



Guest Opinion: A prayer for our nation

By The Rev. Kristopher D. Schondelmeyer

June 7, 2020

I am hurting today.

Our nation is hurting.

I believe we're in the midst of a defining moment in American history. May we recognize it unfolding before us. We are living through two global pandemics with diseases that are suffocating our people. One is COVID-19. The other disease is systemic racism.

Night after night we've seen tongues of fire burning in cities across our nation. In the midst of the fire I have seen the Holy Spirit calling our nation to pay attention to the pain of so many. We would do well to hear the prophesy of Jesus regarding the destruction of the temple in Matthew 24: "You see all these (buildings of the temple)? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." In Jesus' eyes, the temple had been turned into a physical representation of the oppressive power that he came to turn upside down.

Because of his words and actions, Jesus was deemed a rebel-rouser according to those who held power. Jesus even committed his own act of civil disobedience when he went into the temple and began flipping tables and using a whip to drive out the money changers. He was protesting the unjust political and economic treatment of God's people. Remember...that's why he was crucified.

Because of the destruction and violence many may want to turn away. I would ask us not to turn away, but instead to turn toward American history.

We celebrate the physical destruction of economic property that took place during the Boston Tea Party. We're proud to call it a defining moment in American history. But, remember that it was also an act of civil disobedience where early American colonists broke into private British ships to loot and destroy their property as a protest against unjust taxation. Certainly, the lives of black and brown brothers and sisters are as important as tax on tea.

We ask black and brown brothers and sisters to protest peacefully. But when they do, it seems we're more concerned about the knee taken by a football player than the knee taken by an officer on the neck of a fellow human being. We don't get outraged by white men who show up armed with military style weapons to protest a public health emergency. But we're upset when unarmed black and brown brothers and sisters march peacefully for justice saying, "Black Lives Matter."

Some white people ask, "What about us? Don't all lives matter, not just black lives?" But, remember what Jesus said in Matthew 18 about the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to help the 1 that is lost. We're not the ones whose lives are in danger from systemic racism. There is no trust in the systems of society, and that's the problem.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that "A riot is the language of the unheard." He pleaded with us to hear the voices of peaceful protest because he didn't want to see it happen. As a pastor, I join Dr. King in advocating love instead of hate, peace instead of violence. But I can understand why the fires of righteous indignation might rage.

Some have asked, "What can I do to help?" I don't have easy answers or the wisdom of sages. I'm simply a pastor who is struggling to make meaning of the times we are living in. But I do believe there are some places we can start.

We can read and learn the history of slavery, of racism, of Jim Crow, of the systemic issues that perpetuate divisions and fear.

We can build relationships and listen to the stories and experiences of black and brown brothers and sisters without judgment ... but simply listen to understand another's experience.

And, all of us can pray ... for what is unfolding in our nation will take nothing short of a miracle to heal.

The Rev. Kris Schondelmeyer is a Presbyterian Pastor in Bucks County and a doctoral student at Palmer Seminary of Eastern University studying Contextual Leadership with a concentration in Religion and Public Policy.