

4 Easter 2020

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

This verse from Acts, is foreign to our economy in this country and unfortunately, to most Christians, including myself. To literally sell everything we have and distribute the proceeds to everyone, would put all of us on equal footing, regardless of Race, economic status, education, religious upbringing, sexual orientation, or privilege. I believe that, as a society, redistribution of wealth and goods, is absolutely necessary if we are able to move forward in a post-pandemic world..

I think that my greatest fear is that we will try in every way possible to go back to as we were 3-4 months ago; as if nothing happened. As is the case with many of you, the rollercoaster of emotions is almost unbearable. I have shared before that my tendency is to react to things pretty quickly. This leads to comments that were not well thought out. In some cases, my words probably needed to be said, but often **not** so much. I took part in the Webinar, sponsored by Christ Church Cranbrook, this past Wednesday night. The title is: ‘Race, Inequality, and COVID-19: A Conversation with Charles McRay Blow and Professor Angela Dillard.’

If you didn’t get to watch it, you can see the recording on YouTube. There was a lot for me to process after watching this. But one thing that I immediately reacted to was a comment by Charles Blow concerning what the Surgeon General had said. I had to look up the Surgeon’s General’s comments to see why many Black Americans had found them so offensive.

In a press conference explaining how Coronavirus was disproportionately affecting minority communities, Jerome Adams made these comments:

“I want to close by saying while your state and local health departments and those of us in public service are working day and night to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and to protect you regardless of your color, your creed or your geography, I need you to know that you’re not helpless and that it’s even more important in communities of color, that we adhere to the task force guidelines to slow the spread...

Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. And call your friends and family. Check on your mother, she wants to hear from you right now.

And speaking of mothers, we need you to do this if not for yourself than for your abuela. Do it for your granddaddy. Do it for your Big Mama. Do it for your Pop-Pop. We need you to understand, especially in communities of colors, we need you to step up and help stop the spread so that we can protect those who are most vulnerable”.

The Surgeon General, who is African American, was trying to relate on a personal level, but many felt he was talking down to them and treating them as though they were not able to take care of themselves.

I cannot certainly interpret his intent, only he can do that. But my immediate reaction was honestly anger. That the Surgeon General of the United States was telling people of color that if they took better care of their health, they could contribute to stopping this virus.

There was no mention of poverty being a factor, food insecurity being a factor, members of intergenerational family members living in one household, Many working in jobs that are

service oriented and considered essential so they had to continue going to work in often unsafe conditions or having no job at all. But to discuss any of these issues then becomes political and difficult to discuss if one wants to keep his job.

But what we **do know** is the disproportionate effect that this virus has had on people of color. On April 28th, the Diocese of Chicago also had a similar conference titled: “COVID-19, Health Disparities and Systemic Racism: How do we respond as people of faith?” In an article found on the Episcopal News Network last week; it read: “Moderator Derrick Dawson, co-program coordinator for Chicago Regional Organizing for Antiracism, opened the program by reminding participants that 30% of Chicago’s population, but 70% of its COVID-19 fatalities, are black. He said environmental, political and economic factors helped foster medical conditions that are driving the steep rates of death in black communities”. The article further states that; “According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Latinos account for 27% of COVID-19 deaths, but only 18% of the population in virus hotspots. The pandemic is also taking a significant economic toll in Latino communities. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 84% of Latinos are unable to work from home. In roughly 50% of Latino households, someone has lost a job or taken a pay cut, according to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center”.

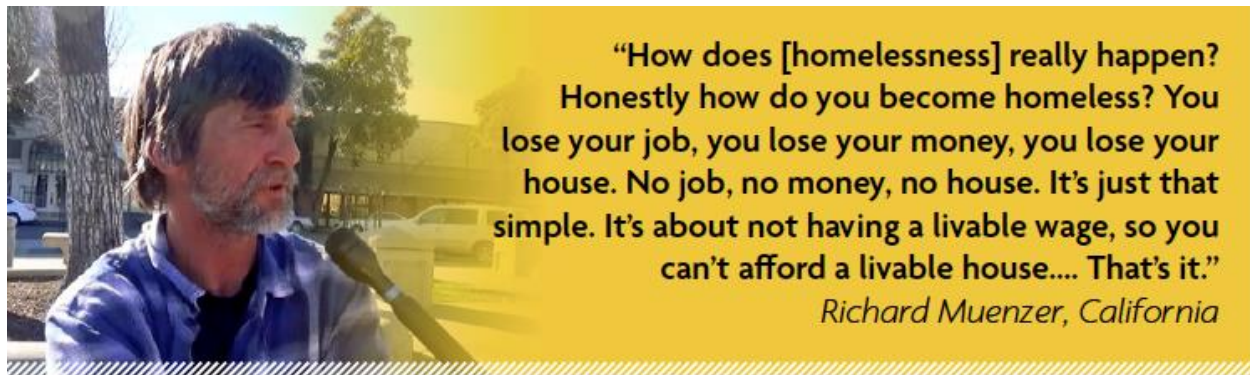
Laura Leon, a hospital program manager and health care justice advocate from Trinidad Lutheran Church in Chicago’s Humboldt Park said; “Latinos are the ones doing the unprotected work, and they are frequently doing it without health insurance. “Sometimes I want to close my eyes and not see it, but I think it is important that I see it and that I speak.”

The United Nation’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs put out a report

Concerning Indigenous Peoples and COVID-19. In part it stated:

“The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic poses a grave health threat to Indigenous peoples around the world. Indigenous communities already experience poor access to healthcare, significantly higher rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases, lack of access to essential services, sanitation, and other key preventive measures, such as clean water, soap, disinfectant, etc. Likewise, most nearby local medical facilities, if and when there are any, are often under-equipped and under-staffed. Even when Indigenous peoples are able to access healthcare services, they can face stigma and discrimination. A key factor is to ensure these services and facilities are provided in indigenous languages, and as appropriate to the specific situation of Indigenous peoples”.

Helping to personalize these issues are stories from individuals who have been directly affected by these injustices.





“As an Army veteran, I’ve seen the costs of endless war. I’ve worked with Afghans and Iraqis directly impacted. I’ve lost close friends to wounds and suicide. Our country has lost so much. What have we gained from 18 years of fighting? Elected leaders need to step up now and end the forever wars in an expedient and responsible manner.”

Jose Vasquez, New York

“The poverty in this area is not accidental. This was Native land, and then it became farming land. And there were industries like [General Motors] and others. It was a prosperous area and it worked for people. The San Fernando Valley was a place you wanted to be. It was plentiful. When NAFTA was signed, the factories left and jobs declined. Within a period of 5-10 years, everything changed.”

Diego Ortiz, California



“I have experienced things such as water shutoffs, poverty and living in fear of being taken away from my home...not being able to shower, brush their teeth, or cook, it’s wrong. No one wants to live in poverty. Being able to live with your basic needs, including water, is a human right.”

Kailani Jones, Michigan





“...My mother was a single parent, raising 4 children...An officer stated that he did not need a warrant to arrest my mother. ... [At the station] she went into an ICE hold. As the oldest of four, my whole world was destroyed. The questions that were running through my head were, ‘will I have to give up college? Get a full-time job in order to maintain the well-being of my siblings? Would I ever see my mother again?’

My mother was detained for about four weeks; those were the hardest four weeks of my entire life... I was destined to become an immigration attorney. There are currently more than 11,000 unaccompanied children in the care of U.S. Health & Human Services. This policy is inhumane, it is immoral, this policy must stop!”

Viviana Rodriguez, Alabama

While much of society can look at these issues as something to deal with later when we have gone back to normal; Christians do not have this luxury. For one thing, many of these issues have been present for decades and are now only being looked at seriously due to COVID-19. What may be **optional** for most, is an **expectation** for those who operate in an atmosphere of Love. Not that we are any less concerned about our families or getting back to work than our neighbors are. But as followers of Jesus, our path forward must lead to a new normal whatever that may end up looking like. We are just as responsible if not more, for the injustices that exist and the suffering that has been caused to our brothers and sisters of color, to all those who are homeless and live in poverty, to all those who have little to no access to adequate healthcare, food, or clean water. We must challenge the status quo. For those who love God, there is no other choice. It is what we are called to do.

Yes, we have a lot of soul-searching and work to do. But my sisters and brothers, we always have hope.

A good friend put a meditation on Facebook yesterday which I found very appropriate and moving. It is by Imogen, the Priest at the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Raleigh, North Carolina. Imogen references a poem written by Jan Richardson titled; "Blessing For a Broken Vessel". It reads:

(for Holy Saturday)

"Do not despair,

You hold the memory of what it was to be whole.

It lives deep in your bones.

It abides in your heart

that has been torn

and mended a hundred times.

It persists in your lungs

that know the mystery of what it means to be full,

to be empty,

to be full again.

I am not asking you to give up your grip

on the shards you clasp so close to you

but to wonder what it would be like

for those jagged edges

to meet each other in some new pattern that you never imagined,

that you never dared to dream”.

I believe that through our Baptism, we hold the inherent memories of what it means to be whole. Those memories are deep within us. Even now we now find ourselves to be broken; society to be broken; justice to be broken. Just as we became a new creation through our Baptism, our brokenness can once again be made whole by God. We need to actively welcome God into our lives. As Imogen put it:

““It is one thing to realize that God is present with us all of the time. It is another thing to **welcome** God’s presence into our lives. It is one thing to give somebody the key to our house and say, “Come and go as you please, you’re welcome anytime. It is another thing to open the door for them and say, ‘Oh my gosh, I can’t tell you how glad I am that you are here. Thank you for coming”.

How joyful is that? My brothers and sisters, we can get back to where we need to be.

Maybe not quite the same way as the early Christians did. Their new normal looks different than our new normal will look. But we will find a way to live in that new normal with all of our sisters and brothers in equality.

One step at a time, but always moving forward, with God leading the way.

AMEN!