. Love does not order or control or murder. Love builds up everyone. The Spirit calls and equips us to share the good news of Love with those who are without hope.

See, we all – all people, all of God's creatures – have been created in the image of God, as an act of ultimate, creative love. God tamed the formless void not with order but with love. What we see as a romantic sense of order in our primeval stories (e.g. Genesis 1:1-2:3) is really just a whole lot of loving respect for proper relationships among God and God's creatures and Creation.

In our sacred stories, we are charged to cherish the goodness of Creation, to be fruitful, to invite people to follow Jesus's Way of Love, to live in peace, and let ourselves and all the earth rest 1/7 of the time. But we tend to focus on filling, subduing and dominating, which also are ideas present in the Creation story as we tell it. We try to dominate and subdue time, space, people, animals, and the earth. If that is the limit of our focus, then we will not experience peace.

The Gospel today features the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:19-20): "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Jesus calls us to gather people all over the world into his teaching, what he has commanded us, which is summed up in the "Great Commandment" (Matthew 22:37-39): "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love has to be our priority – loving God, loving ourselves, and loving our neighbors.

Love like this is the basis for the justice that leads to peace. It has been said that there can be no peace without justice. Chaos will rule without this love. Martin Luther King, Jr., said: "As long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantees of riot prevention." Social justice and progress are the fruits of real Christian love.

Pastor Jonathan Whitfield, Deb Brewer-Cotlar's pastor at Corinthian Baptist Church in Des Moines, was recently quoted saying that "Christians need to come alongside the community that is hurting from all the racist violence and injustice." Pastor Rob Johnson, associate pastor at Corinthian, who organized the vigil last Sunday evening, said, "we all have to listen." We have been talking for years at St. Andrew's of joining the people of Corinthian in worship, to listen and learn, and maybe to begin to develop some community. Maybe it's time to actually do that! And/or can we find organizations led by people of color that we can join up with in a listening, following, and supporting stance?

I have been grateful as a gay man for our supportive, listening straight allies, especially at St. Andrew's, who show up faithfully not just to participate in Pride celebrations, but to help facilitate our presence. I have also been grateful to attend the Ames NAACP banquet the last two winters, and to see hundreds in my mostly white little city gathered in support of our Black leaders. So, I am going to commit to make following and learning from Black leaders in Des Moines a priority for my leadership with St. Andrew's.

But first I'm going to address a more primary failure to love, by taking some sabbath time to tend to my own health and wellbeing. In these months of pandemic, like many clergy and other leaders, I have worked especially hard, neglected to take planned time off, and objectified my body to the detriment of my relationship with God and ability to love and lead others in loving well. Sadly, I have simply been too exhausted to be present in the ways I have felt called to be since the murder of George Floyd. So, I am going to add the time I had planned to take off from my work this spring to my already planned summer vacation, and be off from June 8 through July 13. This timing makes sense given that diocesan and parish leaders do not yet consider it safe to gather in Polk County due to the continuing coronavirus spread. It is a good time for the congregation to focus on socially distanced fellowship, action, and learning that does not require a priest. I look forward to joining efforts to spread God's love with renewed listening and creative energy in July.

In his Letter to the Romans (8:19), Paul writes that "Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." God has given us life in the context of Creation, a

system of love and respect in which we are called to be God's heirs, agents and stewards, made in the image of God to do God's work of nurturing Creation – all of it. Jesus calls us back from our fear and self-interest to experience and reveal this deep, ancient love of God. He calls us to repent from our domination and control and turn back to God's image and likeness and love, to focus on loving God by loving our neighbors as well as ourselves.

This new virus is humbling us and reawakening us to our dependency on God's love and our interdependency with one another. When one selfishly or fearfully chooses not to wear a mask, many may suffer and even die. When one selfishly or fearfully claims power over another's life, many may suffer and die. When one person selfishly or fearfully claims control of the world's resources, and even other peoples' bodies, many suffer and die and even the planet itself may not survive.

So, as we enter into the summer of 2020, I invite you to reflect on how God is particularly calling you to join in God's likeness and God's interest in loving Creation, and with whom Jesus is calling you to build relationship for healing the centuries of oppression with love. You may want to start with some rest and care for yourself, God's beloved child, who is not perfect and is also very good.