

## The Antidote to Fear

Protests over the wrongful death of George Floyd has seized the country from coast to coast. Chants of “I can’t breathe,” and “Black lives matter,” permeate the atmosphere and fuels the righteous anger of the protesters. We all heard the voice of the subdued accused crying out in agony, over and over, “I can’t breathe!” while a white officer dug his knee into Floyd’s neck for nearly nine minutes with a seeming nonchalant and uncaring attitude. We all watched Floyd die, right in front of our faces. Another black man’s life snuffed out at the hands of a white law enforcement officer. Once again, parents, grandparents, wives and anyone who have black sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, friends, or neighbors, even black men themselves, were confronted with the ever-present, suffocating fear of Living while black in America.

Let me be very quick to say that not all officers are like this. Misguided, overly aggressive, law breaking officers are the exception, not the rule. At the same time, I might add, it is also true that misguided, out of order, law breaking black men is the exception, not the rule. It is true that there are countless, thousands of law enforcement officers who take their oath to serve and protect seriously. They are to be commended and uplifted as the true model of law enforcement. Equally, there are far more intelligent, upstanding, law abiding black men than is most often presented to us through the media. Nevertheless, due to body cams, security cameras and videos from private citizens, more of the abhorrent behavior of rogue policing is being captured, bringing to light what heretofore had been the secrets of the Order. This only serves to undergird the fear of the black community, which is this: Justice is not for us!

That came to light so clearly for me just a few weeks ago as I viewed a video detailing the saga of twenty-one-year old Tye Anders of Midland, Texas. Before I knew it, I was weeping like a baby. My wails were so loud and spontaneous that it caught my husband by surprise. The young man had been pulled over for a traffic stop; a situation that has led to many tragic outcomes between black men and white officers. I listened to Mr. Anders repeatedly scream to the top of his lungs, “I’m scared! I’m scared!” He lay on the ground, refusing the officer’s orders to stand up and come to them. In sheer agony, he just kept screaming, “I’m scared!” He was convinced that he would be shot or killed. Despite the officer’s calm and gentle assurance that none of the sort would occur, the fear of what could be, based on what had already been for decades upon decades, gripped and paralyzed him. Though things ended well for the young man, in the sense that he was not harmed and did not die, fear ruled that moment.

Through my sobs and inconsolable weeping, I shouted to my husband, “No one should live in this kind of fear! No one! This has to end!” Yet, it continued. Just one week later, we all listened to George Floyd pleading in total fear, “I can’t breathe!” We have rightfully lifted up Mr. Floyd as a symbol of the sickness of this country. We are correct to disallow the attacks on his humanity because of his human flaws. However, in doing so, we should be careful not to deify Mr. Floyd either. His flaws were real. He was a law breaker. He did have underlying health conditions. But the knee on his neck killed him, not his human flaws.

We justly mourn the death of George Floyd. It has been the catalyst for these latest protests. But the frightened cry of men like Tye Anders is the tear-filled cloud that looms over the black community on a daily basis. I’m scared! I’m scared to get pulled over for a traffic stop. I’m

scared to be in a group at night. I'm scared to walk down the street by myself at night eating skittles. I'm scared to be in my legally owned house, drive my legally owned car, or dress a certain way. I'm scared!

Fear is killing our black men on a daily basis – mentally, emotionally, intellectually, you name it. Fear is killing physical health, as I would submit to you that some of the underlying diseases that affected Mr. Floyd came from the stress of LWB – Living while black. This is where the protest should be! Policies that have allowed this kind of fear to exist for decades must be changed. Thankfully, out of protest, change is already occurring. For example, the state of Minneapolis has outlawed the use of choke holds. Chiefs of police and officers are speaking out and condemning the actions of the officers in Minneapolis. Murder charges have been brought against the officers involved. However, the protests cannot end with charges only. There must be changes to the system of justice so that convictions are obtained and the message is driven home: Black lives do indeed matter!

This is why I write to you today my beloved community of Arlington. We must add our voices and resources, in whatever ways possible, to stand up for justice. We must call for laws and practices that are fair and just for all. We must exercise our greatest protest and vote on Tuesday November 3, 2020 to ensure that we have the best leadership in place. We must solidly affirm through all of these actions that Black lives matter! People of color are human, made in the image of the almighty God and no matter their human flaws, deserve dignity. There can be no peace in this country until we recognize all as a part of the human family of God. We must pray and peacefully protest until this comes to fruition.

In many of the protests we hear the chant, “No justice, no peace.” In a time where peace is so greatly needed, we the church have a great opportunity to lift up the truth about the true source of peace. It is not in one who demands it just by protest. It's not in one who seeks to command it by claiming to be the one who brings law and order. Peace is in the One who brings true order to life. It's in Jesus Christ. With this peace, we know that no matter what happens, we can trust that all will work for good. Fear is suffocating us. But, with the peace of Jesus Christ, we all can breathe. Let's be sure to shout this message loudly and clearly. The peace of Jesus Christ is the antidote to the suffocating fears of our times.

Peace be with you!

Pastor Di.