

Time to Begin Reconciliation

As I watched the events in the nation's capital Wednesday, many emotions went through me: anger, anxiety, bewilderment, fear, despair. The next day the question that kept running through my brain was, "What can I do?" I am weary of lamenting what is wrong with our country and being in conversations that circle around, "If those people (fill in the blank) would only"

Let me try to be clear. All leaders need to be accountable and the more public your position, the greater scrutiny you rightfully experience. I am not for letting anyone off the hook. In addition, we must ask ourselves if the reaction of the security officers and police to this event as opposed to their reaction to Black Lives Matter protests --regardless of the explanation -- is an example of the racism that infects our country.

My point is different. As disciples of Jesus, much less citizens, we are commissioned and equipped to be agents of change. For our own well-being and our community's well-being, we must find ways to embrace our agency especially since our faith is that God does all the heavy lifting. I think of the feeding of the five thousand when Jesus said to the disciples, "You give them something to eat" in order to remind them that they have agency. Jesus is equipping them and us for the work of the ministry. We need to wear trifocals so that we can have three perspectives: what is in the distance; what is in front of us; and what we are ourselves. Too often when we think about complex issues, we limit our focus on those other people or the distant future for a solution and do not attend to what we can do here and now.

But this is the only life we have to live, and we are called to live it for God. This means embracing our discipleship and taking the first step.

I don't know what that looks like in the current context. I haven't lived into it. I do know a corollary that can empower us by example.

In 1976, Belfast Northern Ireland was deep into the "troubles." The power struggle between the Catholics and Protestants had gone beyond arguments into violence. Betty Williams was an office worker. She was not very political because she was busy with her job and was married with children. Her days were full. One day in August of 1976 she was walking home from work, and a member of the IRA was driving a car in her street and as he was driving, he was shot dead by British troops. His car spun out of control and killed three children.

Betty Williams could have gone on Facebook (except there wasn't Facebook in 1976); she could have gotten herself on a talk show; she could have done the Southern thing which is to ignore it; she could have come up with some explanation of why these persons behave this way and felt morally superior, and maybe these endeavors would have been good things to do. But would they have made anything change?

Instead, that night she began knocking on her neighbors' doors and saying, "We cannot live like this anymore." She kept knocking and found that conversation led to conversion led to communion. Together with Mairead Corrigan, an aunt of one of the children who died, she formed the Peace People. This organization set up local peace groups to bring people of opposing views into conversation with one another.

Betty Williams won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1976. One woman on her way home from work changed her nation and moved it towards peace.

I do not know what can cure our nation's deep-rooted problems. I do not know how to bridge the political gaps much less our nation's embedded racism or the income inequality that perpetuates poverty. I do know this: I am tired of watching the news and coming away with anger, anxiety, or despair. The cure is not indifference, nor is it simply to find a quick solution to a complex problem. But in my bones, I know this is true for me: it's time to begin and it's time to begin where I am even if it's like Betty Williams knocking on doors and saying, "We cannot live like this anymore."