

Today's verdict in the trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd will undoubtedly bring a sense of justice, and even relief, to many, many people in Minnesota and around the nation. Our history is full of examples of the legal system's failure to hold public servants accountable for violence against Black, brown, and Indigenous bodies, so today is an important step in the direction of a more just society.

At the same time, Mr. Floyd's murder is a symptom of a deep sickness that infects every one of us, and every institution that makes up the fabric of our common life. One verdict, however momentous, will not heal this sickness that lies deep inside us. If we are to be faithful to the call of the gospel, joining the Spirit's work of healing and liberation must now form a core part of how we spend the rest of our lives. As we move forward together, there are several things to bear in mind about what it means for us as disciples of Jesus to join this work.

First, this work does not happen quickly. Over the last several centuries, racism has so thoroughly informed how we live together in the world that it is programmed into every public and private institution, every education, criminal justice, banking, and housing policy, and indeed, even the very cells that make up our bodies. Every aspect of our life as a nation is engineered to advantage some and disadvantage others based on the race they appear to belong to. It took several centuries for us to reach this moment, dismantling and rebuilding a new future will be work that consumes the rest of all of our lives.

Second, this work must be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and rooted in the transformation of our own hearts. Racism is part of the web of interlocking sin we are all trapped in. In my forty-four years of living, all the pain I have both inflicted and endured has convinced me beyond any doubt that by ourselves, we are incapable of escaping that sin, and that we can only be liberated by the power of God's almighty love. It will not do for us to say we need action instead of prayer. Regular, intentional, disciplined practices of anchoring my body, mind, and soul to the living God is the only way I have a chance of acting in a way that is faithful. If I act in the world before my own heart has been taken over by the power of God then I have misplaced my faith in my own abilities, and it's people like me that have made such a mess of things to begin with. This is not about our own good intentions, or noble efforts, or performative wokeness. The healing our world so desperately cries out for can only be done by God, and we can only be on board with what God is doing if we are offering our hearts up for healing moment by moment.

Here in the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, this work will need to start with telling the truth about how our own church has been complicit in building systems, both in and outside of the church, that privilege some at the expense of others based on race. This will ask us to take a fearless moral inventory of how we have functioned, and then begin to discern what we might look like on the other side. Even as I write this, this work is beginning, and as this year unfolds, there will be invitations to our whole diocese to engage with it.

We will also need to join what the Spirit is doing outside the institution of the church. Our society is being invited to reimagine how we understand and approach policing and public safety, how might we imagine new approaches to our lending, housing, employment, and educational policies, and on and on. If we are to be faithful, we as Spirit-soaked disciples of Jesus will need to be fully present to all of that work.

To confess that God is Trinity is to confess that God's very heart is unity without uniformity, and difference without division, that God's very heart is a relationship of perfect mutual love, and that Christian life is always about making room inside ourselves for the reality of another, and to be transformed by that encounter into something that is holy, and altogether closer to the heart of God. That is what God in Jesus has done for us, and that's what we are called to do with, in, and for one another and the world.

The question for us after the trial is: who shall we become? Can we learn to see ourselves, not as people competing for rungs on a ladder, but as members of the crowd pressing in on Jesus, diverse and different and broken, but united by our faith that Jesus alone has the power to heal the sickness inside us, in the assurance that his power, like that of God our mother, is an inexhaustible well of love, of healing, of joy? Can we give up ourselves, and our whole lives, as an offering to that love, until it is gloriously done, on earth as it is in heaven?