

Dear siblings in Christ,

Bishop Hanley and I have been deeply troubled by the events in our nation's capitol. I offered to write a message to the diocese as Bishop-Elect and he, your Bishop, has graciously agreed to join me.

We continue to reflect on, pray over and think critically about the riot on Wednesday that desecrated our nation's capitol building. That day we sat through meetings as the news was breaking and we felt torn between the business at hand and the terrifying violence that was being inflicted upon symbols of our democracy. Like everyone we've spoken to, we were heart-sick and profoundly sobered by the reality of what our country is now confronting.

This morning in my email, I received images of African American Christian women, dressed in white, standing firm and statuesque, and a caption suggesting they ought to be the security in front of the capitol. They would guard it fueled by their faith in Jesus Christ, a symbol of compassion, mercy, justice and peace. There was irony in some of the other images I received. One photograph showed African American janitors cleaning up the wreckage left by the rioters. The irony: African Americans cleaning up the mess created by white supremacists who hate and fear them.

I hope that our reflections and discussions in the coming weeks, months and years will continue to draw us into deep self-examination about our identity as a country with roots in racism and the ways it enlivens some while killing others. I also hope that these same reflections and discussions will inspire us to ask "what is required of us as followers of Jesus?"

At this particular moment, I am reflecting on the danger of living one's life embodied as the "other." I am thinking about the ways that living in a body feared by those in power can shape behavior, assumptions, psychology (and more) focused on survival. I am thinking about the way that the mere presence of the "other" makes some people fearful even as they scramble to believe they are superior.

We know what is required of us as followers of Jesus. Love ... not sentimental love, as **Presiding Bishop Curry clarifies**, but love that is courageous, merciful and reconciling. This Christ-like love is also embodied. It is not an intellectual undertaking as much as it is a heart-filled commitment to be moved to embrace a stranger ... to be humbled by our limits ... to be informed by what our bodies tell us. When we experience fear, our bodies are focused on survival in the most primal sense. Fear can be a wise teacher, if we stop and listen. And fear can be put to rest by love that is patient and kind. This kind of love is what Jesus was teaching. Unlike fear, love is not a knee-jerk reaction; it is the result of habits cultivated through prayer, common worship, and meditating on God's Word.

Perfect love casts out fear. This is one of my favorite quotes from The Bible because it challenges me to cultivate the love that Jesus taught - love that inspires me to lay down my life for my neighbor, that does not judge with an eye toward superiority or dominance, and that tempers and forges and remakes the primal temptation to fear those who are different.

In our prayers and meditations as we struggle to find our way in times steeped with hatred and fear, let us all remember that each of us is called to forgive one who has hurt us and to ask for forgiveness from one we have hurt. This is how Christ-like love is cultivated. This is how we become transformed as the Beloved Community.

May God help us as God continues to love us beyond our understanding.

Yours in Christ,

Diana Akiyama
Bishop-Elect

Michael Hanley
Bishop