

Easter 5—Year A  
Acts 7:55-60  
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16  
I Peter 2:2-10  
John 14:1-14

On **Friday morning**, I was in the middle of writing the announcement about the new **Missioner we will share with the Diocese** (we'll get a sneak preview this coming Wednesday before the Bishop announces on Thursday), I was working on that announcement when **my phone started going crazy with texts**. They were from my friend and colleague **Pastor Reggie Hunt** who leads **Cornerstone Summit Church**. The one I saw first said this:

*Black and brown ppl get profiled often. And in this case a black man was profiled, tracked down and shot and recorded.*

*By these guys*

Then followed pictures of **Gregory and Travis McMichael**, the two white men, father and son, who have now been **arrested and charged** with **aggravated assault** and the **murder** of **Ahmaud Arbery**, a 25-year old black man who was **jogging** through a neighborhood outside of Brunswick, GA. **Gregory McMichael**, the father, said that he thought **Arbery** looked like a suspect in a series of recent break-ins. **They saw him running, they armed themselves, got in their pickup truck, chased him, and shot him.**

This happened on **February 23<sup>rd</sup>, two and a half months ago**. **Gregory McMichael** was a former police officer and former investigator for the Brunswick Judicial Circuit District Attorney's office. This case made its way to two prosecutor's desks (both of whom had to recuse themselves because of relationships with **Gregory McMichael**), but it wasn't until a **video tape of the shooting surfaced this week, filmed by third person, William Bryan, followed by a national outcry**, that the **gears of the justice system started to turn in earnest**. The **Georgia Bureau of Investigation** and the **FBI** are now involved. And finally, **Thursday**, the **DA representing the Atlantic Judicial Circuit arrested and charged the McMichael's**. *Ten weeks Ahmaud's parents have waited for their son's alleged murderers to be put in jail.*

*I had heard something about this story earlier this week*, probably when the **video went viral**, but honestly, *I hadn't tuned into the details*. There's a lot to track these days—the **pandemic**, an **economy in freefall**, thinking about **how we will reopen church** and **what the new normal will be**, **balancing work and home**, **sometimes doing work at home**, **ricocheting between too much connection or too little**—all the stuff you all are balancing, too. *So, I wasn't tuned in.*

*And then came the texts.*

After the pictures, Reggie texted this, and I share this with his permission.

*This is the profile of [the] murderers*

*And this is the profile of the guys that I see.*

*This is what the service man looks like that comes to install the cable and is awkward when he realized I'm black and relaxes when he realizes I work for app*

*This is the profile of The guy that refers to me as son, and wants to say boy .  
This is the guy at The stop light with a confederate flag*

*This is the guy that works maintenance at sp and has the trump sticker, works at the physical plant at ASU  
and wants to talk about Armanti*

*This is the profile of the guy that stares at me when I'm riding a bike or sits outside in the lot at church  
and I'm not supposed to be scared.*

*And many white pastors and friends, coaches are silent. Smh. Appreciate you being authentic in friendship  
and speaking up.*

Ouch. I had a **rush of emotions**, starting with **shame** (*How could I not be paying attention?*) moving quickly to **deflecting** (*How can I be expected to track all these things—there is so much in the world right now?*). And then that **sinking feeling** (*What do I say, how do I respond to my friend and colleague, Reggie?*) I was incredibly **uncomfortable** and **uneasy**. I **wanted to explain myself**, but there was a **deeper intuition stirring** that **I just needed to receive what he said—let that land good and hard, a blow to the chest, a blow to the heart.**

Finally, I tapped out this reply—*“Thank you for dialing this in with laser focus. This works on my heart and soul, and will find its way to words. I am committed to that.”* That felt true. And I knew it **committed me to find words and raise it with you all this morning.**

Reggie replied with this.

*This was my challenge on social media*

*to my evangelical bros/sis, to my campus min bro/sis, to my para-church friends, to several of my white colleagues.*

*Proverbs 20:23 “unequal weights are detestable to the Lord and dishonest scales are not good.”*

*I encourage you to speak up. Why is there silence to a justice system that allows two men to leave their house, profile and shoot an unarmed black man in the street!*

*We don't like to talk about race, but we want diversity. We invite black/brown people to help our “diversity” by singing in worship, preaching, reflect on MLK weekend (once a year), help our programs etc.*

*If I assimilate into your world weekly, I ask you to have compassion for the horror of mine!*

*God saved you for your heart, called you to ministry to reflect His heart. We are called to lead communities not stand in PC fearing the loss of attendance. Consider Speaking up and using your influence to adjust the “dishonest scales”*

*(make the proverbs a devotional text before you preach it 🙏🙏)*

I told him that what he posted was *absolutely a fair critique, challenge and call*, and then I asked his permission to share his words, to which he replied, *“Absolutely. We are friends in the trenches.”*

What I didn't see until much later was Reggie's preface to all the texts—right at the beginning, he said that he was sending this to me because he felt close to me and a few others in Boone. Reggie trusted me enough to share **what is real and what is raw and what is true**. Such trust is tender and sacred and comes with the responsibility to steward it well. *Who is that person in your life who trusts you enough to tell you the hard truth, a hard truth you then have to steward?*

Uncomfortable though it is, and it is **immensely uncomfortable**, Reggie was **the stone upon which I had to stumble Friday morning**. His witness, and the witness of Ahmaud, and the witness of all black and brown people who are shot because *we*, whose skin is white, who have lived our whole lives with the privilege of *“being given the benefit of the doubt,”* the witness of all these black and brown people who *continue* to be shot because *we* can't get a handle on our bias and fear, privilege and power—**THESE ARE THE STONES UPON WHICH WE MUST STUMBLE**. The witness of all those who are killed by those in power who feel threatened *going all the way back to the stoning of Stephen at Saul's command [Acts 7:55-60]*, the witness of all the innocents murdered throughout the ages—**THEIR CRIES ARE THE STONES UPON WHICH WE MUST STUMBLE** because staring up at us *through their eyes* are the eyes of our crucified Lord.

*We need to be broken by this. By what happened to Ahmaud, and by what is happening to our black and brown friends all the time—in huge glaring public ways and in the private drip, drip, drip of daily humiliations.*

I know it's **hard right now to stay dialed in to all that's being revealed to us, all the inequities and injustices that occur every day, and all the disparities that have been especially revealed by the Coronavirus**, *but we must keep our eyes trained on these events, we must speak up and call it out—call it out when we witness it, call it out when the justice system fails to do justice, call it out when “the way the world works” doesn't work for our brothers and sisters whose skin is darker, AND THEN we've got to roll up our sleeves and get to work “striving for justice and peace” as we have vowed to do. This is painstaking, slow, hard work.*

I often don't know **THE WAY** forward, and **THE TRUTH** is hard to find, and **LIFE** feels so precarious, *but Jesus knows THE WAY, Jesus will dial us into THE TRUTH, if we dare to have ears to hear, and Jesus will show us how to make LIFE sacred again because he himself is the essence of ALL these things.*

When we **join in THE WAY of justice and peace**, when we seek out **THE TRUTH**, *no matter how painful it is to hear*, when we dare to believe that **black and brown LIVES matter because they are made in the image of God and live in bodies in which Jesus himself lives**, THEN *we'll begin to understand “the place that Jesus has prepared for us;” THEN we'll be able to recognize “the Father's house with many dwelling places” that Jesus speaks of.*

As we join this **WAY** and **TRUTH** and **LIFE**, Jesus himself will take all our shattered and broken pieces, *“join them to himself, THE cornerstone, and build us into a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, God's own people,”* in the words of I Peter. And all this *isn't just to construct a beautiful mansion for its own sake*, but there's always a *“so that”*—we are **built into a spiritual house joined to the cornerstone “in order that [we] may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light.”**

Jesus is “calling us out of darkness” and blindness and “into his marvelous light,” confident that, with his help, in his power, we will be strong enough to take on the powers-that-be and build the *beloved community*—build a *community* that is just and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and kindness—build the kind of *community* that *he died for*, build the kind of *community* that *he rose for*, build the kind of *community* that *he holds together in his body*.

After all, as Ephesians 2 proclaims, “For *he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone* (there’s that cornerstone again). *In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.*”

I often don’t know **THE WAY** forward, and if I ever had the illusion *that I did know THE WAY*, well *the pandemic has taken care of that*, but **I DO KNOW** that when **someone comes across our path** and trusts us with their experience and their story and calls us to wake up and pay attention, then we best stop what were doing and dial it in because Jesus is calling us to follow him into a shattered place and join him in making it new.

So, stumble on this stone, fall and be broken, shattered even; it’s *the only WAY Jesus can break open our hard hearts and make them new*. Then, with a heart made new, with courage emboldened, with voice that is sure and clear, *let him seal you to himself*. The cornerstone is longing for us to join him, and in the strength of that bond, come what may, *we will SPEAK what needs to be spoken and we will DO what needs to be done UNTIL we are the one new humanity that Jesus labored so dearly to birth*. Amen.

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