

May 28, 2020

Dear Trinity family:

On Tuesday of this week Minneapolis resident George Floyd died a violent death at the hand of a Minneapolis police officer in the course of an arrest. Minneapolis Mayor Frey immediately fired the four officers involved, and yesterday called for the Hennepin County Attorney to file charges against one of the offending officers. Unlike past racially motivated deaths at the hands of police in our city, this one was videoed, in its entirety, and posted everywhere. Those of you who watched the video saw a handcuffed Mr. Floyd pinned to the ground by the officer's knee on the back of his neck. "I can't breathe!" Floyd said repeatedly. The onlookers pled with the officer to stop. And there on 38th Street and Chicago, in a matter of minutes, he suffocated, on camera, as the life drained out of him, and he was still.

I am still processing, and I don't yet have the words. Countless numbers of my clergy colleagues rushed onto social media to remind us all of our baptismal promises and to post photos of themselves at the resulting protest Tuesday night. We do weird things when we don't know what to do. What I did find helpful were the words of our bishop-elect, Craig Loya, who wrote:

I am heartbroken and angry by the cold-hearted murder of George Floyd, a beloved child of God. America in 2020 is the place where black men are regularly murdered by police while they are handcuffed and begging for their lives. This simply does not happen to people who look like me. Not all of us are guilty of committing racist hate crimes, of course, but all of use are culpable in a society that devalues black and brown lives. While it would be easy for me to point the finger at the police officers who have been rightly fired for committing murder, I am privileged in countless ways, known and unknown, but the racist foundation upon which our nation is built. The Way of Jesus is never about fearing and devaluing the other. It is always about giving up ourselves for love of the other. It is about making space in the center for those we have pushed to the margins. It is about receiving the one another across difference as a pure gift and blessing. My job as a Christian leader is always about making space for voices that have been silenced, and repenting of the injustices which I commit, and which are committed on my behalf. I hope you will join me in praying for the repose of George Floyd, for his family and friends. I hope you will join me in lamenting the racism that is alive and well in our church and in our world. And I hope you will call me to account whenever I fail to make space for voices of those who cry "please, please," which is the work Jesus is always engaged in.

What I do know is that it is not okay for us to do and say nothing. It is not enough to worry, and watch, and lament in private. We are good people, with big hearts, a deep desire to be faithful to God and each other, and to be about justice and wellbeing for our communities. If you don't know what to do, google: "what white people can do" and about 50,000 specific and impactful ideas will present themselves. Today I called the Hennepin County Attorney's office ([click here for information](#)) and, as a Hennepin County resident like so many of you, urged the County Attorney to press charges against all the police officers involved in George Floyd's death. Tomorrow I'll find the next thing that I can do and say. Please join me.

The death-by-police incident on Tuesday is laid on top of our already scary and unsettling reality of pandemic. Yesterday the United States surpassed the 100,000 mark of COVID-related deaths. That, along with the reported blue-green algae growing in our city lakes that is making people sick, is sending me over the edge. I think we can now safely say that we're in liminal space on steroids.

Liminal space, you will recall, is a between place, a moment when the world as we know it has gone away and the new reality has not yet presented itself in its fullness. Liminal space, while unnerving and frightening, is a time of unique and significant spiritual richness. Throughout the season of Eastertide, we have been holding our proverbial feet to the spiritual fire – and have stayed focused on exploring, through sermons and conversations, through Adult Forum and writing five hard spiritual truths that present themselves most pervasively in liminal time:

- 1) Life is hard.
- 2) You are not in control.
- 3) You are not that important.
- 4) Your life is not always about you.
- 5) You are going to die.

We've arrived at the final, big momma of all the hard, spiritual truths: "you are going to die." Trinity parishioner and fellow priest Fred Nairn spun a deeply meaningful and poetic sermon on this topic last Sunday. If you missed it, you can find it [here](#), (scroll to the bottom of the page and click "VIEW").

Whenever I think about this hard, spiritual truth, I think about a single, short sentence found in the 4th chapter of the Rule of St. Benedict. In it, Benedict implores his community to, "Keep death daily before your eyes." Or, keep your death always before you. The Rule of St. Benedict was written in the 6th century, at a time the world was unsettled. Rome had long fallen into a succession of invading armies. The economy was in shambles. And the Plague of Justinian was ravaging the city. The people were terrified. And it was into that liminal, chaotic space that Benedict of Nursia, in 516, comprised the Rule, intended for monks living communally under the authority of an abbot. It can also be argued that the Rule was for the rest of the people out in the world, too. This Rule, which includes a daily rhythm of prayer, work, and the singing of the psalter, has been carried down through the centuries, through times of plenty and wellbeing, and during the succession of plagues and calamities to follow. And through the years, the people took comfort in knowing that the monks were voicing laments and petitions to God on their behalf.

The "keep death daily before your eyes" was not intended, I don't believe, to terrify or be morose. I think its intent is to keep our gaze on the bigger picture, a "right ordering" for living. Death is a reality, it reminds us, and that truth has implications for the way we are living our lives right now, each day. If we keep our mortality in our daily purview, it helps us live better and more fully. It helps us make good choices about our time, relationships, and resources so that we can savor the gift of living.

There's a famed story about an exchange between Wendell Berry and Thomas Merton. Berry was asking Merton about the Shakers, who thought the end of the world was coming at any moment and why, even though they thought that, they still built the best furniture and saved seeds to improve the diets for the elderly. They did all of these things for the care of the whole. And Berry said, "I don't understand that." To which Merton responded, "When you think the world is coming to the end there is no hurry. You slow down, and you do the best work for you and your community." When we know our life will, at some point, come to an end, and we keep that truth in front of us, it is a permission, daily, to slow down and do the best work for ourselves, our family, and our community.

I'm also convinced that a healthy and close relationship with our inevitable death breeds, within us, virtue. Throughout his whole life, Jesus was focused entirely on teaching about the presence and power of God's enduring love. God is merciful without reason, he taught repeatedly, so *have mercy* yourselves. If we remember that our lives are going to end, doesn't that make us more compassionate with ourselves and with others? Doesn't it seem like a waste of precious time (if we're paying attention to its limit) not to be generous and merciful? As Sara Miles writes in her fantastic book, *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead*, "Everything Jesus has revealed, through stories and parables, bossy directives and patient touch, remains available to his disciples. He's shown that we have the power not just to feed and heal, forgive and cleanse, but to do these things in new ways that reflect God's nature and give us life. It doesn't take a special kind of person – the selfish and the obtuse are welcome, too. It doesn't take a lot of equipment, or training – little kids can lead. Jesus is still with us, which means we can say *yes* to God's call, without knowing what the outcome will be. We can jump right in, instead of waiting for a committee to authorize our work. We can come and see what God is doing, all over the place, instead of worrying that we're not good enough. We can get over our fear of strangers, free ourselves from superstition, and find sweet streams of mercy in the middle of the driest places. We're not alone."

As Richard Rohr says, "Reality is the greatest ally of God. Reality is that thing that brings us out of the clouds of spirituality and down to the earthiness of spirituality." Maybe that's what "you are going to die" is all about – the sweet message with the sharp edge. It's the reality that brings us down to earth, rearranges our priorities, evokes from us our best and merciful selves, and creates urgency to make good of our finite time on earth. In pandemic, in liminal space, we can no longer operate as if death is not a reality for ourselves and the people we love. It's a fragile truth. Our current liminal space uncovers a fragility that has always been there for us. But that's the nature of liminal space – it strips us bare, and brings us, ultimately, to life.

What's Helping Me Right Now

(written before Tuesday's tragic events in Minneapolis) I spent Memorial Day weekend on the majestic shores of Burntside Lake north of Ely, on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe and Wilderness Area. There has been virtually no rain in that part of the state this spring, so it's dusty and hot and the lake is lower than I've ever seen it. Still, we heard Barred Owls and loons, saw a fox and evidence of a black bear, and marveled at the plethora of blooming yellow marsh marigolds. It's one thing to walk around Lake Harriet. It's another thing to be in the North Woods and to enjoy quiet and the true darkness of night.

I'm now into the classics, having recently finished John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, and now working on Jane Austin's last novel, *Persuasion*. Anyone want to read and then talk about these beauties?

I am baking up a storm, and here's my latest favorite recipe (so easy, but truly the very best version of a traditional cookie): [click for recipe](#). Tosi was featured in the 4th season of the Netflix series "Chef's Table." "Life is too short," she says, "to worry about how many cookies I ate today." I love her.

Blessing

Because this is my last Rector Reflection for the summer, I am aware that the real blessing today is YOU! Thank you for sticking together these past months, for digging in and exploring the hard, spiritual questions of liminal time. Thank you for showing up for Compline and Sunday Zoom

Church and small group gatherings. Thank you for checking in on each other and sending notes and fun mail. Thank you for celebrating our graduating high school seniors. Thank you for the expressions of encouragement and affirmation to the Trinity staff as we attempt to lead with graceful, non-anxious patience. YOU are the blessing. YOU.

Over the summer we'll continue to dig into the spiritual richness of liminal space. And we'll continue to be creative and aware and curious as we, together, explore what it means to follow Jesus in these strange and fraught days. The prayer below is by the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber and can be found here in her weekly blog, "[The Corners](#)".

I do not know when we can gather together again in worship, Lord. So, for now I just ask that:

When I sing along in my kitchen to each song on Stevie Wonder's Songs in The Key of Life album,
that it be counted as praise.

And that when I read the news and my heart tightens in my chest,
may it be counted as a Kyrie.

And that when my eyes brighten in a smile behind my mask as I thank the cashier,
may it be counted as passing the peace.

And that when I water my plants and wash my dishes and take a shower,
may it be counted as remembering my baptism.

And that when the tears come and my shoulders shake and my breathing falters,
may it be counted as prayer.

And that when I stumble upon a Tabitha Brown video and hear her grace and love of you,
may it be counted as a hearing a homily.

And that as I sit at that table in my apartment, and eat one more homemade meal, slowly, joyfully,
with nothing else demanding my time or attention,
may it be counted as communion.

Amen.

Keep the faith. Be watchful, open, curious, and engaged with the needs of other people.
With much love, Devon