

Watchword for Monday, April 20th

The Lord said, "I have chosen Abraham, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice." Genesis 18:19

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Peace and health to you in this midst of the challenging season with the COVID 19 pandemic. In the midst of great change, we have our attentions and energies drawn in many directions. We also are looking expectantly to a time when some sense of normalcy will return. In the midst of this I invite your reflections on the watchword from Monday, April 20th printed above. As children of Abraham what does it mean for us to be keepers of the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice?

It is encouraging to see the witness of our church communities in care for others by encouraging people to stay at home and practice physical distancing. It is amazing to see the ways congregations are reaching out to serve basic needs. In addition, it is heartening to see the works of justice as well.

We draw your attention specifically to this work of keeping the way of righteousness and justice. A time of change and challenge can reveal the tensions in living into this call and can teach us many things. This season with COVID 19 is revealing there is something wrong with our "normal".

- We are seeing how fragile existing economic structures are for those in poverty, working and middle classes.
- This pandemic is exposing more fully existing racial disparities. African Americans are being affected at much higher rates.¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released on April 17 that 30% of COVID 19 patients are African American though African Americans make up about 13 percent of the population in the United States.²
- Existing health disparities among Indigenous communities have made them especially vulnerable to COVID 19.³
- The Latinx/Hispanic community in the U.S. is disproportionately getting sick from COVID-19.⁴
- There is a rise in xenophobia. We have seen racially charged action against Asian Americans. "Reopen the government demonstrations" in Michigan and Wisconsin featured confederate

¹ "Covid-19 will pass. Will we be able to say the same about the racism it has illuminated?" by Morgan Medlock, April 23rd, 2020. STAT <https://www.statnews.com/2020/04/23/covid-19-will-pass-what-about-the-racism-it-has-illuminated/>

² "80% of Georgia Residents Hospitalized with COVID-19 Are Black" by Danielle Maya Banks, May 1, 2020. Blavity:News <https://blavity.com/80-of-georgia-residents-hospitalized-with-covid-19-are-black?category1=news&subCat=Wellness>

³ "Native American Communities disproportionately at risk amid COVID-19" by M. Johanna Lopez Miyaki, April 23rd, 2020. <http://eltecote.org/content/en/news/native-american-communities-disproportionately-at-risk-amid-covid-19/>

⁴ "Hispanic and Latino groups hit hard with coronavirus, VDH says" by Autumn Childress, May 1, 2020. <https://www.whsv.com/content/news/Hispanic-and-Latino-groups-hit-hard-with-coronavirus-VDH-says-570105991.html>

flags, white supremacy imagery and assault rifles. In addition, we have seen a rising wave of antisemitism.⁵

- There is a threat of restricting resources to persons in the trans community.⁶
- We see the public health crisis in overcrowded prisons and jails and many calling for release of people who pose no public safety threat. The U.S. current addiction to mass incarceration means many go to jail or prison not to keep our communities safe but to propel the prison industrial complex.⁷
- We have seen evidence of how comfortable we are with violence as this March marked the first March since 2002 in the United States that we have not had a school shooting.⁸
- Stay at home orders have given the natural world in many areas a “breather” and fostered health. Can we learn new ways to live well with God’s creation?

COVID 19 is exposing existing problems with how we care for each other and love our neighbors. Jesus’ friends could not go back to life as normal after his resurrection, they were called into a new future and so are we. In our own communities how are we embarking on this ministry of justice, right and restoration? Dear Church, how are we raising the call for our communities to address the larger issues of inequity? How is the Church’s prophetic voice lifting Christ’s call for restoration and healing in the brokenness such disparities reveal?

Yes, we want to return to life without the pandemic. Yet, there are some problems about simply returning to life as normal. God’s justice demands we not turn away from the existing injustices affecting God’s people, Jesus’ resurrection calls us to speak and act for the good of all, and the Spirit of our Living God moves us forward to bear a vision of a world restored and justice real for all.

In Christ’s justice, hope and peace

The Western District Justice Coordinating Team

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⁵ “As Coronavirus Spreads, So Does Xenophobia and Anti-Asian Racism” by Suyin Haynes, TIME March 6th, 2020 <https://time.com/5797836/coronavirus-racism-stereotypes-attacks/>

“Anti-Lockdown “movement”: Powered by racism” by Amanda Marcotte, Salon, May 4th, 2020 <https://www.salon.com/2020/05/04/anti-lockdown-movement-powered-by-racism/>

⁶ “Trump tells Doctors Treatment of COVID19 Transgender Patients is Optional” Kelli Busy, April 25th, 2020. Planet Transgender <https://planettransgender.com/trump-treatment-of-covid19-transgender-patients-is-optional/>

⁷ Learn more at www.rocwisconsin.org. Another good resource is Michelle Alexander’s “The New Jim Crow”

⁸ “It Shouldn’t Take A Pandemic to Prevent School Shootings” by Elaine Roth, April 29th, 2020 <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/shouldn-t-pandemic-prevent-school-050007172.html>

