

Broken Open: A Holy Week Retreat Experience

Today is Wednesday of Holy Week. My name is Rev. Victoria Carr-Ware and I serve as the Ecumenical and Multifaith Campus Minister at Seattle U. Our theme today is the Call and Cost of Discipleship.

Thinking back to last year when then Senator Kamala Harris stood before the nation and accepted her nomination to the Vice Presidency of the United States, I was overwhelmed with emotion. Senator Harris talked about the women and men who came before us. The ones who, and I quote, “without fanfare or recognition organized, testified, rallied, marched, and fought not just for the vote but for a seat at the table. These women and the generations that followed worked to make democracy and opportunity real in the lives of all of us who followed.” Then Senator Harris named some of the folks who came before us like Mary Church Terrell and Mary McCleod Bethune; Fannie Lou Hamer and Diane Nash; Constance Baker Motley and Shirley Chisholm. Seeing a Black, South-Asian woman standing before us meant something to little brown and black girls all over this nation and world and it signaled something profound to everyone else as well. Those on the margins saw all the possibilities before them. The stories of these women, their fight, their struggles, their victory, they represent our history, American history, as much as anyone else does. The story of our ancestors, the people, the women whose lives and experiences and struggles we don’t often hear about, but upon whose shoulders we all undoubtedly stand. I wonder, would I be where I am today, if it weren’t for the likes of these women... and my own mother and grandmothers and the men who fought alongside them? Would you be where you are if not for the ones who fought against systems and structures, if not for the ones who came before who fought for the freedoms we’ve gained so far?

While stomping for then Senator Barack Obama, Grammy award winning media mogul, Jay Z was right when he said, “Rosa Parks sat so Martin Luther King could walk. Martin Luther King walked so Obama could run. Obama's running so we all can fly.” And that

realization is what gives me the courage to keep on fighting, and to keep on following the way of the cross, despite the possibility of rejection, suffering, betrayal, and sometimes even violence. Knowing that those who came before me fought so I can continue fighting for justice today *and* for those who come after me.

The truth is we are surrounded by so much violence that it's often hard not to become numb to the suffering in our wake. It's almost natural for us to hide away and make sure we're safe and secure, even if it means that others are suffering for our unearned privilege. More than 561,000 people are dead from coronavirus and still some are saying it's just a hoax. Ten people were killed in a mass shooting in Colorado this month and still some are arguing against common sense gun laws. With a nearly 150% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes, some folks are still asking whether the shooting spree at Asian spas across the Atlanta area that left 6 Asian-American women dead and 2 others, should be considered a hate crime. Worse yet, some are asking if these women were involved in the sex trade, as if an answer in the affirmative would make their murders somehow less important, less egregious, less real, less worthy of our attention and grief.

As Christians, we cannot afford to become numb. It is not the way of Christ. Jesus Christ understood suffering and oppression experientially. In his life, and context, we see a man whose life circumstances compelled him to speak truth to the proverbial powers, not only to help heal the wounds of the spirit but also to address the practical realities of his own people who were subjected to the harsh and cruel treatment of the ruling class.

I wonder, how might we treat refugees and asylum seekers at our border, how might we feel about children being thrown in cages, separated from their families if we confessed that as an infant, Jesus too was a refugee, seeking asylum in Egypt as his family and many others fled the murderous edicts of Herod. How might we respond to the poor, or include the poor in our political discussions and debates when we think of the abject poverty, destitution, and physical hunger that Jesus faced as a child and young man? How might we treat young mothers, pregnant out of wedlock seeking reproductive care

and assistance raising their children, if we remember that Jesus's own mother, was a teenage mom who conceived her firstborn out of wedlock and was looked on with disdain in her own time. How might we see these folks differently? Who might we seek to include? On whose behalf are we willing to make good trouble? Shouldn't it be those who are well acquainted with the suffering of Jesus. The call and the cost of discipleship, the way of the Cross, requires us to look upon the face of those who are suffering as if we are looking upon the face of Christ himself.

In the Cross we find God's presence in our broken and bleeding places; in the Cross we find the courage to continue fighting for the beloved community; and in the Cross and Resurrection, we are reminded that God reigns forever. Jesus' call to take up our cross and follow him is a weighty task, but our belief that God's Kingdom come, God's will be done, invites us into a neighbor-love ethic, and gives us faith to keep working that justice may roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amen.

I now invite us to reflect on the following questions:

- Where have you had to make a choice that challenged the status quo or made you risk rejection? What newness emerged?
- Consider difficult conversations or choices you've made to live your values in the world. What gives you the strength and the capacity to follow Jesus' way?