

Dear First Baptist Church of Stoneham,

8/28/20

On Sunday August 23rd Jacob Blake was shot in the back seven times by Kenosha, Wisconsin Officer Rusten Sheskeyas as Blake attempted to get into his vehicle. The full story is still unfolding, but this fits the usual narrative that has happened over and over again; an unarmed Black man is shot down by Police. Given all of the fervor that came from the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, Blake's shooting occurred in a perfect storm of frustration, pain, sadness, and anger. All of this has boiled over into rage that has been expressed by some through property destruction, arson, and looting. Tim Keller in speaking about injustice gives a window into the mindset of those that take the path of destruction. If injustice goes unchecked and there is no hope in God's final justice, the result is that:

“...there are only two things to do – lose all hope or turn to vengeance... it means that the tyranny and oppression that have been so dominant over the ages will never be redressed... since there is no Judgment Day, we will need to take up our weapons and go and hunt down evildoers now... belief in Judgment Day keeps us from being... too violently aggressive in our pursuit of truth and justice.”

-Tim Keller *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*

Proverbs 13:12 says that “Hope delayed makes the heart sick” and with the scourge of Police brutality there has been a lot of delayed hope. This in no way means that looting and violence is justifiable. No, this means that what we are seeing is not so much lawless chaos but the pain, hopelessness, and anger that has built up over decades of Police abuse, discrimination, and inequality. Wisconsin has been rated as the worst place for a Black person to live by several sources for the following reasons:

Black Wisconsin residents are also almost 10 times more likely than whites to go to prison, nearly the largest gap. Black children in Wisconsin had worse educational outcomes than their white classmates and their black peers in other states. Milwaukee topped the nation's most racially-segregated U.S. cities, which is also where the vast majority of the state's black population lives.¹

What we are seeing in Wisconsin goes beyond Police brutality into issues of mass incarceration, housing discrimination, and education inequality. Issues that, almost 60 years after the Civil Rights movement, still need to be addressed. Looking beyond anti-Black racism into xenophobia, let us not forget that it was almost a year ago that a White Milwaukee man threw acid into the face of a Hispanic man telling him “Why did you invade my country? Why don't you respect my laws?” assuming that the man was “illegal.”²

What are we as a church to do right now with the situation in Wisconsin and the continuing issue of individual and systemic racism, xenophobia, and Antisemitism throughout the country? Pray, first and foremost. We need a miracle to turn the tide of hatred in this

¹ <https://www.blackenterprise.com/5-worst-states-for-black-americans/6/>

also see <https://www.wpr.org/report-milwaukee-racine-rank-worst-cities-african-americans-live>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/nov/06/milwaukee-acid-attack-clifton-blackwell-hispanic>

country and only God can do that. After prayer, I must be completely honest with you all, I don't know what the next steps should be. Protests are good, they raise awareness, but there needs to be solid, tangible action. What that should look like eludes me. Voting this November is important, both locally and nationally. We need people in office that support radical Police reforms and accountability. Self-education on the problem is also important along with self-examination of our own hearts and attitudes. Beyond this we need to seek God for how we as individual Christians and as a church body can join Jesus in the work of dismantling racism in our country.

In the area of self-education, I would recommend the following books:

-[White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity](#) by Robert P. Jones

-[The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today](#) by Charles Marsh

-[The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee](#) by Patrick D. Jones

-[Civil Rights Activism in Milwaukee: South Side Struggles in the '60s and '70s](#) by Paul H. Geenen

I recently finished *White Too Long* and found it to be an excellent examination of the seeds of racism that were planted into American Christianity early on that took root and continue to bear fruit today. *The Beloved Community* traces how Christianity played a large role in the Civil Rights movement and the continuing struggle for racial justice and equality today. I have not read the last two books that focus on Milwaukee, but I wanted to include them as they give more background to a deep history of racial division and injustice in the city and the state of Wisconsin.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Psalm 32:8 HCSB

Let's ask God for wisdom and instruction on this and follow out His plan.

Thank you,

Pastor Calvin W. Fergins, Jr.