

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Pentecost, June 14, 2020  
St. John's Episcopal Church, Linden Hills, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
The Rev. John Bellaimey, Priest-Associate  
{bracketed items are video or still clips in the video version of this sermon}

{Fade-in from black to George Floyd's place of death; angel painting, still photo}

In the name of God, nailed to the cross because of our sins. Amen. This is the place where George Floyd was murdered.

{Gugino falling still photo} And this is Martin Gugino, a gentle giant of a man, 75 years old, white of skin and white of hair, approached the armed death squad in Buffalo. He said something to them before they shoved him stumbling backward onto the concrete. They didn't arrest him, handcuff him, or crush his neck by taking a knee. They left him there, bleeding from his ear. Two members of the squad were suspended. Their blood brothers, all 57 of them, quit the Emergency Response Team in jaw-dropping solidarity.

{narration} I am also a tall white man with hair that will be white soon enough, and a follower of Jesus' Path. Ruefully, I admit that I saw myself more in Martin than I did in George Floyd...

{George Floyd still photo} ...who, like me, was also tall, Christian, and loved to sing. It's just one of the many ways my whiteness works.

{Gugino still photo} Martin is a member of the Catholic Worker Movement. Founded by Dorothy Day, the Catholic Worker is a collection of small communities, mostly in cities, that embrace voluntary poverty in an attempt to live as Jesus did, in friendship with the poor. They ask people to commit to a revolution of their hearts.

And something is stirring. Confirmation class member **Aidan Criner** tells us that the online world has been utterly important in getting people active in the real world: into the streets and into the sufferings of black and brown people. Here's a video he sent me this week:

*{Aidan's clip} For the past week and a half, for me and a lot of people, has been completely surreal. In response to the killing, I went to the first protest and we left before it got violent and I remember specifically thinking there is no way that Mpls. would have a riot. It's not going to happen. And, because I couldn't see it happening, and it did, that blew my mind. I feel like if you go on social media, all you see is people sharing news or their perspectives or new insights about police brutality and now just race as a whole; and I feel like this kind of sparked a discussion in our nation that is going to keep going. And I don't think everything is going to go back to normal, once the officers are (hopefully) convicted, and I think this is going to, it might set a new standard for how we hold police accountable for brutality. I think more people are going to be more aware of racism and looking for it, and more people are going to be talking about it, basically that's all that a lot of people have been talking about, and on the news, for the past week and a half. So I think we will come out of this different.*

{video slo-mo of names on George Floyd Avenue} History is punctuated by violence, which usually moves us backward against the famous arc of justice Rev. King spoke about. Scripture says so, too. If you didn't click on today's readings, here is my crude summary:

{back to narration} Reading Number One: the ex-slaves from Egypt tell God, “we saw what you did to the Egyptians, drowning them and snatching the lives from their firstborn. So we will do what you say, and hope you will keep protecting us. You are the scariest cop in the universe, so we are going to obey *all your laws*. They kept the promise for 40 days.

Reading Number Two, from Paul, himself probably a member of the Temple Police, with arrest warrants in his saddlebag that only needed him to fill in the names once he found the troublemakers up there in Damascus. His change of heart meant dropping his police baton and taking up the pen. In today’s excerpt, Paul writes, Even though the world teaches that violence solves problems, Jesus walked calmly into the face of violence, and violence nailed him.

{George Floyd’s name on cross} Jesus knows our sufferings, Paul writes, and knows they do not have the last word.

Reading Number Three, from Matthew, the traitorous tax-collector whose whole town once despised him, but Jesus invited himself over to dinner for a chat. He repented of his extortion, gave up living in the nicest house that stolen money could buy, said goodbye to his Roman goon squad, and followed the carpenter. And the carpenter soon gave marching orders: Tell everybody ‘the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. It’s not impossible.

We’ve heard that the original sin of America is racism, enforced by violence. 500 years of genocide against the people of this land. 400 years of prison camps called plantations, then Jim Crow, then mass incarceration and *I can’t breathe*. Our scripture says that God did violence on the Egyptians to free the slaves and then helped them violently conquer Promised Land. White settlers in America found comfort in that.

{Minnesota State Seal}

But our scripture also says that God gave up violence. Jesus, who was God in a human body, submitted to violence as a kind of last resort, and in doing so revealed something unexpected about God, a gentle bravery reflected in Martin Gugin, and in the outpouring of protest at the men in badges sworn to protect and serve us, who too often just protect and serve each other.

{stills of Liv’s murals on boarded up Wild Rumpus and E & C Gallery windows on 43rd St.}

**Liv Rosten** is an artist, and also a member of our confirmation class of 2020. She answered Mr. Floyd’s crucifixion with these two images of resurrection and lamentation. She responded to the ugliness with beauty. Here’s Liv.

{Liv’s clip} *My involvement in the George Floyd situation has been: I made a print of his face, and I made this sign, (double-sided) and I attended a protest at the Capitol with my friends.*

And here’s **Zander Zoia**, for whose family this is not an abstraction at all.

{Zander’s clip} *My family hasn’t done too much in relation to the protests in George Floyd’s death. We’ve been quite sad about it and it’s kind of scary to see all the violence and all the chaos that’s ensued, and has consumed*

*that whole area. My parents' businesses are there, and so that's where most of our thoughts and worries have been going. Otherwise, we are really sad and hope that things can get better.*

How can you fail to be sad in all this? Thanks, Zander. Our next guess, **Britt Sutton**, went on pilgrimage with Aiden, Liv, Zander, and twenty others, walking the Camino of Santiago de Compostelo. Lest we romanticize the Camino, we should know its history. Santiago, aka St. James, is best known in Spanish Catholic Folklore, as *Matamoros*, the Moor-Slayer, killer of infidel Muslims.

But I digress. Britt, like me, is staying home these days and being careful not to catch the virus. Also like me, Britt ventured out a couple of times to join the beautiful young crowds in the street. Here's his video.

*{Britt's clip} Hi everyone, my name is Britt. I'm going to be confirmed this year, in the confirmation class of 2020. And basically I have just responded to the murder of George Floyd and the events within my community and pretty close to my neighborhood by just getting out and seeing what's happening more, and not necessarily going to protests, just because of all the stuff around covid-19, which is a little bit worrying with those big groups of people. But I helped clean up, on Lake Street, all the burned-down buildings and looted stores. I did that with my dad and also went to the Memorial at 38th and Chicago, now 38th and George Floyd Avenue, with my family. It was really nice to see everyone being brought together, all having a like-minded mindset. And also I have been finding myself listening to upbeat music to combat all the sadness and the distraught in our lives right now.*

*{narration} Dr. King and Gandhi preached and practiced non-violence, like the millions filling the streets, masked and unmasked, furious and hopeful, weeping and singing, and if we have ever seen crucifixion, we saw it in Derek Chauvin's calm executioner's face, in George Floyd calling to his mother, and in the flames along Lake Street,*

*Crucifixion says, Violence IS OUR FINAL ANSWER! And so says the abusive husband, says the military budget, says the thundering twitterer of threats.*

But we see resurrection in the clean-up crews and the dancing, marching, singing, multiracial throngs on our screens. *Love*, says Jesus, *is my final answer*. Get out there and raise the dead, heal the sick, and cast out demons. You have what you need in your heart.

Our next guest is **Garrett Pauly Walvoord**, The video quality is my fault, not Garrett's.

*{Garrett's clip} Hello everyone, today I would like to talk to you about a message that was particularly profound to me, and that was Rev. Al Sharpton's address at George Floyd's funeral in Houston this week. "Until Americans who kill black and brown Americans are held responsible, there will be no change. Secondly, in the status quo, as a result of the racial injustice that is so ingrained in our society, these people are not being held accountable and until they are, by all Americans--white, black, brown, and all creeds and colors--there will be no change. And until Americans accept full responsibility that dedicating themselves to a life of racial justice is not just today, tomorrow, just a picture, just a post, or a donation, but a full change of the way we live our lives and the way we interact with each other, there will be no change." Sharpton says that to bury another black or brown American is too many. Injustice must change and we, all Americans, must dedicate ourselves to that change. Thank you.*

And here is what **Alexandre Cholat** said.

*{Alexandre's clip} The other day I walked to 38th and Chicago, right where George Floyd was murdered. There was a peaceful protest going on, and some demonstrators. It was a really powerful scene. I was soaking all this up and realized that this is only a half mile away from my house, which is really crazy. I look at the news now, and it's all over the world now, in Europe and China, people fighting for justice. And I thought to myself, realized something: I can't change the world. My voice alone can't change the world, but I can use my voice to change the community. In Minneapolis we saw what was wrong. I can use my voice to change my community, and my community can change the world, with my help.*

{narration} These student videos are my offering to you for today. We don't have any bread and wine. We have no hugs. No real singing together. No newcomers walking shyly in the door to see if St. John's Church, like Jesus, is for real.

Later this morning, you're invited to zoom calls at 9:30 and 10:30, and I hope you'll come. I'd love to hear about what you've been doing, or hoping to be doing.

If you are like me, I pray for this new generation of Americans, whose idealism is now being tested. Their patience and attention spans being stretched. Their will to struggle being formed. They are so beautiful.

I close with a few more pictures from Friday morning at 38th and Chicago. May God the Creator, God the Crucified and Raised, God who has by Thy might / led us into the light / keep us forever in the path, we pray.

{George Floyd Ave, no narration}

{The place Mr. Floyd left this Earth}

{Fist sculpture}

{George Floyd Square}

{I can breathe now -- add title}

{So it's OK for YOU to kneel?}

{Black people: you are so loved. Fade to black}