

# 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 ten days:

“Riots are the language of the unheard.”

But what many of us are not so familiar with is 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. Our protest is nonviolent and peaceful, but it is 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, criminalizes black and brown lives, 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 depressed neighborhoods, and disenfranchises the vote of people of color in our country.

The peaceful protests drew thousands of diverse people across the lines of race, gender, age, orientation, ethnicity, and income level. But as is often

the unfortunate case, peaceful protests turned riotous and people began to commit acts of violence and vandalism.

I want to be clear: we at KCC do not and cannot condone the actions of any person who turns to violence to make a point. We do not and cannot condone the actions of vandals; nor do we or can we condone the actions of the President, any elected official, or community leader who calls for or employs the use of excessive police or military force in worship of the idol named “law and order.”

We, as a people of faith gathered in the name of Christ Jesus, must stand in solidarity with those being denied their basic human rights as we add our shouts for justice to theirs. We must champion the work of those who have turned up to clean up downtown San Diego and La Mesa in a swift manner following the vandalism – some of our KCC members are these amazing Good Samaritans (thank you!). We must honor the service of our first responders and our justice system, and we must support them in their efforts to amend their policing tactics. We must hold our elected official accountable to govern with fairness and decency.

I ask that you join me in prayer for wisdom and courage for our elected leaders, first responders, protest organizers, and protesters, and to remain grounded in the hope for a better tomorrow.

But ... I also noticed something else happened quite quickly once riots started occurring. The riots gave opportunity for a large segment of society who value tranquility and the status quo to abdicate their responsibility to listen to the marginalized and the oppressed. They stopped listening and started talking. And one cannot do both at the same time. They are quick to condemn the riots but fail to listen in authentic and earnest ways to the cries of the dehumanized who demand their inalienable rights of life, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness.

I plead with us, Kensington Community Church, to refrain from falling into this sinful behavior. We condemn the actions of the rioters and vandals, AND we continue to listen to and respond to the cries of the oppressed. Let us not prioritize tranquility over the existential reality of long-suffering for our neighbors of color. Let us recognize the status quo is not the goal. Our

goal 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 bear witness to an All-Loving, Always Recreating God who works through good and loving people throughout the course of history.

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