

There is a dangerous rising tide of white supremacy in our country today.

There are a growing number of people emboldened to express and act on their belief that white people are superior to people of other races; that this land was built by and belongs to the white man.

White supremacy is the original sin of this country. We assumed supremacy over the native peoples who inhabited this land when we came here as immigrants and foreigners.

We assumed supremacy over Africans as we enslaved them to work in the land that we stole from native peoples.

As we came to our senses and ended slavery we created Jim Crow laws and other barriers to keep black people poor and disenfranchised.

These are the beginnings of a scourge of cyclical poverty that we all still suffer from today.

This is the mess we have inherited; it's hard to know how to reconcile our past with our present and our future.

What we saw in Charlottesville this week was evil.

Armed men bearing torches and shouting Nazi slogans about blood and soil go beyond protesting decisions to remove monuments.

The idea that a certain segment of society deserves more privileges than others is directly in opposition with the message of Jesus. We are to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves,"

How do we bear that love in a situation like this? How do we bear God's love and witness to others who spew hatred and discord?

What are we supposed to do other than shake our heads and lament the fact that in this day and age a movement such as this could be gaining strength and growing.

Martin Luther King, Jr., wisely said:

"It may well be that we will have to repent in this generation. Not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people."

There is a subtle but strong pressure to stay quiet. There is pressure to not talk about it in certain places. Not on social media, not at social gatherings and certainly not in church.

Today is our day of Sabbath. A day of rest and a day to give thanks for all of the gifts God has given to us. It is also a day to think deeply about how our Christian faith impacts how we act in the world.

We cannot remain silent. We have to have the courage to denounce evil acts and to work toward reconciliation.

The word courage has at its core the word coeur or heart. Rather than an act of heroism, when we are courageous, we draw upon our deepest held beliefs and speak and act from that place, even if the words or actions present a conflict in polite society or even a danger to us.

This is what the Syrophenician woman does.

She is an outsider, someone named as other. Her people fought against the Israelites in the Maccabean revolt. She is Greek, she is a gentile, she is a woman. She is.... other.

The Maccabean revolt is the stuff of legends for the Jewish people. Everyone knew that this woman was on the wrong side of Jewish history, when Jesus and the disciples saw her coming; they saw their common enemy.

I don't think there is any way to sugar coat how Jesus reacts to her. He is ready to dismiss her; to ignore the fact that her daughter is beyond ill and desperately needs his help.

Her daughter's illness has radically changed her and the woman is desperate to have her daughter back, healthy and whole.

Jesus had just been telling the disciples that what they digest spiritually is revealed in the actions they take.

Then he encounters the enemy and is challenged by his own prejudice. He experiences an "us and them" moment.

This story reveals the full humanity of Jesus. It is in our human DNA to categorize people, to try to protect our tribe from the hostile tribe. It's a matter of survival.

But when we let our fear dictate our actions, we lose our ability to discern what is right.

In God's kingdom we all are recipients of God's grace and the gift of life. We are all welcome to receive the power of God's healing to bring freedom from what holds us back from thriving and living as we are intended to live.

The woman's daughter is possessed by a demon, she is not herself, she is not living as her true self but is enslaved by something that prevents her from fully embracing life.

Hate of the other robs us of life.

The woman somehow knows that Jesus can offer her daughter the ability to reclaim her life.

She also knows that she is the other, the outsider.

She calls deep upon her courage, to walk into a place filled with people who she knows will see her as the enemy. She crosses that line that society has drawn in the sand to mark what is or is not acceptable.

She calls on her courage and humbles herself trusting that Jesus will sense her deep need and be moved beyond his prejudice to share the power of God's healing and compassionate love. Somehow she knows that Jesus will treat her justly if she hold her ground and speaks her truth.

When we are courageous we act from our heart.

Our Baptismal Covenant (Book of Common Prayer, pp. 304-305) reminds us, as Christians, to "persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord."

What happened in Charlottesville was evil—pure and simple. There is nothing God-like or life-giving about the KKK, Neo-Nazis or white supremacists.

The final part of the Baptismal Covenant asks the question, "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?"

The link between love and justice is unbreakable in the kingdom of God. "Jesus taught us to love not hate. Jesus taught us to stand up for the poor, the

oppressed and the marginalized. Jesus also taught us to stand up and speak out against injustice and hate. “1

Today is our Sabbath, a time to rest, a time to give thanks, a time to think deeply about our lives and to become grounded in our faith so that when we are called on to respond we can respond with love and true courage.

“May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.”

-A Franciscan Blessing

Resources:

With thanks for inspiration to:

Bishop Scott Mayer

<https://episcopaldiocesefortworth.org/we-are-baptized-for-such-moments-as-this/>

Rachel Held Evans

Cory Booker

August 12th

https://www.facebook.com/corybooker/?hc_ref=ARTPrGx38Jk2iqfaoUzOp2z-a-tq980tM8I28upEiCUY2DHuWwfMQRN8SP64OHqKbfg&fref=nf

Rev. Kevin Johnson

<https://episcopaldiocesefortworth.org/diocesan-clergy-respond-to-charlottesville/>

Dr. Cornel West