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What Does It Mean?

A Reflection on the Killing of George Floyd, Racism, and God's Call for Justice

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Acts 1:6-8; 2:1-13

In this text, Luke continues his theological conversation about what Jesus did and taught. Luke brings us into the midst of that apostolic band of believers gathered in Jerusalem. They were there for two reasons. First, Jesus told them to wait there. Secondly, Jesus promised them they would receive the Holy Spirit!

And it happened! While they were there, they witnessed an unusual movement of the Holy Spirit. There was such an outpouring until others were amazed and perplexed. Now, although the filling of the Holy Spirit was internal, the evidence of that filling was external. When the people saw the Holy Spirit's external influence, they asked, "What Does This Mean?"

This provocative question hangs over the book of Acts and Christianity. What does it mean that people from different locations, people who spoke different languages and tongues, could hear and understand the Gospel? Here, we are talking about connection. The Holy Spirit connected with those in that place, and they connected with the community.

So, Pentecost is a spiritual connection, with the intent of equipping. The Bible says, "They were in one place..." why? Because they were of one mind. They were together because they wanted to be together. They were together because they needed to be together. They were together because Jesus told them to do so.

It is incredible what we can accomplish when we get together. Positive, productive, and powerful change can evolve when we come together with a Jesus-centered focus. At its core, Pentecost, like the incarnation itself, is about God coming to us in our fallen condition. Pentecost is a message of God about togetherness.

Though we may not look the same, may not articulate the same, may not like the same music or the same foods- we are not that different! For the most part, we seek the same things. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs contains five levels. Two of them are:

1. Physical Survival Needs
2. Physical Safety Needs

We are not that different. When you are hurting, and there seems to be no place to turn to, and no real change, it's disheartening. God sent those disciples into a hurting world. You could say the Holy Spirit, "pushed" them out of their comfort zone, and some responded by asking, "What does this mean?" In other words, "Why?"

Why are they behaving this way? Why are they saying these things? Well! It was too much for them to hold "inside" any longer. They had witnessed too much, suffered too much, and felt too much to keep it bottled up. Now, some believed the disciples to be drunk. Not so!

They had witnessed something that shook their soul. They saw the power of the Holy Spirit. And when they did, the Spirit pushed them into the street.

But why the streets?

Well, because the "streets" are where pain, misery, hurt and brokenness come when cries for help are ignored. The streets are where broken hearts weep when court systems close off pathways to justice.

The streets are where souls take a stand and cry out. "Can you not see what is taking place?" The streets are where the 10 lepers met Jesus (Luke 17:11-19). The streets are where the lady with a blood issue for 12 years reached out to Jesus (Mark 5:25-34). Jesus was marched through the streets on his way to crucifixion (Mark 15:21-32).

On the streets of Minneapolis, Minnesota George Floyd groaned and moaned, as one officer rested his knee upon his neck. Meanwhile, three other officers meandered nearby.

Those who swore to protect and to serve snuffed the life out of another human being.

This is not an indictment of all law enforcement, but it is an indictment against those four officers. As for those officers who are faithful to their oath – I commend you.

Yes, I have seen the burning, the stealing, and the destruction of property.

I don't agree with that either!

That's not a peaceful protest. That's not civil disobedience, but we can't let that push the cry aside. We have to address both institutional and individual ills in society. You would not treat an animal that way. Please understand me; this is about FAMILY. George Floyd is our brother.

The truth of the matter is that it could have been one of my two sons. Or even more so, it could have been me! Yes, me! When I walk upon this campus, here at Highland Valley UMC, and there's nobody here but me, all it takes is one police officer — just one — just one officer deciding that I don't belong here; and I could end up with a knee on my neck. And by the time any of you hear about it, it will be too late.

Eight minutes and 43 seconds, and it could be over for me.

We live shared "humanity," that was set into place by God, and this grieves God.

We live shared humanity, but all are not afforded the same freedom of movement or being.

There has to be a change in law enforcement. There are decades-old policies that have pushed segments of society to this point—this point of once again taking to the streets. Even Jesus addresses this matter in Luke's Gospel Chapter 4, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel..."

Don't lose the message because of the madness.

Don't dismiss the reality of cries for help because of the clandestine EFFORTS of others. "What Does This Mean," has been the question at various times. It was asked when this COVID-19 virus sat in upon us. And now that we have witnessed the brutal death of George Floyd, "What Does It Mean?"

What does it mean that the history of African Americans is one of having chains around our necks? A history of hangings, literally and figuratively. What does it mean to hear and see things that are demeaning about one's race, and others act as if nothing is wrong? What does it mean that in 2020 nations are seeing African Americans lying on the ground, held down for some 8-9 minutes?

But the more pressing question is, what does it mean to see what you saw- the "brutality," and not be "pained" to the very core of your being? What does it mean if you found, within yourself, some excuse for that behavior?

What does it mean – if all you do is turn off your TV, turn off your mind, and turn off your empathy simply because George Floyd is black?

Christian friends: It can't keep going this way! Lord, have mercy!

We can do better!

Better in our conversations!

Better in our relationships!

Better in our fellowships!

Better in our Christian witness!!!

Better in our Law enforcement.

The pain is real!

The experience is real!

And still, the hope is real!

The God of our faith is real!

Spiritual power is real!

"What does this mean?"

Well, it means humanity needs spiritual help reaching the moral high grounds of brotherhood, and God will bring the change required when we get together. Now, believers have no choice, not if you are Spirit-filled.

You have no choice but to stand for right and righteousness.

You have no choice but to come out of hiding and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. You have no choice, not if you know the grace of God!

It is God's grace that calls us to justice, compassion, and love.