

The Divine Comedy:

Notes from Pastor Darryl

June 2020

In a 1967 speech entitled, “*The Other America*,” The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. issued a sentence that many of us have heard before, and may have heard spoken in the public sphere in the last two weeks:

“Riots are the language of the unheard.”

But we may not be so familiar with the question that Dr. King posed immediately after making this statement:

“What is it that America has failed to hear?”

Of course, the question was rhetorical.

Dr. King already had the answer for us:

“For large segments of society, we are more concerned with a false sense of tranquility and protecting the status quo, than we are in hearing the cries for justice, equality, and basic human rights.”

In the wake of the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police officers charged with his protection and to be in his service, there have been peaceful protests around the world asking our society to hear the cries of the unheard. I know many of us have joined the protests either literally with our bodies or symbolically with our spirits.

These protests are nonviolent and peaceful, but they are most certainly assertive in the demand for the end of policies and regulations that excuse the escalation of deadly force by police without provocation or justification, deny the poor a way up and out of poverty, limits access to the basic necessities of clean water and air, a good education and affordable health care to people living in “urban” neighborhoods, and disenfranchises the vote of people of color.

These nonviolent peaceful protests asserting the fundamental truth that Black Lives Matter has drawn thousands across lines of race, gender, age,

orientation, ethnicity, and income level. But as is often the case, peaceful legitimate protests were co-opted by riotous people with less than noble intents who proceeded to commit acts of violence and vandalism to destabilize the protests and confuse the narrative for justice.

We, at KCC, cannot and do not condone the actions of vandals or arsonists or anarchists; nor can we or do we condone the actions of the President, or any elected or community official who employs the use of excessive police or military force in adoration of the false idol named “law and order.”

I noticed something also happened once the first riots began. People used the riots as license to abdicate their moral responsibility to listen to and to advocate for marginalized and oppressed neighbors. People quickly condemned the rioters and just as quickly turned a deaf ear to the cries of people whose inalienable rights of life, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness have been denied them for generations.

I plead with us, Kensington Community Church, not to fall into this false dichotomy. Let us answer our calling to a higher purpose than what the status quo portends.

We, as a people gathered in the name of Christ Jesus, grieve with those whose bodies, minds, and souls have been tormented by systemic racism. We champion the courage of peaceful protesters demanding justice. We stand in solidarity with and add our shouts to their voices seeking human rights and due process of law. We applaud the work of those who turn up to repair our cities following the actions of vandals. We support law enforcement in reforming and amending brutish police tactics. We hold our elected officials accountable for failure to lead and bring people together.

We bear witness to an All-Loving, Always Recreating God who works through good and loving people throughout the course of history. Our aim is to use our prayers and gifts of the Spirit to do some earthly good by living in the heavenly way of Jesus Christ.

We give glory and praise to a God who liberated our forebearers from oppression under Pharaoh and liberated the world from sin in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

We pray to a God who hears the cries of God's children, and we rebuild the Beloved Community guided boldly by the grace and advocacy of the Holy Spirit.

“What has America failed to hear?” Dr. King once asked.

The question raised by Dr. King in 1967 remains valid today.

And now, we add a second equally valid question, “Will we listen this time?”

O merciful God,

open our eyes to see,

open our ears to hear,

open our hands to serve,

open our heart to love,

open our souls to live a life eternal.

This we pray in Christ's Holy Name. Amen.

Be well. Stay Safe. Have Courage. Fear Not. Love often.

Pastor Darryl