

Dear Friends

Our neighbour is in trouble.

The news of a black man suffocated to death by a police officer should be sufficient to let us know that our neighbour is in trouble. The disturbing images of violence and riots in the streets of American cities remind us daily our neighbour is in trouble. The escalating numbers in the reports on the spread of the coronavirus show that even before the events in Minneapolis last week, our neighbour was in trouble.

And when your neighbour is in trouble it is not easy to know what to do. It serves no purpose to point fingers because we have a lot of problems ourselves. But neither should we say that their problems are our problems when there are important differences between our nations and cultures that matter. Many commentators have said that the issues of racism in American society and police violence against the African American community are complicated and that may be a good place to begin.

In the confronting of a complicated social problem, the roots of which are embedded in the creation of the nation itself, it may serve to be reminded of what we know to be true.

No person in the custody of police in a civilized society should be put to death while not resisting arrest nor having even been accused of a violent crime. Let it also be said that there are an abundance of police officers, in every jurisdiction, who routinely carry out their responsibilities with respect and integrity. Identifying and removing those who are incapable of performing their duties is as important in police work as it is in teaching, ministry, or any other profession.

It is true that people who have endured an endless history of injustice, prejudice, and violence are entitled to their anger and will, when provoked, exercise their God given right to assemble and speak truth to power. Peaceful protest and peaceful action are vital and essential rights in democratic societies. It is also true that there will always be those who exploit the moment and without any desire, ambition, or aspiration for peaceful transformation will foment rage, hatred, and destruction. There is no virtue and no righteousness in rioters and looters.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love."

As George Floyd was dying he said, "I can't breathe." Our neighbour is in trouble because they are out of breath. Their vital supply of mercy, understanding, and acceptance is being cut off by a culture of division and a vacuum of moral leadership. They are gasping for a direction forward. So what shall we do?

Love them. Jesus could not be more clear in his teaching than when he said that to love your neighbour is what it means to love God. Reach out to individuals, friends, family members in the United States and tell them we love them and know that they are not alone in their time of trial.

Walk with them. Name the problems we have in our communities and be committed to working for renewal and reconciliation in our nation.

And pray for them. Pray with all your heart that a transformation may take place in the soul of our neighbour. For they are in trouble.

Grace and peace,

Michael