June 3, 2020

Dear Grace Church Community,

I write you today a two-part letter. The first part is to rejoice in God's goodness as once again we are invited to participate in blessing, planting, and harvesting the beautiful food of the garden and offer it to our neighbors in love.

You are invited to join us in our **12th Blessing and Planting of Gideon's Garden** on Friday, June 5 and Saturday, June 6.

On **Friday, June 5 at 6:00 PM** we will bless Gideon's Garden for the 2020 season. We will pray for the Rev. Jen Bloesch, Fisher Riiska, Tim Picoli, and all who work in the garden this year. We will give thanks for Dan Tawczynski and the workers of Taft Farm who helped Jen and Fisher prepare the garden for planting. We will pray for all who receive the glorious produce from the garden, all who hunger, and all who with gratitude are fed. **Join us here or call in at 1 646 558 8656 (Meeting ID: 891 8042 5878, Password: 774694.**

On **Saturday, June 6** we will plant the garden for this season. In this time when the need for healthy food is so great, we need your help. Because in loving our neighbor, we cannot be present all at once in this pandemic, the Rev. Jen Bloesch has organized an **online signup** for you to pick a time to come and plant. Each segment will be for one hour with a 30-minute period in between for Jen and Fisher to prepare for the next planting group. No more than 8 people can be in the garden at any time (Jen and Fisher will be present). **You can sign up here.** Thank you to all who have signed up to join us. If you are unable to join us in the garden on Saturday, please make time to drive by the garden and see all the goodness that is coming to life. Contact Jen and let her know you are holding her in prayer and are grateful for her faithful work.

The second part of my letter is an invitation to prayer and conversation. These have been very hard weeks. The coronavirus has claimed more than 107,578 lives. As our country begins to reopen its businesses, and public places, the virus continues to tell us that it is not done with us. The number of people who have lost their jobs, the number of our neighbors who wonder where they will find food or housing for their families continues to rise and there is a deep fear that help will be slow in coming.

And then as if it could not be worse, the cancer of racism and the brutality it takes against our black and brown brothers and sisters, does not stop. The pictures of Ahmaud Arbery out for a jog in his neighborhood, being hunted down and murdered by

two white men were fresh in our hearts, when the news of Breonna Taylor's murder by the police as she slept in her home followed by the public murder by strangulation of George Floyd by one police officer as three other police officers stood by and watched, has once again sent the world reeling with overwhelming pain at the injustice and violence that too often draws no response. Our country is on fire. People justifiably ask what does it take for this to stop? How long must we face unjustified violence and acts of hate without end?

We may comfort ourselves because we live in a beautiful and often kind place. A place that cares for its community. A place that responds when injustice rears its ugly head. But we cannot hide the reality that racism is everywhere. And because we are church and because we believe ourselves to be white, we cannot turn away. We cannot deny our complicity nor deny that this cancer is deep and invasive. We cannot ignore the pain and even hopelessness of our brothers and sisters who daily suffer the insults and wounds of racism.

These times can make us want to turn away. But Jesus calls us to follow him—not down a garden path—but to the cross. He tells us not to be afraid. He tells us that he "is with us always, to the end of the age."

I invite you to watch a video made by the Rev. Otis Moss III, senior pastor at Trinity Church in Chicago. You can access the video here. He filmed it in response to the murder of Ahmaud Arbery. It is a powerful video and one that will touch our hearts deeply. But I do not send this video simply to make us wince at the pain. I send it to invite us into a conversation. We have read several books on the experience of our brothers and sisters who are black. Now I would like to invite us to come together and talk about being "white." I would like for us to uncover what we need to share God's love in a shattered world.

I invite you to watch the video and join me next **Thursday, June 11 at 6:30 PM** on Zoom to talk about what we heard and saw and how the words of Pastor Moss and the cries of the world are touching us right now. This conversation, I hope will only be the beginning of a time of reflection, prayer, and action. **You can join me here or by calling in at 1 646 558 8656 (Meeting ID: 833 1910 8059, Password: 719125).**

We need to be at prayer in these terrible days. But as Steven Charleston said recently, "Now is the moment for which a lifetime of faith has prepared you. All of those years of prayer and study, all the worship services, all of the time devoted to a community of faith…your faith has prepared you for this. Long ago the Spirit called you to commit your life to faith. Now you know why. You are a source of strength for those who have lost

hope. You are a steady light in days of darkness. The time has come to be what you believe." I look forward to our conversation.

May God hold us all in his almighty hands of love,

Janet

O God,
you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son.
Look with compassion on the whole human family;
take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts;
break down the walls that separate us;
unite us in bonds of love;
and work through our struggle and confusion
to accomplish your purposes on earth;
that, in your good time, all nations and races
may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.



