

So to start with... a heads-up. This is Trinity Sunday and I am not going to preach about the Trinity. No doubt some of you will heave a sigh of relief! Others may be disappointed. But I think what's going on in the world right now, in God's world, is what demands our attention this Sunday as followers of the Christ.

This has not been a good week for our world. This hasn't been a good week for our island either. Violence has stalked onto centre stage of our collective consciousness, loud, harsh, in our face. Unless we are totally fasting from all news sources we cannot avoid it. Sadness, shock, grief... we are feeling them all. What we might not be so familiar with are the feelings of indignation, outrage, anger. And fear. Unless we are people of colour. Unless we have lost someone to violence, we might not know that rage. Unless we have been treated badly because of our skin colour, we might not know that fear and rage.

Living in Portland I learned something about that from my African-American friends. I learned about The Talk, given to young boys as they begin to get taller and bigger. No longer children in size though still children in spirit. The Talk is akin to a rite of passage for African-American children, especially boys. It's all about how to behave in the presence of police: no sudden movements, don't question why you're being stopped, comply with all verbal commands, never raise your voice, keep your hands on the wheel if you're driving a car., no eye contact...
Make it home alive. Please... make it home alive.

We can wonder - what would it be like to wake up every morning worrying about whether our kids would make it through the day alive. We can wonder what it would be like to hear our 4 year old son or grandson say these words:

"Mommy, the darkest people get shot and killed and sometimes the little bit lighter ones, too," 4-year-old Quest McEwen mused. His mother, Tessa listened in shock. "So, that's why I want to be good," he continued. "Maybe I shouldn't talk like this so I don't get died."

This is the delicate-but-brutal balancing act parents are called to, of protecting their children's innocence, while educating them about the realities of what it means to be black in the US. For them, "The Talk" has nothing to do with the birds and the bees. It's about surviving police encounters, being aware of rights and learning how to live within a complex, systemic, centuries-old framework of race-based prejudice, violence and discrimination.

But Gyllian, you might be thinking, that's in the States. Why are you telling us something that has nothing to do with us? Right?

What do we say to ourselves? What do we say to each other?

"Thank goodness we're not like them (the US). They have this terrible systemic racism to struggle with, arising from the slave trade. Their country was built on it. We're lucky not to have that kind of inheritance to struggle with."

No systemic racism here? Too bad that's not true, eh!

No systemic racism here... Tell that to the descendants of the Chinese who came here to work in the mines and on the railroads but weren't allowed to bring their wives. Tell that to the descendants of the Japanese-Canadians who lost everything and were forced to live in substandard housing far from their homes. Tell that to the survivors of the Residential Schools. Tell that to the families of the indigenous men taken on the Starlight Tours in Saskatoon where, arrested by police for drunk and disorderly behaviour instead of being taken to the jail to sleep it off, they were dropped off on the outskirts of the city where they froze to death.

Tell that to the young Edmonton couple, Ngeze (enjize) and Rukundo (Roo-kindoh). July of 2018, while out grocery shopping, Ngeze hit another car. After calling 911, she phoned her husband to come help. Rukundo, a construction worker and father of five originally from Burundi, rushed to the accident location. He was greeted by two helpful officers. Rukundo's partner was upset, so he helped with insurance information and paperwork while she calmed down. But then two other officers arrived. Rukundo was on the phone with the insurance company when one of the newly arrived officers, who appeared to be upset, asked whether he was involved in the crash. Rukundo said the officer then told him he had to leave the scene, or he'd be arrested. Rukundo explained he was helping his partner and assisting the other officers. The officer perceived this as obstruction, 'Rukundo said. "He raised his voice. He treated me like I'm not a human being." Rukundo was taken to the station and charged with obstructing a peace officer and resisting arrest. Worried Rukundo would go to jail, the couple spent \$5,000 to successfully fight the charges. They've been struggling financially ever since."

Oh wait, I left out something. The part where the officer held Rukundo's face to the ground, his knee on Rukundo's neck? He couldn't breathe. He thought he might die there. He wondered if he would ever see his children again. Who would take care of them and love them?

The charges were dropped... but I ask myself would this have even happened to me? What do you think? Would you be treated that way at the scene of a car accident? And if you were... how would you respond to watching that video of George Floyd being choked to death by the officer? How would you feel?

So here we are, on our beautiful island with the world out there smoking and trembling with the pain and rage of those who are discriminated against and their allies, and the outrage of those who've been discriminating. We're the witnesses. And it's intense and disturbing. Shocking and horrifying. And maybe we have rage, grief, indignation...

Wait! What's that sound? Do you hear it? That clarion call for justice? Do you hear the Lord calling your name?

You are being called to cry out for change, for justice, for mercy... We have just entered into the season of Pentecost. We've been claimed, as the Reverend William Barber says, as God's companions in healing the earth and this healing takes place

one intentional and loving act at a time. We can have no doubt that God asks this of us. From the time of the Prophet Micah 700 years before Christ was born, to the teachings of Jesus, we know what we are called to do. We know.

"What **does the Lord require** of you? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your **God.**" ... **Micah 6:8,**

Or how about John 13:34 where Jesus tells us:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We, in this parish, are for the most part, the privileged ones. Most of us are not vulnerable to racist acts directed against us. So we have power. And we can use it. We can use it to be visible allies. When you hear someone speaking in racist terms, you can speak up. You can say "Ouch." Sometimes that's all it takes. Words of love and peace and justice.

When you see someone being treated in a racist way, you can go be with that person, give them a warm smile, introduce yourself, and talk with them the way you would with any of your friends. Be a buffer between them and the racism. Be a lover as Jesus commanded us to be.

When you notice someone being racist on social media - respond. Say "Not so. Here's what I know." Be an ally. Stand up for justice, mercy and love.

We do know what to do. We know how to be God's people. And we can educate ourselves. There are many books out there. Next week I'll post up some titles recommended by friends of mine, people of colour. You might find some of these books hard going. Of course! Did you think it would be easy to confront our own privilege? To unmask our own racism? Because we are. All of us. We cannot grow up in this society without having racist thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. And we can change them. We can be healers of the world. We can live as lovers of God and God's creation. I beg you to join me in this hard, essential work. Jesus is calling us. Amen.