



Statement on the verdict in Kenosha

Faithful friends,

In worship at this week's presbytery gathering, our prayer of confession and hope opened with these words:

Lifelong discipleship formation is marked by a life of faith that actively seeks wisdom. It does not rest on what was learned in the past but is awakened by the issues facing today's culture: injustice, inequality, divisive segregation, oppression, suffering, abuse of creation. Lord, show us where we are complacent in our discipleship. (written by Rev. Michelle Henrichs)

Within the bounds of the area which we describe as the Presbytery of Milwaukee, the injustice and inequality of human laws demonstrated by the releasing of accountability of a human who killed other humans requires active discipleship.

We grieve with the families and friends of Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber, as their grief is compounded by the waiving of accountability by the justice system. We grieve with Gaige Grosskreutz whose injuries have not been addressed with remorse and restitution. We grieve with the community of Kenosha so deeply wounded by the events that have unfolded since the day Jacob Blake was shot and paralyzed by law enforcement. We grieve with all communities and all justice-seeking leaders who fear that the vigilantism rewarded with this acquittal will embolden other citizens to take lives. We grieve with our loving God who weeps when any of God's children are harmed by one another.

And we grieve deeply with Siblings of Color who count the verdict in Kenosha as one of innumerable evidences of disparities between the treatment of Black and Brown people and the treatment of White people. The call to active discipleship on our predominantly White presbytery begins with active listening to the cries of those who speak of injustice, inequality, oppression, and suffering – listening without counter-arguments, listening without hypotheses, listening with trust in the people who have lived experiences which we as White people will never have.

As a Matthew 25 presbytery, we have committed to acknowledge all forms of racism and engage with the struggles for racial justice. As a foundation, in 2016 the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted an anti-racism policy which clearly explains "Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. It is also a lie about God, for it falsely claims that God favors parts of creation

over the entirety of creation. Because of our biblical understanding of who God is and what God intends for humanity, the PC(USA) must stand against, speak against and work against racism. Anti-racist effort is not optional for Christians. It is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship, without which we fail to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.”

Active discipleship around injustice, inequality, oppression, and suffering looks, too, like learning – learning more and more of the stories that People of Color have been gifting unhearing ears about what life is like as people not perceived as White. You will find at the end of this writing a handful of excellent resources to learn something **old** but likely unheard, as of yet, by White ears.

Active discipleship involves engaging today’s systems in order to effect change on them. It looks like many things from

- teaching others what you’ve learned
- electing leaders, including in the legal system, who are committed to addressing the structural inequalities that disadvantage people who are not White and able-bodied and straight and cisgender (identifying with the gender assigned at birth)
- examining the solutions we have put in place to help people and changing/correcting them where they don’t actually help **all** people

and myriad small and large ways which require us to use our voices speaking God’s abundant love for every single person.

Active discipleship is claiming the boldness of Christ to speak out against injustice even now, especially now, that violence against those who stand up for the marginalized has been deemed legal. Active discipleship means boldly speaking for justice and equality in our communities, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our families, even at the risk of our own comfort in those situations. Active discipleship demands we examine our complacency around violence, especially gun violence, our complacency around the lack of accountability for oppressive and unequal actions, our complacency around violent and unjust things that “don’t happen here,” because they happen everywhere, **including** our own backyard. Active discipleship is emboldened vocal and visible witness when God’s love is missing from our systems, from our communities, from our networks, from our neighborhoods, from our nation.

Active discipleship includes difficult reckoning. For those of us who are perceived as White, a category that has shifted with the arbitrary legal decisions by judges in power over our country’s history, acknowledging that we may lack a variety of privileges and may have experienced many, many difficulties, but none of those hardships were because of the color of our skin, may be uncomfortable. In Mark 10:17-31, a rich man asks Jesus what he needs to do to get to heaven and Jesus tells him to sell everything he has and give the money to the poor. The man went away “shocked” and “grieving” for he had many possessions.

Ashanti Cook, a member of Calvary and of the Racial Equity and Justice Task Force, and I have been having conversations about the weight of the arbitrarily-valued and arbitrarily-designated Whiteness, in itself a difficult reckoning at first. The next steps of active discipleship around injustice, inequality, oppression, and suffering as people identified as White are akin to those of the rich man, the ones

that sent him away shocked and grieving. Ashanti wisely wrote to me, “Many people may benefit from the fallacy of whiteness, which in and of itself is oppression, as those who are labeled as black do not get a choice about such label in the eyes of those who claim whiteness.” Active discipleship calls us to give away the possession of Whiteness, to eschew the value of Whiteness, if there is any hope of redistributing what we White people have had in benefits apart from and above People of Color. You, too, may feel shocked and grieving.

We cannot undo the verdict which delivered no consequences for a child of God taking the lives of two other children of God. What we **can** do is lean into the call to active discipleship in the face of injustice, inequality, oppression, and suffering. Will you join me, and help me be accountable?

In faith,
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Moderator, Presbytery of Milwaukee

Christian Boyd,
Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Milwaukee

Rachel Yates,
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Joyce Wilks-Love,
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Mel Smith,
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Joy Myers,
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Jesse Swanigan,
Moderator of Public Witness, Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy

Travis Winckler,
Moderator of Dismantling Racism and White Privilege
Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy

an abbreviated beginner’s reading list

- *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Richard Rothstein
- *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, James W. Loewen
- *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, Bryan Stevenson
- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander
- *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, Edward E. Baptist

- *Race in America: Christians Respond to the Crisis*, David Maxwell & Laura M. Cheifetz, eds.
- *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*, Michael Eric Dyson
- www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/racism/