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## Bishop's Statement on George Floyd and Racial Violence

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Thu, Jun 4, 2020 at 4:30 PM



*From the Bishop*

### Statement on George Floyd and Racial Violence

June 4, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

***Peace be with you.***

These are the first words the risen Christ speaks to his disciples when he comes to them in the locked room on that first Easter night. The last they had seen of him, he was dying on the cross. But now, "Jesus came and stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this he showed them his hands and his side. ... Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.'" (John 20:19-21)

***Peace be with you.***

This is the Gospel we heard this past Sunday, on the Feast of Pentecost. And we hear this wondrous, awe-inspiring Easter story on Pentecost because we are celebrating the gift of the Holy Spirit - the ongoing presence of the living Christ and the very Breath of God. And in the next verses we are told, "when Jesus had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" (John 20:22-23)

And then he gives them his Spirit. Like God breathing into Adam and Eve at creation, Jesus breathes the Spirit of the new creation.

***Peace be with you.***

Within our longing to be together in church during this pandemic there is the longing for human connection, for human touch, for friendship. We want so much to gather at the Lord's Table and to share the Peace that Jesus gives. As we start to regather while continuing to observe

practices of social distancing, maybe after turning toward one another to wave or bow, we should turn outward and say to the community *beyond our walls*, “The Peace of the Lord be always with you.”

***I can't breathe.***

Oh, my God. I heard Sunday's Gospel, and all I could think of was the black child of God, George Floyd, his neck pinned to the pavement by the knee of a white Minneapolis policeman, with the life -the breath of God - being choked out of him until he was dead.

I heard “Peace be with you,” but what I saw was the almost casual execution of a hand-cuffed black man, spreading outward in spasms of violence, fear, and hatred and enveloping our beloved country.

***I can't breathe.***

How long, O Lord? My heart is broken, again. I grieve for Mr. Floyd and his family. I grieve for our fellow citizens of color, all counted among those Jesus so clearly calls our neighbors, who live under the shadow of injustice. I grieve for all the good and honorable people in law enforcement who put their lives on the line daily and who must go to work facing distrust and hostility because of historic racism and the unlawful actions of a few. I grieve for my children, and for all our children, who will inherit this prolonged and painful march toward justice and equal opportunity.

How can we have made such a mess of simple fairness? I confess and lament my own sins, my blindness, my indifference. I lament the violence loose in our cities. I lament that the unifying outrage at Mr. Floyd's unjust death has been co-opted and corrupted by cynical, opportunistic destroyers and exploited by politicians. I lament the temporarily lost opportunity for serious conversation and reform urged by the angry, but peaceful protestors as they struggle to hold our attention instead of the viral images of rioters and looters.

But I follow Jesus. And I believe that he loves Mr. Floyd, and though it's hard for me to say it just now, he loves that cop, too. I believe in the resurrection and that love conquers hatred and is stronger than death. I believe when hope becomes hopeless, then comes the Christ. And I believe the Church, you and me, is continually called to something greater and braver and more beautiful than we usually settle for. My hope is in the risen Christ and in his Kingdom. Therefore, I hope and trust that our children and grandchildren will build upon our shaky foundation, making significant strides in overcoming systemic racism and hate. I hope and trust that people of good will can *create opportunities* for reconciling conversations and constructive action.

We will regroup and regather to work for God's true peace and justice. Using a prayer from the Book of Common Prayer's marriage liturgy, God wants to make our life together “a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair.” We have holy work to do.

I love America. I was brought up to love it, to believe that *all* are created equal; to believe that we are one nation under God; to believe in liberty and justice for all; to aspire and work for the

high ideals of this nation; to cherish and respect the abundant blessings we have as a nation; and to serve the common good. I am thankful that peaceful protest is enshrined in our First Amendment and that our religious freedom brings us a responsibility to shine the light of the Gospel on society and government. I am thankful that I can speak freely, that you are free to disagree, and vice versa.

To face the racism that infects us like a pandemic is not about hating one another or bashing our beloved country. The conversations, debates, new policies, and reformed laws needed by our country and our society are about striving for those high ideals, are about seeking to do better. The violence and division of these days does not define us. They are a real and broken part of us, but we are so much more. And capable, by grace, of becoming so much more. People of color, who have suffered, and are suffering, injustice and indignity, yet continue to love America and call us to live up to its promises, have much to teach all of us about the preciousness of our country.

***Peace be with you.***

That's the first thing the risen Christ says. The first thing he *does* there on that first Easter evening is this:

***He showed them his hands and his side.***

He is risen and the wounds are there. But through those wounds comes our peace. His death is the way to new and reconciled life. "By his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5) To show our own wounds, as Christians and as Americans, is to be truthful. Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life tells us that when we know the truth, "the truth shall set you free." (John 8:32) The deep wound of racism tears us apart and shrinks our souls. Denied, it will almost surely metastasize. Jesus offers peace, and then he shows the violence that's been done to him - the legal, state-sanctioned violence that abused and killed him. On the cross, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" and having said this, "he breathed his last." (Luke 23:46)

***I can't breathe.***

***We can't breathe. Our brother is dying.***

***Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us.***

***Peace be with you. And he showed them his hands and his side.***

***As the Father has sent me, so I send you.***

*In the same way that God the Father has sent the Son, so Jesus sends the Church, sends you and me, to be fully present and embodied in his beautiful and broken world. He sends us by his Holy Spirit and with his very breath, to bring peace, and to show our wounds. And because we are sent as he is sent, by our wounds, we offer his own healing love, his own breath of life.*

Pray for the repose of the soul of George Floyd: "He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through his indwelling Spirit." (Book of Common Prayer, pg. 501) Receive our brother into the arms of your mercy; give him your Spirit; give him the breath of life eternal. Amen.

And, from the New Zealand Prayer Book, pray for Peace: "O God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, and give peace to your Church, peace among nations, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts." Amen.

"Breathe on us, breath of God; fill us with life anew..."

May the Peace of our Lord be with all of us.

Love in Christ,  
+David

David M. Reed  
**Bishop of West Texas**

## Read More

"A Word to the Church," letter from Presiding Bishop Curry on May 30th

"But We Must Still Choose Love," article by Presiding Bishop Curry

A Selection of Prayers Recommended by Bishop David Reed

Resources for Addressing Racist Violence from The Episcopal Church

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