

Dear Siblings in Christ,

In our baptismal vows we are called to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. With the images of protests, murder, the National Guard, and strife on the news and on social media, and with protests in our own community, peace and justice feel like a distant and unattainable hope right now. Yet on Sunday we marked a day of renewed hope for the early church. Pentecost is when the breath of God blew on the apostles, giving them new life as witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of a time of uncertainty. The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to proclaim, in word and in deed, God's plan of reconciling all people in the name of Christ.

But this Pentecost, even as we mark the coming of the Holy Spirit and the breath that gave birth to the church, we cannot ignore the last words of George Floyd: "I can't breathe. I can't breathe. Please stop. I can't breathe." We cannot stop thinking about George Floyd, a black man who was murdered by a police officer in the city of Minneapolis. We cannot stop thinking about the countless others, video-recorded and not, whose names and stories and deaths didn't make the news. Countless others who have suffered untimely and unjust deaths. We cannot turn away or forget. Although it is heartbreaking, we must hear our neighbors who are crying out and we must use our breath—the very breath we have received as a gift from God—to break the chokehold of systemic racism.

Racism is both personal and woven into the fabric of our society. Its inequalities are rooted in American slavery and Manifest Destiny, yet are still present today. Whether related to finance, education, healthcare, or criminal justice, those inequities continue to exist. As Christians, we know such iniquity as sin.

As we proclaim our desire to strive for justice and peace, we must condemn the sin that has led us here, a sin that we are all complicit in. Confronting this sin may make us feel uncomfortable, but our discomfort is nothing compared to the fear of violence and weariness that people of color are bearing. The killing of George Floyd is not a new or unique murder. Instead, in communities of color, pressure has built, suffering has been endured, and God's people are crying out like the voices of the prophets, "How long, O Lord?"

While we cannot erase or ignore the sins of our past, we can join together in reconciliation with the voices that cry out for justice and peace. So let us, too, cry out "How long, O Lord?" How long will we fail to live up to our baptismal promise "to renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God, the powers of this world that rebel against God, and the ways of sin that draw us from God?" How long will we be indifferent and proclaim innocence, convincing ourselves that we are not part of systemic racism or that this is not our problem? How long will we let ourselves become helpless, overwhelmed, and fearful?

As we struggle to understand racism in our lives, our ministries, the church we love, our city and nation, our cries join together. We ask God for the breath of the Holy Spirit, that it might open our hearts and change us as a community and nation. That our "How long"s may turn into words and actions that change the systems of racism which hold us captive.

As your pastors, we commit to doing the work to become anti-racist. We commit to being an ally and partner in the work for racial justice and racial equity. And we hope you will join us.

Today we invite you to learn with us by participating in a 21-Day Race Equity Challenge. It is an opportunity to engage different voices and perspectives—a time to read, watch, listen, and learn. It is a time for self-examination and honesty. It is a time to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, to be remade as vessels for God's love and reconciliation. Each day we will share a new way to learn, as well as our own reflections, in our Messiah Family and Friends Facebook group. If you'd like to design your own journey through the 21 days, you can find information on how to do so here: <https://www.eddiemoorej.com/21-day-challenge/>

We have no illusions that all will be changed immediately or that the change the world needs is within our power alone. But today we take one step toward that change, standing as friends. We commit to bearing the burdens our brown and black neighbors must carry all the time—fear, violence, weariness, anger, and despair. We commit to standing up. And since we know that we will stumble, we will make mistakes, we will get discouraged and our energy will flag, we stand before God, asking to be filled once again with the breath of life. We will pray each day as we do today—come, Holy Spirit, come.

In the Name of the God Who Makes All Things New,

Pr. Andrew Plocher

Pr. Molly Eversoll