

Dearest friends of the Belly of the Whale,

We are a people desperately in need of healing. The needs of the world are vast and wide, but in this moment there are two pandemics that we are compelled to face together - one is brand new (covid-19) and one is centuries old (racism-1619). Both are heartbreaking.

I am overwhelmed. I am angry. I am lamenting.

I lament the lives and livelihoods lost to Covid. I lament the black lives lost to police brutality, murder, profiling and racism. I lament the centuries of trauma experienced by people of color in this country since slaves first arrived in 1619. I lament the opportunistic use of violence to turn peaceful rallies into senseless destruction. I lament all the ongoing agony and other forms of oppression and illness that still exist but are not front and center at this moment.

Yet I am hopeful.

I find hope in the compassion and dedication of essential workers providing care for all. I find hope in the police officers doing their job with integrity and compassion. I find hope in increased commitment to concrete actions needed for systemic change. I find hope in the peaceful protests bringing critical issues to light. I find hope in a faith that promises there are no wounds too deep to be healed, no sin too great to be forgiven.

*Lament and hope are excruciatingly and exquisitely interwoven
as part of the fabric our shared humanity.*

As a white woman, I am keenly aware that when I speak of the evils of racism, I do so as one who has not experienced the lifelong trauma of daily life in a world that sees darker skin as more dangerous skin. I acknowledge that too often I have been complicit by not challenging the comments of others, my own assumptions or my own biases. It is time to confess my own need for transformation and redemption.

To my friends of color, I am deeply sorry for the times I kept silent, looked away or failed to act. I hear you. I love you. I stand alongside you ready to learn, listen and act to bring about meaningful change, healing and justice.

To my white friends, I challenge you to stay engaged beyond the headline urgency of the moment. The racial inequities we face have been centuries in the making and will take time and commitment to dismantle. Stay committed. Stay engaged. Find what it is that YOU are called to do and then do it.

Listen carefully. Love profoundly. Act boldly.

As the director of Belly of the Whale Ministries, I commit to...

- ground all my words and deeds in the inconceivably vast love and grace of God,
- learn more about how to be an anti-racist and then live the lessons I learn,
- advocate tirelessly for systemic changes that will bring about peace and justice for all,
- pray without ceasing for eyes to see the image of God in every single person I meet.

I pledge to do this in part by increasing my commitment to prison ministry and advocating for concrete reforms that will combat the ongoing injustice of mass incarceration in the United States. I have a lot to learn, but feel deeply called to be engaged in racial reconciliation in this way. Please hold me accountable if you see me wavering in any way from this commitment.

Jonah's prayer from the belly of the whale was one of honest lamentation and prayerful hope. I pray that in our current collective belly of the whale moment we, too, will honestly face both the hurt and the hope.

The time for racial reconciliation and healing is now!

By God's grace and our faithful response, I pray that we can co-create a future where together we are able to...

*act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God
... one step at a time...*

With strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,

Sharon

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