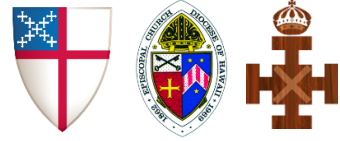


From the Bishop

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The Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i



February 8, 2023

A Reflection from the Bishop: Continuing Violence in Our Communities

My dear Siblings in Christ Jesus,

Over the past couple of weeks, the people of the United States have again been faced with the reality of unwarranted police violence in the death of Tyre Nichols. The Presiding Bishop has addressed this incident in his [A pastoral word from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry on the death of Tyre Nichols](#).

I have been ruminating and praying about the pervasiveness of violence in our society and in our lives. Nations have besetting sins that then influence the responses of individuals. I think the besetting sins of the United States are shaped by the myths of individualism and materialism. Materialism and the related sins of greed and lust drove European settlers to displace and eradicate indigenous peoples for land and enslave Africans for free labor. With that, however, the access to “free” land and labor allowed the American myths of rugged individualism and Manifest Destiny to permeate our culture and society. Such myths can only be maintained by control and violence. Racism was born of these sins.

We are talking about “sin.” In the Book of Common Prayer, “sin” is addressed in “An Outline of the Faith commonly called the Catechism” on pages 848-849:

Sin and Redemption

Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.

Q. How does sin have power over us?

A. Sin has power over us because we lose our liberty when our relationship with God is distorted.

Our responses to the world – good and bad – are shaped by our culture and society. In a culture that values accumulation and power over community and peace, it leads to an acceptance of violence to protect what is “mine” and to ensure that I am not harmed. It can lead to “I’ll get you before you get me”. At its worst, it is about being the one with all power – the one in control.

Theologically, when we speak of “will,” it looks to the notion that the whole person behaves in a way to bring something about. It is the “why,” “how” and “what” of all that we do. As the followers of Christ Jesus, our “wills” are called to be in line with Christ. We are guided by virtues including, for example, humility, kindness, patience, and justice, but all grounded in faith, hope and love. These are not virtues our society admires or affirms.

As Christians, the incongruence is real. We are caught with the witness of Jesus that calls to us with words like:

“You have heard that it was said, *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*. But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too.” (Matthew 5:38-40)

“If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me.” (Matthew 19:21)

Yet, the world around us calls for something completely different. As the Disciples, we must honestly struggle with our own sinfulness – our own need for security and control, and our own fears and anxiety – that allow us to willfully harm others and ourselves.

The officers in Memphis are us. The will to power is born of brokenness and fear. Violence is the answer of a world that is lost.

As Disciples of Christ Jesus, we must look to Redemption: “the act of God which sets us free from the power of evil, sin, and death” (BCP, page 849). We live – or are called to live – in the world as it is God, a commonwealth of justice, love, and peace: time, place and being without anxiety or fear. We again face the reality of humanity in fear and pain. Yet, “The Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God’s purpose for the world” (BCP, page 861).

We continually pray:

Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

+Bob

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