

**Jeff's Jottings**  
**June 5, 2020**

England had just entered World War II when C.S. Lewis wrote this: "Conflict, unrest, emergencies- these don't create a new situation; they just aggravate the insulated and comfortable among us so that we see the real human situation as it actually and always is."

And so here we are, in the midst of conflict, unrest, and emergency, desperately trying to make sense of the world around us. Pain and destruction continue to strangle hopes and dreams of people across the country. People are dying — alone from a terrible virus or from a knee on the neck in full public view. Cities burn, destroying businesses and inflaming divisions. Tens of millions are out of work. Long-standing, untreated inequalities have been exposed anew. What has been just below the surface, known but barely acknowledged and rarely addressed seriously, is now impossible to ignore, as we lament the murder of yet more black men (and women) and the racism that persists and persists and persists amidst the white privilege of others.

No words, is how our friend and leader, the Rev. Alike Galloway of Liberty Community Church described things last week, artfully told by the Liberty Church Mission Team in a document we sent you on Friday.

And words are still hard to come by, and maybe should be, if only because too often they are used as shields to suggest piety but deflect real action. Our Presbytery has and will do that as part of its deep commitment to justice; our first statements, with commitments to action, were sent to you last Friday, and more will follow. Jottings today is a place where I can make my own personal pledge:

- To actively read, listen, watch, notice. With a focus first and foremost on what Black, indigeneous, and people of color are saying and telling me. Not because it is their burden or responsibility to continually have to educate white persons who won't pay attention, but because it is my responsibility to seek out what I have not been able to hear nor what is not my experience or story to tell. Every morning this week, I have sat with this brief excerpt from a longer email from my friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Craig Howard, executive presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery, as a way to remind myself of this: *As an African American male, resident of St. Louis county, and leader in a white church, I find myself silently screaming at the repeated incidents of racial hatred marking our society. It just keeps happening again and again. Racism scars my earliest memories of life and continues to daily rip into me.*
- To engage and act. All the learning in the world is for naught if it does not compel action. ("*It just keeps happening again and again.*") Mind and heart must connect as we (I) look for the ways in which I can leverage my learning, my position, and my resources for change, and to hear the challenges of colleagues when I fail or fall short. I will ask you and our Personnel Committee to hold me responsible for this, and hold me responsible to you.
- To reflect. We learn best in a dynamic partnership of action and reflection, one building on the other. I must resist my temptation to be "tired" of all this, or afraid of a misstep, and instead actively reflect on my learnings and actions and failures, and to ask what next steps must be.

"...(S)o that we see the real human situation as it actually and always is." How those, like me, who have disproportionate power and immense economic/ educational/ cultural/ social (a.k.a. white) privilege can

be in solidarity with black communities. How we muster the strength and self-discipline to hear what black, indigenous, and people of color are telling us; the humility to understand our role in the lack of justice in this world; and the courage to pursue a new way, God's way, without always having to be told. Today I am grateful for people who are speaking hard and prophetic words for justice; I pray I will better hear them and honor their words in my actions.