

13th Sunday after Pentecost
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Time

This past Friday, thousands gathered from all over the country for the National Action Network's Commitment March. The march marked the 57th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington and Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech. At least one of our parishioners masked up and attended the rally. Several other parishioners staged an impromptu gathering here on the porch and watched the live stream of the speeches together. The day's events began at the Lincoln Memorial where King's famous speech was delivered. His son Martin Luther King Jr. III and his granddaughter spoke, as did Congress people, community leaders, and ministers—we didn't think it was an accident that some of the most compelling speakers were preachers—and then others, to be followed by statements from families of those who have been killed by police. Family members were then going to lead the march down the National Mall lending mass support to efforts like the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and The George Floyd police Reform Act, among other efforts to combat the triple evils King spoke of—poverty, racism, and violence. It became clear that things were running a little long. There was a band that we initially thought was providing swelling music for speakers as they reached the crescendo of their words, but we quickly understood this was an "Oscar band," playing speakers off, if possible. The time for the march drew near, and organizers sadly realized that not everyone standing on the dais would be able to speak. Relatives of Jacob Blake, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, and Eric Garner, among others, were waiting. How that realization must have thudded against the heart already numb to loss. To lose someone to violence. To be promised a few moments to voice that hurt, that loss, that rage and that sadness, only to be told at the time hadn't been managed. That our system simply hurts so many there isn't time to acknowledge you and your loved ones. In the end, organizers had to apologize and simply acknowledge the family members who would then go on to lead the march. There wasn't time to mourn. There wasn't time to grieve. There isn't time, it seems, for any of us to mourn, to grieve. To grieve for the loss of friends and family, of our country as we knew it, of our schools as we knew them, of our church as we knew it. A friend on Facebook remarked on other matters, "I feel like we need a national week of mourning where nobody works—unless of course that helps you—and we just sit and sort through some stuff." There's never any time to mourn, is there.

Today we are enjoined among many things in Paul's letter to the Romans to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep. Here in this space, on these grounds, at this time, among this people, we are charged to make time, to acknowledge the time that was set aside and hallowed by God for just this purpose. Here there is and must always be time—time to laugh, time to cry, time to sigh, time to rest, time to change. Because we don't know how to acknowledge pain.

Hearing the speakers that I did, I heard anew how powerful and provocative the phrase "black lives matter" is. Its power comes from its simplicity. A seemingly banal observation. Black lives do not matter more, they're not superior, stronger, cooler or deeper. They simply—the phrase says—matter. The phrase calls attention to the fact that patterns exist in our society. Patterns in which—despite the apparent progress of century—a system that disadvantages, abuses and destroys black lives persists. The phrase declares the truth the system has seemingly forgotten. Black lives matter. Because someone who looks like me can walk into a place that looks like this and murder nine African Americans and then be apprehended and charged without further incident. Because someone who looks like me can hunt down a black jogger or pick a fight with a black teenager in a hoodie and kill them, and justice will be delayed or denied. But a

black man at a routine traffic stop, a black woman sleeping at home, a black child on a playground may not make it home alive. There are patterns in our society. To hear the phrase “black lives matter” from those at the rally on Friday was to hear grief. It was to hear anger and loss and pain. It was to say black lives matter to God, too often the only true witness to our sufferings. To insist on a truth they know but the world denies. Surely the phrase has social, cultural, economic and political dimensions, but we as Christians attend to the spiritual first. We follow a God who led us out of Egypt, out of all oppression. A God who desires the death of no one. We follow Jesus Christ, his son who lived among us that we might have life and have it more abundantly. A man of color who died unjustly at the hands of the authorities of his day, and who rose again. We worship this Jesus Christ in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free—in whom all of us are one. We believe black lives matter, and we hear in those words the trauma of generations. Bound as we are to weep with those who weep, we Holy Cross, along with our diocese, have signs on our lawn that declare just that. Black lives matter. Still we are afraid and angry and dismissive of even our own pain.

Today, this week not only marks the 57th anniversary of the March on Washington, but the one year anniversary of the death of my nephew. My brother and his wife had a lot of trouble conceiving. They’d given up on the idea that they would have children and even pursued adoption. After sinking much time, resources and more into adoption, the adoption agency they were working with went under, taking all of that time and resources with them. After some time though, miraculously and in an almost biblical fashion, Sam discovered she was pregnant. That was the good news. Then came the bad. And over the next seven months or so, the news got worse and worse. Jace was born September 3rd and he graced this world for 36 hours. I watched my brother have the best day of his life and the worst. There was good news, and there was bad news. Then came the theology. As people—well intentioned, well meaning—seeking to ease my brother and his wife's pain, began the act of rationalization to fix the suffering and the pain and the anger and the despair into something that made sense, forgetting that it didn't make sense in a world called good. We rushed to explanation: God needed another Angel. Everything happens for a reason. And I was told, by priests, to get over it. Me, who a month and a half before had welcomed his own son Gabriel, just before Jace.

My worst fear for Gabriel was that Gabriel and Jace would be compared for the rest of their lives. That nosy, busy body extended family would be evaluating which colleges they went to and their girlfriends and all that other stuff. And instead, I walk through life comparing them in the worst way possible. Because Jace isn’t even here. And he’d walking with Gabriel right about now.

Whenever our church encounters grief, despite the fact that we possess the resources the spiritual wherewithal and the ritual to give life to that grief, to speak that grief if only to ourselves, we fail and quickly skip to something more comfortable. When someone says black lives matter, look how fast we jump to the social and political and moral dimensions of that, deleting the grief that lay behind it. Grief that in some cases our church was less the Redeemer but more the bearer of that grief. We are afraid of our own pain. We need to be able to sit with our grief—to weep with one another. My brother invited me to preach at Jace's funeral. And I asked, when I was younger, I never understood why an almighty God would need to rest on the 7th day. It doesn’t make sense. But now that I'm older and I've seen what I've seen, I think an all loving God might. You see, an all loving God would look at the creation she knew to be good and she would trace the lines of causation and probability and see what would happen to the people she loved so much. And she would weep. Just as Jesus Christ wept at the death of his friend, our God wept on that 7th day. And our God hallowed that time for us so that we might rejoice with those who rejoice, and we might use that time to weep with those who weep. That's what our Sabbath is.

Stripped of the usual hallmarks of consumer Christianity, our church in this corona time must find new ways to be church. Let's start with that radical solidarity that Paul enjoins. Let us weep with those who

weep. Let worship be a time and a place where we can bring all that ails us, and so many things ail us, literally and figuratively in this time. Let's reinvigorate this notion of Sabbath and make time to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Doing justice for us, especially at Holy Cross, begins in education, learning how to sit with the pain and the injustice of our history. Some of you might be familiar with *Let Justice Roll* Parishioner Sherry Soanes completely retooled the course she teaches at American University for our benefit, and the experience was transformative for those of us who were able to participate, and especially for me who got to play teacher assistant for a while. I and others plan to offer some version of that very course in a retooled manner for a small group this fall so look for an announcement about that.

But more important, as part of our adult forum series on Sunday will be looking at Sacred Ground every four to six weeks. Sacred Ground is a film- and reading-based dialogue series on race developed by the Episcopal Church, grounded in our faith. It's a 10 part series built around a powerful online curriculum of documentary films and readings. It takes church groups through the chapters of America's history. It takes us through race and racism, weaving in threads of family story, economic class political and regional identity. Participants are invited to peel away the layers that have contributed to the challenges and divides of the present day, all while grounded our common spiritual call to faith, hope and love. Parishioners will be able to attend that as part of our regular adult education series at 10:30 on Sundays. We're offering the dialogues every four to six weeks to allow for some time to sit with what we learn. As always, we can make use of the expanding resources on our website.

Love mercy. Paul's letter has everything you need to know about how to behave in church. Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection. Outdo one another, not in being right, but in showing honor. Bless those who persecute you. Less them and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. But take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

There are times when it comes to exceeding grief, whether that grief is eminently social or deeply personal, that we won't know what to say. Words will fail us. Let me give you a script in those instances. Say *that*. When you don't know what to say, tell the person you love *that*. Your silence can be deafening. Ill-chosen words can hurt. Tell them you don't know. Tell them you want to say the magic words that will help them. tell them you're uncomfortable. tell them you don't know.

And in all things walk humbly with your God. Throw yourself into the Sabbath. Worship here. Weep when the songs lament. Rejoice when they proclaim Salvation. And invite others into this space where you can weep and cry and sigh and rage openly. Bring others into this Sabbath time. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Stripped of all the usual hallmarks of consumer Christianity, our church must recall and reinvigorate all the many meanings of what it means to be church. Let us embrace, then, Paul's call to radical solidarity with the most vulnerable in our world. Let us weep with those who weep. Let us share their rage and their despair as we can. Let us share our own pain and our loss, unafraid. Let us see where the spirits sighs then lead us. Let this our Sabbath Sunday be that day of mourning, be that time on the microphone for those who don't have it. We the church are charged to make time, to acknowledge the time that was set aside and hallowed by God for this purpose. Here, there is and always must be time. Time to laugh, time to cry, time to sigh, time to rest, time to change.