

Daily Devotion for June 2, 2020

In the early years of my ministry, I was bi-vocational, that is, I worked part-time in a congregation with my spouse and part-time at a nearby long term care facility as a registered nurse. The last position I had at the facility was as the infection control and wound care nurse and I spent time tracking the various infections in the facility, providing infection prevention education sessions for staff and taking charge of any and all skin wounds.

I remember one resident in particular. She was a delightful lady, well into her 80's who was admitted with a small pressure ulcer on her hip (there's a more technical term for where it was located but I'll just say hip for ease of terms). It didn't seem too bad, just some raw skin, not very big...but the skin surrounding the open area was dark and that troubled us. It meant that there was more damage than was visible to the eye. We couldn't see it yet but it was lurking.

And sure enough, one day, her skin just fell away revealing a large gaping wound almost down to the bone. The underlying tissue was gray and dark, indicating infection and dead flesh. There was drainage and a foul odor. It was horrifying and frightening.

We were tested severely in trying to treat that wound. It meant daily cleaning and washing of the wound, packing it with medicated bandages, and weekly trimming or debriding of dead tissue so that healing could take place. It took a long, long time for healing to take place with constant attention and dedication to treatment. And of course, we weren't just treating a wound, we were caring for this dear lady, tending to her needs, her comfort and her care, all while trying to help her to eat well, maintaining her nutrition and hydration, encouraging her, and treating her as a person and just "a wound".

Why am I sharing this story? We have just been through one of the worst weeks we have experienced in years. George Floyd was killed just one week ago and less than 24 hours later, the four police officers who were involved in his death were fired. Three days later, one officer was arrested and charged with 3rd degree murder and manslaughter. Quickly, there were calls for the healing to begin with that arrest.

But we cannot make that move so quickly. There have been years and years, generations of racist treatment and brutality, inequality and injustice perpetrated upon our black and brown siblings. One arrest, or even 3 more arrests will not root out and cut away all of the insidious and deadly rot that has festered below the surface of "Minnesota Nice". I must admit that I felt relieved when the first reports of the looting, arson and vandalism, the burning of so many small businesses were being laid at the feet of "outsiders" out to do us harm. We couldn't conceive that Minnesotans could behave this way. Sadly, while there may be still "outsiders" doing harm, much of the damage was done by "us". And by "us" I mean looters, protestors and those who have supported white privilege and institutional racism for years.

All of us have contributed to the rot that was lurking below the surface. Before healing can take place, we must acknowledge our own complicity, confess our part, and pledge to learn from these terrible days. We must listen without comment to the stories being told of being profiled, targeted and viewed with suspicion while going about daily life. We must learn to recognize our own white privilege and call

it out when we perceive it. We cannot allow racist comments, slurs and “jokes” to be told in our presence without calling it out for what it is. We must seek out relationships that are mutual and respectful with black and brown people, appreciating their culture, traditions, joys and sorrows. We must advocate for change legislatively and institutionally. We must keep our eyes on the experiences of the victims, of the ones who have suffered and not be distracted by the excuses of “well, what about...”

It is a long, slow process. There are no easy fixes, no bandages that can cover the wound that has now been uncovered and exposed for all of the world to see. We must engage in the debriding of the dead tissue that is racism, prejudice, injustice, suspicion, white privilege and inequality. And we need to constantly examine our own attitudes and actions, cleansing our thoughts and words and deeds so that new tissue can emerge.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. “ Psalm 51:10

Let this be our prayer and our call to action as we grieve for George Floyd and pledge to rid ourselves and our society of the rot of racism. And let us begin the task of cleansing and renewal so that healing can eventually take place.

Peace be with us all,

Pastor Kisten