

JUNE-JULY 2020

# **PRESSURE** **A Time under**

**REJOICE!** writers share about life  
in the shadow of COVID-19  
— now a space where communities  
are challenged to confront their racism

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION BY

**REJOICE!**

MENNOMEDIA

*A Time under Pressure*

REJOICE! writers share about life in the shadow of COVID-19

— now a space where communities are challenged to confront their racism

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# PRESSURE

## A Time under

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—*Leslie Hawthorne Klingler, REJOICE! editor*

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## A Time under Pressure

One of my writers felt guilty for not making the most of the extra time she has due to the pandemic. I could relate. I have often felt bewildered and unproductive in these past months. “Nothing is wasted,” she reminded herself and me: God works in all circumstances.

Nothing is wasted; *God* works in all situations. The emphasis on God is important to keep in mind, especially in the shadow of COVID-19. God works even when we are having trouble doing so.

The Spirit has been nudging me to let go of my desire to to be dramatic, efficient, and effective in this strange limbo of COVID-19. I’m sensing a call to open my eyes and respond to the Spirit’s movement instead of trying to control it. I’m challenged to initiate meaningful practices that I can commit to for the long haul.

I worry that the current eagerness to engage in racism issues has too much to do with filling pandemic voids. I’m concerned that us white people’s ambitions to dismantle racism will last only as long as we have the spare time. We’ve chosen a moment convenient for us to protest the racism that our black and brown neighbors have always struggled against. Only God’s mercy in the form of these brothers and sisters standing by our side redeems our current protest, and only time will reveal the integrity or lack thereof of our commitment to anti-racism.

Nothing is wasted; God works in all situations—sometimes despite our best efforts. Where is Christ today? What is the color of his skin? How do we follow Jesus in this time under pressure and beyond? I hope these reflections facilitate our response.

—Leslie Hawthorne Klingler  
REJOICE! editor



Walking by shops along a busy street in Querétaro, Mexico, I saw this strange and unsettling display that made me think of racism.

—Leslie Hawthorne Klingler

*Editor's Note:*

*A Time under Pressure is our third special publication documenting the Spirit's movement as perceived by Anabaptist writers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Submissions are printed in the order that they were received.*

*Many contributions to A Time under Pressure respond to the events surrounding George Floyd's death. With courage and vulnerability, our writers offer heartfelt conversation about racism, anti-racism, and our Christian faith. May we enter this communion with grace and the expectation that the Spirit will enable the people of God to bear good fruit through it.*

—Leslie Hawthorne Klingler  
June 28, 2020

# Mid-Year Appraisal: Expert on Blackness

by Rebecca Babirye, Inzai, Japan

Just two weeks ago, I was simply an intercultural communication instructor at a Japanese College. In the process of dealing with the college's most pressing problem in 2020—a pandemic—I was dismissible.

Then the world shifted. Our eyes turned to the systemic racial oppression of African Americans in the U.S. My role changed. I became an expert on blackness.

Forget that I am a black African whose experience should not be confused for a black African American's. I did not have time to delve into such details. My white students wanted to listen and learn from me. My African students sought comfort and empathy as those like them were being attacked. My Southeast Asian students compared their experiences of discrimination with the African American one—and that seemed to annoy both the Whites and the Africans. My Japanese students had not even seen the news. We were all figuring out how to feel and respond appropriately.

I feel paralyzed in my new role. I am a blind woman trying to lead other blind people. But we need to forge forward. We have to learn how to wade through the confusion, excruciating agony, exhaustion, and ignorance and somehow cling to a hope sturdy enough to outlive this ongoing crisis.

I tell my students that we should be committed to actually seeing each other. See the color. Marvel at the God-given worth. If we inch forward in that direction, we can anticipate a return to the healthy pleasures of being in a multicultural community. ♡



*Rebecca Babirye, who worshipped at Lombard Mennonite Church in Illinois during her studies, teaches intercultural communication at Tokyo Christian University.*

# Send Hope

by Rebecca Babirye, Inzai, Japan

When I read earlier about the discrimination of Asians in America, I did nothing.

But in a globalized era, everything travels more freely, even xenophobia. In the early days of COVID-19, I found myself sitting as far away as I could from the Asian-looking commuters on the train. Somehow, my “non-racist” brain perceived the Asian passengers as riskier than the whites and blacks. Mind you, I live in Japan. Finding a “safe” space distanced from Asians on the train meant not using the train at all!



Rebecca Babirye and Nora, a favorite niece, enjoying Japan’s cherry-blossom season

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“In a globalized era, everything travels more freely, even hope. I am eagerly waiting for it.”

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When I watched America’s reaction to George Floyd’s murder, I did nothing. Of course, I cared. Floyd should have never been murdered regardless of his crime or his criminal record. Black lives matter! I shook my head in disbelief at the injustice.

But in a globalized era, everything travels more freely, even anger. The more I watched the news, the angrier I got. This escalated to frustration and hopelessness. Will this ever change? How many protests are we going to witness before we see transformation?

I sighed and thought, “I can’t do a single thing, can I?”

But in a globalized era, everything travels more freely, even hope. I am eagerly waiting for it and ready to pass it along. ♡

# My Friend Mike

by Ruben Chupp, Nappanee, Indiana

Mike is successful by nearly any metric. He has a college degree. He is edging toward fifty years of marriage. He has four thriving children. He is a grandfather. He is a deacon in his congregation. He is an entrepreneur, at one time owning three prosperous businesses. Well into his sixties, he remains healthy and athletic.

Mike has been my friend for nearly 40 years. In 1985, he defended my decision to follow Jesus when others were skeptical for good reasons. We formed weekend softball teams, traveling to tournaments in Indiana and Michigan (where Mike resides in the same home he purchased in the 1980s).

*However, Mike is African-American.*

Mike met Donna, who is white, when he matriculated to Michigan on a cross-country running scholarship. They became a couple when that was unusual and suspect. While dating Mike, Sandy's father was confronted with racial smears about Mike. Donna heard "[N-word] lover" in school. Some opined against their marriage, using Scripture to support intolerant judgements.

Mike and Donna were married in a Mennonite church, encountering racist umbrage in some quarters of the congregation. In 1996, Mike and Donna left there to be involved in a church plant that continues to flourish and grow 24 years later.

When Mike and Donna's children were younger and would enter a store with Mike, they were often followed. Not so when they were with Donna. While one son was in high school, a noose was found hanging in black classmate's locker. Both of Mike and Donna's sons felt pressure to be athletic and accomplished basketball players; they were neither. One daughter was harassed in college, lug nuts on her car compromised to loosen as she was driving.

As a close friend, I have been able to discuss racial issues with Mike. In a conversation focusing on his experiences as a black man,

he asked me, “Do you ever think about being white?” “Rarely,” I responded. He then said to me, “I think about being black every day of my life.” I was silent, angry at this injustice. Cognitive gears lurched to a halt. Bile simmered in my gut. I had no answer; I did not know how to respond to my friend. I still don’t.

I will never forget Mike’s statement. I could assume that, because Mike and I are friends, I am not racist. But I am well aware of

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“Do you ever think about being white?”  
“Rarely,” I responded. He then said to me,  
“I think about being black every day of my life.”

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personal prejudices that can abruptly surface. I could assume that I am more informed about racial issues than most, but I remain a white man in a context where white men make most of the rules.

Jesus—the one who defended the marginalized of his day—humbles me. Mike—one who has always extended Jesus’ grace to me—humbles me. The grace that Mike has offered to me, the traits of Jesus he has shown me, have not been without effect.

I don’t know how to respond to my Friend Mike when he tells me about the racism he has encountered. I don’t know how to articulate the acrimony I feel when racist, unjust comments are made by political leaders in Washington. “I’m sorry,” seems too easy. “Thank you for your Friendship,” feels too flippant. “I care about you,” sounds too feeble. Maybe it’s enough to say, “I love you. Thank you for continuing the conversation.” 🌸



*I have a wife, three children, and fourteen grandchildren, all of whom have deepened my understanding of grace. Into my 30s, I looked for Jesus in all the wrong places, eventually discovering that he was always present. I have learned that grace is the most powerful substance known to humankind; I’m a selective extrovert; a good time to take a nap is whenever I can; to my reading of books there is no end; and I remain fascinated by horsepower and speed. I want to live as long as I live, trying to follow Jesus all the way Home. Sunnyside Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Indiana, helps me with that. —Ruben Chupp*

# I Am Starting to Breathe

*by Cyneatha Millsaps, Elkhart, Indiana*

The past month has terrorized my spirit. Every time I turned around, a new issue stole my attention. I lamented human trafficking and wrote about my concern for women and children in our country. Then I learned of the Varsity Blues scandal and actor Lori Loughlin and her husband plea-bargaining for just two months in jail after defrauding a university of a half a million dollars. The injustice of it sparked my anger about power and privilege in our penal system.

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“We need to correct the assumption that physical force is law enforcement’s greatest strength.”

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When I saw the news of George Floyd being choked to death, my spirit and will to fight evaporated. I could not keep up with the world around me; my thoughts and actions were moving too slowly. I felt hopeless and physically drained. These new emotions came on top of the isolation and loneliness of our stay-at-home orders and concern about a virus taking out people of color and senior citizens at an alarming rate.

Today, I am starting to breathe. I feel my mind clearing and more coherent thoughts taking shape.

We have a lot of work to do in this country. I am thankful for the energy and vision of the younger generation. I believe they will chart a new path forward that changes the way this country operates.

Where do we go from here, now that we can take a deep breath?

I am optimistic about the concept of defunding police departments. I know we need police, but I am excited to begin a conversation about what an effective police body might look like. Imagine the change if we figure out how to train police to truly be peace officers who mediate and protect society through

vigilance and service.

“To Protect and to Serve” is the motto of many police academies and departments, but the fact that the police are a “force”

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“We need to correct the assumption that physical force is law enforcement’s greatest strength.”

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has somehow confused things. The term *force* seems to have monopolized police mentality and become its primary characteristic. We need to correct the assumption that physical force is law enforcement’s greatest strength and replace it with trust and peace.

What ideas do you have to begin the conversation about building up our police in a peaceful and supportive role? Before tearing the system down, we need a concept of how we want to police ourselves. ♡

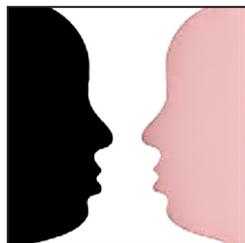


*Cyneatha is director of Mennonite Women, USA. She belongs to Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Indiana. If you want to get on her good side, offer her a slice of homemade pie.*

# A Greater Pandemic and Nastier Virus

by Ruth Smith Meyer, Alisa Craig, Ontario

In the 1940s, the one-room school I attended had 25–30 students made up of white European descent. The one exception was two sisters with darker skin and tightly curled blond hair—gifts from their great-grandmother, who was part African-American. They were good friends and rather romanticized for the distinction in their genetic makeup.



My teacher from the 6th-to–8th grade passionately advocated for the original inhabitants of the land where we lived. With a great deal of pride, she taught that Canada had been a welcoming home for escaped slaves from the South. She and my parents taught me that all people are made in God’s image. Origin, skin color, and religion make no difference because we are all part of God’s family.

I was well into my forties when my complacency was shattered. A member of my writers’ group presented an article for critique. I was interested to hear her story; her family descended from slaves who fled to Canada to find refuge.

My heart felt warm as I began reading her account. Imagine my devastation when I learned that the slaves’ welcome was

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“His family was threatened to the extent that he moved his wife and children to Toronto.”

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not what I had imagined. These refugees were relegated to certain areas and not assimilated into the rest of society. Even in the 1950s, their descendants were not allowed to eat inside the town restaurants; they could buy meals there, but they had to eat outside.

The author’s father was one of the brave souls who stood for their rights in the 1950s, contributing to the successful enforcement of the new law that made many forms of discrimination

illegal in Canada. As a result, his family was threatened to the extent that he moved his wife and children to Toronto to avoid harm. I was horrified to learn that such suffering occurred where I live and so recently. I cried as my whole being ached with the revelation.

At our next meeting, I started my critique with a tearful apology for being part of a society that caused her pain, yet I was naïve enough to think that such prejudice no longer existed.

Again, since George Floyd's death, I've heard too many stories of professionals being assumed to be service workers because of their skin color; individuals of color followed under the assumption that they may commit a crime; and entire populations living in fear of how they will be treated if stopped by police. I've learned that, because of the color of their skin, parents have to teach their children to be unduly subservient to law enforcement. I've learned that entire populations never really feel safe—even in Canada. This knowledge grieves and saddens me.

Yes, living with COVID-19 is a real threat, but the pandemic of racism has taken precedence for me; the need for a more equal society weighs heavier on my heart. I pray that I can be part of real change. How can I move from being not racist to being actively non-racist? ♡



*Ruth Smith Meyer lives and breathes in small-town Ontario, even while her heart beats with those far and wide. She is an elder at Nairn Mennonite Church and, until COVID-19, was involved in a number of volunteering and community interests.*

# I Am a Winner/Be Ready to Die

by Doris Steiner Diener, Souderton, Pennsylvania

“You are at high risk,” is not a welcome message—especially when it means to stay quarantined at home for months. “Because of your age and disease diagnosis, your body cannot fight COVID-19 or the medicines used to counteract it.” What difficult news!

With so little known about the virus or its transmission, and despite my husband’s diligent precautions, I have felt very vulnerable. We have carefully discussed the options for action in the event that I would contract it. We have felt the possible proximity of death and speculated what that path may look like.

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“‘You are at high risk,’ is not a welcome message . . . I have felt very vulnerable.”

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How does my belief affect my response to the current reality? I don’t believe that Christianity is relevant only when all is going well. What difference does it make in the challenges I face today? This is the backdrop to the verse to follow [*see next page*].



*Doris is a wife, mom, and grandma, an educator of learners of many ages and nationalities, a storyteller, and lifelong learner. Though she has lived and taught in a variety of places, her favorite place to be is at home in Souderton, Pennsylvania, where she serves her family and others, reads, reflects, writes, and sews. She and her husband Larry are members of Franconia Mennonite Church.*

# I Am a Winner/Be Ready to Die

*by Doris Diener*

“How can we win?”

Is the question we ask,  
When disease and violence  
Break peaceful silence.  
Win? An impossible task!

“Be ready to die,”

I heard someone say.  
Being constantly ready  
Holds our lives steady  
Regardless what comes our way.

“Be ready to flex,”

it has often been said.  
When we can be flexed,  
We can be at rest  
For whatever comes next.

“Be anchored by trust.”

Though it challenges belief,  
In a bad storm when  
the high waves form,  
We find confounding relief.

“Don’t be afraid,”

we have been told.  
When we’ve no fear,  
Our perception is clear  
To persevere.

“Pride precedes downfall:”

Is etched by my past.  
Humble interdependency  
Prescribes transcendence;  
With God and others, we triumph.

“Use your head and your heart,”

Their balance is vital.

Learning and logic dispensing  
Mixed with intuitive sensing  
Releases Spirit-empowered  
commencing.

“Hind sight is best,”

You’ve experienced it too.  
Looking back we know  
Tough times help us grow—  
Though never invited anew.

These words we say

We believe

When we’re in control and  
Nothing’s impeding our goal;  
Whatever we want, we receive,

But when what we’ve built  
Crumbles into pieces,  
Have we just been naïve?  
We sit down to grieve  
And our doubt increases.

Is unchallenged belief

All I offer my God?

Might He want more  
Than I’ve given before, or  
To expose my façade?

“So be ready to die,”

I keep telling myself.  
Regardless, I cannot lose  
Even though I do not choose,  
I AM a winner, either way!



# Essentials

by Keith Harder, Hillsboro, Kansas

Over the last several months, there has been an ongoing discussion about essentials during the COVID-19 pandemic. What businesses and activities are so essential that they should continue despite the risk? Most agree that grocery stores, pharmacies, and delivery services are crucial. Tattoo parlors, barbershops, beauty salons, concerts, sporting events—not so much. Handshakes and hugs—no way.

This discussion got me thinking about what I consider essential even beyond the pandemic. Food, outdoor exercise, books, and the Internet with Netflix and Amazon come to mind immediately. What would life be without Zoom, steel-cut oats, and fresh fruit?

How essential are church gatherings where we sing and worship together? Should the government be able to order churches not to gather to help mitigate the virus's spread? When is it safe to start meeting together again, and when we meet, what is essential?

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus talks about essentials. He tells his disciples about relationships, the kingdom of God, the birds of the air, and the flowers in the field to illustrate what is truly essential. We all too often fret and worry about the non-essentials.

So, what does Jesus think is essential? I've heard it said that today's luxuries are tomorrow's necessities. My list includes clean air, safe water, healthy birds, and thriving flowers. My list is all that encourages and promotes life—in other words, expressions of love, grace, and right relationships. What's on your list? ♡



*Keith Harder finds refreshment and solace in the Flint Hills prairie in Kansas. Grasses, flowers, and birds inspire and instruct during these anxious times.*

Keith Harder sitting by a prairie spring, one of his favorite hiking spots

# Ah, But Our Land Is Beautiful!

(But sometimes that beauty turns to ashes)

by Leona Dueck Penner, Waterloo, Ontario

While on our annual 2,500-kilometer road trip from Waterloo to Winnipeg last summer—as we were driving around Lake Huron and Lake Superior—I kept exclaiming, “Ah, but [our] land is beautiful” (the title of Alan Paton’s novel on apartheid in South Africa).



At first, those words were simple exclamations of pure joy as we crested yet another hill or rounded one more curve, encoun-

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Canada has known for nearly half a century that the Grassy Narrows First Nation’s sustenance—fish from the local river system—was poisoned by a paper mill upstream dumping tons of mercury into the water.

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tering a seemingly endless array of fabulous views; scenes that demanded frequent stops to “rest” in the sheer beauty of the land as we sipped our coffee or shared picnic lunches.

But then, a day or so later, we drove past the turn-off to Grassy Narrows First Nation. My joy turned to shame and the beauty to ashes as I remembered recent news reports. Approximately 90 percent of the indigenous people living on this reserve suffer mercury poisoning. Canada has known for nearly half a century that the Grassy Narrows First Nation’s sustenance—fish from the local river system—was poisoned by a paper mill upstream dumping tons of mercury into the water. Despite the community’s repeated pleas for help in dealing with the consequences (multiple generations at Grassy Narrows suffer neurological and other serious health problems) successive provincial and federal



governments have been exceptionally slow in responding. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-for-grassy-narrows-families-mercury-is-an-intergenerational-trauma/>

Driving by Grassy Narrows reminded me that South Africa's "apartheid homelands" were patterned after Canadian reserves. I learned this in 1972, when we were MCC workers in Zambia and traveled to South Africa on holiday. An Afrikaner shopkeeper in Durban (where we later lived on an MCC assignment between 1992 and 1995) told me that the only difference between our two countries was population. While Canada could afford to be tolerant and generous because there were many more whites than Indians in our country, South Africa needed more drastic measures because black people vastly outnumbered the whites there.

At first, I refused to believe him, but his comment troubled me. After returning to Canada in 1976, as part of a university sociology course, I wrote an essay about the history of race relations in Canada. Sadly, my research taught me that the South African shopkeeper was right. Canada's history is riddled with racism directed most harshly towards Chinese, Japanese and indigenous peoples.

My long-ago essay concludes by noting that racial biases limited the immigration of Asian people and "were used to rationalize the exploitation and degradation of 'Indian' people to the point where they were of no threat either numerically or spiritually." Canada established aggressive programs to "civilize" and assimilate its original inhabitants through residential schools and adoption into white homes, etc. "Once this dominance was assured by a white majority, Canadians could afford to be tolerant instead of [overtly] racist."

Unfortunately, systemic racism remains deeply ingrained in the fabric of our country, as can be seen from the slow response

to the ongoing suffering of Grassy Narrows First Nation. That situation also reflects what is sometimes called *environmental racism*—in which actions and attitudes continue to denigrate not only the first peoples of this land but also the earth itself.

This summer, we stand at a crossroads involving COVID-19 travel restrictions and the anti-racism protests rocking our world following the murder of George Floyd. Perhaps it's time for us who are descendants of settlers to put on sackcloth and ashes and confess our shame. Consider the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

*Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, "We will not walk in it." Also I raised up sentinels for you: "Give heed to the sound of the trumpet!" But they said, "We will not give heed ... O my poor people, put on sackcloth, and roll in ashes; make mourning as for an only child, most bitter lamentation.*

—Jeremiah 6: 16-17, 26

And as we “cry [for] our beloved country” (as another Alan Paton novel advocates), may we find rest for our souls by taking action and speaking out boldly on behalf of those who have experienced the brutality of racism in Canada for centuries. ♡



*Leona Dueck Penner is a writer who found her vocation while finishing her high school diploma by correspondence when she and her family were beginning their second MCC assignment in Zambia. She intended to enter a nursing program at University of Manitoba on their return to Canada in 1976 but soon found she was a much better writer than chemist. So, she registered in English and sociology courses instead, and that's how this article was born. Leona enjoys photography and cooking with her three granddaughters. She attends Erb Street Mennonite Church, Waterloo, Ontario.*

# Owning My White Fragility

by Bruce Stambaugh, Harrisonburg, Virginia

I wasn't familiar with the term *white fragility*, though I knew about *white privilege* and *white supremacy*. It turns out that the three expressions are members of the same family.

If someone challenges me, for example, about my white privilege, and I deny it, I exhibit white fragility. White fragility is selfish, silly, and unnecessary. It denies the equality of all of God's people regardless of skin color.

I learned about white fragility a couple of years ago at the national convention of Coming to the Table (a nonprofit organization ded-

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“I learned about white fragility a couple of years ago at the national convention of Coming to the Table (a nonprofit organization dedicated to truth, justice, and racial healing).”

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icated to truth, justice, and racial healing) held at Eastern Mennonite University. I was embarrassed that I had to ask a black woman sitting next to me what *white fragility* meant. She kindly explained it, and I unknowingly morphed into the next stage: *white guilt*.

White guilt means taking on the historical sins of my race against people of color. It is a conniving way to continue to maintain white privilege by consciously or subconsciously playing the victim.

I cringe now as I remember racially-tainted incidences of which I was part and parcel. I said nothing as family members, friends, and public officials used racial slurs, including the N-word, about people of color. Most were suggestive comments, while some were intentionally blatant. None were appropriate. Standing by without challenging those derogatory directives was tantamount to affirmation. I didn't think of myself as a racist, yet why didn't I question these bigoted attitudes?

It has taken me too long to come to terms with my racism. But with the series of killings of one black- or brown-skinned person

after another by white individuals—both law enforcement and private citizens—I knew it was time to speak out. Silence is a common transgression of white fragility.

Now, with white supremacy evident at the highest levels of our nation, I can no longer remain silent. George Floyd’s murder ignited a renunciation of white supremacy by individuals and organizations around the globe. Most of the protests have been peaceful—including the one in Lafayette Park, Washington, D.C., which was forcefully dispersed by federal officers.

Those of us who are white must come to terms with our white fragility. We need to stop feeling guilty, angry, and defensive about our challenged white superiority and start respecting all God’s people everywhere, every day. Owning our white fragility means recognizing and grieving the historical atrocities committed by whites against people of color. It calls for *kairos* moments (a Greek word meaning an opportune and critical time for decision or action) in which people choose to do and say what is right for all people. That can only happen if those of us who are white begin to act and speak up for the betterment of all people, especially people of color.

The words of Australian author Dr. Mike Pope challenge all who happen to be white: “Those of us that are privileged must learn from those oppressed by the systems that privilege us. We can’t take justice into our own hands as self-appointed saviors. That recapitulates the violence. Pray for opportunities to learn and to respond when you are called.” Those are words by which I intend to live. I hope you will join me. ♡



Bruce and Neva Stambaugh with their three grandchildren.

*Bruce Stambaugh is a retired public-school educator. Bruce writes a weekly newspaper column and is a freelance writer. He enjoys birding, hiking, photography, traveling, and his grandchildren. He and his wife, Neva, attend Park View Mennonite (MC USA) Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia.*

# They're Right, You Know

by Bob Buxman, Portland, Oregon

The killing of George Floyd has nudged us, pushed us, pulled us (often kicking and screaming) into a conversation about racism. As we express our opinions about what is going on, Bill Bullard's words are good to keep in mind:

“Opinion is the really the lowest form of human knowledge. It

requires no accountability, no understanding. The highest form of knowledge is empathy, for it requires us to suspend our egos and live in another's world.”

In the late '70s, I was employed as a manager of 500 acres of vineyard in Central California. It was the heyday of the United Farm Workers Union with Cesar Chavez, and the farm where I worked was the recipient of *huelgas* (labor strikes). Every work-day morning, 200-250 *huelgistas* (strikers) would show up and



“Homestead in the Vineyard,”  
by Paul Buxman (Bob's brother)

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“These laborers are artists,  
yet we pay them minimum wage.”

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park at the edge of the vineyards, waiting for the 50–100 workers to appear between 5:30 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. to enter the fields to harvest. The strikers would yell, throw clods of dirt, honk horns, and throw nails in the road to puncture tires. It was general intimidation—and it worked well—on me! I felt intimidated! Fearful, actually.

One typical, fractious day during harvest, as the *huelgistas* were doing their thing, the vineyard owner showed up. We walked through the vineyard in conversation while workers harvested and *huelgistas* shouted. Suddenly, my boss stopped in a vineyard

row, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, “They’re right, you know.” I’ll never forget those words.

The vineyard owner went on to explain his perspective. “Look at these vines. See how they are pruned and shaped to produce quantity and quality grapes. The pruners need to think about every cut they make, deciding the best form the vine should take.

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“‘It is not right’ [he said,] ‘But, I don’t know what to do about it; we work within the limits of the markets’.”

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These laborers are artists, yet we pay them minimum wage. They should be getting livable wages equal-to or higher than those who work in Detroit car manufacturing. It is not right. But, I don’t know what to do about it; we work within the limits of the markets.”

I’ve often think of that line, “They’re right, you know.” I think of it whenever I see a segment of society with its back against the wall that blocks them from justice. They’re right, you know.

Van Morrison’s lyrics say, “*These are the days of the endless summer / These are the days, the time is now / There is no past, there’s only future / There’s only here, there’s only now.*” Lord, give me empathy now. ♡

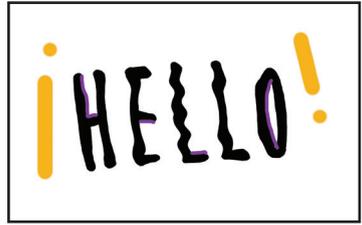


*I’ve farmed and I’ve pastored. The common denominator is that both EXCITE you with HOPE! —Bob Buxman*

# Greeting: A Small and Sacred Thing

*by Jonathan Larson, Durham, North Carolina*

Soon after our family arrived in the Kalahari, I set out to spend time as guest in a village, as rank beginner, as newborn in southern Africa. My host family, forgiving as they were, often quoted apologetically to neighbors the proverb, ‘Given time, even an egg will walk.’



Of all the things the village taught me, one lesson will, in all likelihood, appear as their epigram on my tombstone: “We taught him to greet.”

This bit of instruction found lodging with me accompanied with pain and humiliation. I set out one afternoon to keep

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“He demanded to know what  
barbaric culture I came from.”

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company with children who gathered to sing, recite, and dance at the desert primary school. It was a blistering afternoon. I labored along the sandy path, careful to observe my surroundings. Along the way, I noticed an older gentleman by the path, drowsy in the shade of a nearby thorn tree, the brim of his fedora pulled over his eyes. Not wanting to disturb him, I passed by quietly and found the boisterous school children just as I had hoped.

My return though, brought the moment when I would be soul-schooled. The elder was waiting. He demanded to know what barbaric culture I came from. Where in the world do people fail to greet one another—walk by stony and silent without so much as a fare-thee-well? As the tongue-lashing rained down, the children from school gathered to watch the pedagogue at work, instructing the visitor in the high bar of social ethic.

I begged his forgiveness, crushed as I was. Had there been some means to resign from this abject beginning, awkward and

self-loathing as I was, I would have.

A lifetime later, I'm still pondering and practicing what feels indispensable now: to stop and to greet. Story upon story in sacred writ remind us of what gifts, what promise may lie in a simple,

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Even the plainest greeting is one soul saluting another,  
a transaction of eternal significance.

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deliberate greeting, a nod, a raised hand that says, I see you; I'm listening; I'm open. I recognize, acknowledge, and honor you.

Even the plainest greeting is one soul saluting another, a transaction of eternal significance. Think of Abraham and Sarah and the mysterious visitors. Think of Mary. Think of the diaphanous figure on the resurrection shore of Galilee. Think of the travelers to Emmaus.

Our communities now recognize the urgent need of a long-deferred conversation about racism and white privilege, even as we contend with a prevailing apartheid sometimes physical, sometimes emotional. That dialogue will be eased along as we learn to assume the posture of *hello*, practice both form and substance of greeting across the divide, and learn to say in our living, I see you; I'm listening; I'm open. I recognize, acknowledge, and honor you. I salute the soul that you are. ♡



*Jonathan Larson and his wife, Mary Kay, grew up in post-independence India, where they were classmates at Woodstock School. Following university studies in the United States, they served as Mennonite Central Committee workers first in NE Democratic Republic of Congo (1971–75), and later with the General Conference Mennonite*

*Church in Botswana (1981–94). Jonathan is known as writer, storyteller, retreat leader, and pastor. His wife, Mary Kay, served as epidemiologist in the battle with HIV/AIDS at the Centers for Disease Control. They now live next door to grandchildren in Durham, North Carolina, where he Zooms weekly with neighborhood youngsters in his 'Story Hour of the Ancients.'*

# Breath Prayers of a Protest

by D.L. Diener, Goshen, Indiana

I pull up to the park. I grab my recycled sign and am wearing a shirt from another protest. It's habit now.

But it's different this time, too; I have a mask, hand sanitizer, and my own water. I won't use the public restroom, and I'm keeping my space from others.

I'm upset that these precautions take so much of my focus.

But then, our feet start moving. I don't notice it at first: the rhythm that matches our steps. The breathing in and the breathing out. It's a collective breath. We breathe in, "No justice." We breathe out, "No peace." Over and over again.

The Holy Spirit is with us; this is God's heart. Without justice, there is no peace. Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly.

I recognize this thing we are doing; this is a breath prayer. In the same way we pass the peace in church, we offer this exchange with our neighbors. Hear us, join us. Be part of this movement to fix what's wrong.

Through our masks, now damp with sweat, we cry out. We remember those we've lost; we stand at the halls of power and beg for justice; we march through the streets where we wish for God's peace to reign. We always return to that prayer: no justice, no peace.

Despite COVID-19 masks and distancing, we focus on what our protest is all about: love for our brothers and sisters in God.

No justice, no peace. Amen. ♣



*D.L. Diener lives, writes, and marches from Goshen, Indiana. She is grateful to be part of the Walnut Hill Mennonite Church congregation that is frequently conversing about or participating in justice work.*

# A Morning Meditation

by Kathy Dickson, Bluffton, Ohio



In the midst of what feels like chaos;  
what looks like the world on fire;  
what is reported as days of destruc-  
tion and violence

—maybe justice will rise.

Maybe silenced voices will have space and place to speak.

Maybe those whose bodies are black and brown can rise and rest  
in new safety and sacredness and care of their being.

Maybe all bodies disabled or chronically ill, of every color  
and socio-economic class and national origin and size and age  
and sexuality, can have access to the care they need when they  
need it, in all times, but especially in the midst of a pandemic.

Maybe rights can mean respect.

Maybe something can change.

Maybe the words of our sacred texts will move us to act  
and redeem our mess and not be disguised as prop.

Maybe what divides will be carried away like leaves on stream.

Maybe the newness all around, seed to green sprout, flower to  
berry, will remind us of our own growing.

Maybe hope will rise, sustain,  
like dirt and soil and rain and sunshine,  
new life—

Still

emerging.



*Kathy Dickson has dedicated her career to working with students, first at Bluffton University and now Methodist Theological School of Ohio (MTSO). She cherishes time with her two growing boys and the rest of her family. She belongs to First Mennonite, Bluffton, Ohio.*

# A Little Sign

by Abe Janzen, Calgary, Alberta

We live in a multicultural community in Calgary, Alberta. Across the street, the students, before COVID-19, gathered every morning for their bus connections to school. Most are recent immigrants and second-generation Canadians of color. For a number of years, Kathy and I have kept a trilingual sign that says, “No matter where you are from, we’re glad you’re our neighbor,” nailed to a tree in our front yard.

Every so often, someone stops to read the sign, and then they move on. A couple of years ago, a woman knocked on our door to say thank you. Today, a person we have not met left a gift on our doorstep: a small plant with two notes attached. The first note introduced their family by name with the address of where they live—only a short distance away. The second note, inserted into the top of the little plant, reminded us that it is National Good Neighbor Day and said that, whenever they walk past our house, our sign makes them happy.

COVID-19 has been difficult. Not nearly so many people are walking on the sidewalks these days. Students are not in school, so the bus stop is mostly deserted. The days can feel bleak and oppressive. And, these past weeks, we have witnessed a long-overdue awakening about systemic and personal racism. It’s the right time to be reminded that all healing begins with being good neighbors to each other both inside and outside our homes. ♡



*Abe Janzen lives in Calgary, Alberta. He is married to Kathy. They have two children and five grandchildren. They have served three terms with MCC in Bolivia.*

Abe with granddaughter Sierra

# It's the Rules that Count!

by John Eby, Lititz, Pennsylvania

Playing Monopoly, the Parker Brother's kind, is fun. In the game, one gets to build houses and hotels and collect rent in reward for making good decisions *and* being lucky—just like life. On the one hand, it's a game of



suspense and intrigue; on the other, it's predictable: no matter who plays the game, one person gets rich and the others go broke.

If asked to play Monopoly with a Christian perspective, most

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“COVID-19 brings into the open pervasive racism and economic inequality that personal morality cannot change.”

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Christians would focus on personal morality. Don't smoke or drink too much. Don't weight the dice. Don't cheat when you count the money. Don't gloat as you collect rent or buy hotels. Try hard, but don't be greedy. Be frugal and invest your assets well. Work hard even when you are losing. Pray as you pass go. Every seven minutes, take a sabbath and sing a hymn. Tithe to missions far away and give a dollar or two now and then to persons in need. Do not discuss divisive issues such as politics. And, of course, no hanky-panky.

All that, and still one person gets rich and everyone else goes broke.

COVID-19 brings into the open pervasive racism and economic inequality that personal morality cannot change. There is something wrong when Amazon and Facebook stockholders grow rich while multitudes find themselves in need of donated food. It isn't right that my investments have done well during the pandemic even as unemployment reaches untenable levels.

Rules and structures determine the outcome of Monopoly—and the impact of COVID-19! To work for the kind of economic justice God wants, we must focus on more than personal morality. To reflect the fact that all humans are made in the image of God, we must find ways to dismantle the structures of racism into which we are born.

Racism is not bad people doing bad things to persons of color—though that happens—but rather structures built over many years that put persons of color at a disadvantage in most everything they do.

To make Monopoly a fair game, we would need to change the rules. To make society fair and just, we need to change the norms, structures, and systems that allocate its resources.

Scripture reveals God’s concern for the way society treats its disadvantaged. For example, the prophets called for changes in the rules through strategies like the Jubilee. How is God calling the church and me to be relevant today? ❧

*John Eby’s bio appears at the end of the following article.*

# On Letting Go

by John Eby, Lititz, Pennsylvania

When our family traveled to South Africa during Apartheid, I would sometimes use the “Black” drinking fountains and toilets. It was only symbolic and cost me nothing, but it was one way I could relinquish my white privilege and make a symbolic statement that was meaningful to me if no one else. We also worked with conscientious objectors and refugees and exposed the evils of Apartheid to American and Canadian audiences.



An African American man drinks out of a “colored” water cooler. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1939.  
Image courtesy Library of Congress.

I am an older, white male with adequate resources to live securely at a nice retirement community. During COVID-19, my community has provided amenities, including personal shopping and meals delivered to my door. My church offers online services with inspiring sermons and a rich variety of music. With a computer and access to Zoom, I’ve been able to attend several board meetings. And, even though I had to keep a distance, my family brought me a Thai meal and a carrot cake baked by my grandson for my 80th birthday. Because of my privilege, I can live relatively well with COVID-19.

I cannot be so nonchalant about the deep and pervasive economic inequalities and racism that COVID-19 has made more visible. Persons of color have been affected more severely than whites due to centuries of racism. They tend to live in dense neighborhoods because of legislated housing discrimination in the past and *de facto* discrimination now. Many work in jobs where close contact is necessary and working at home is not possible. Many do not have proper access to preventative health care.

These are systemic problems rooted in our social and economic structures—not the result of individual choices.

I have benefitted from our racist system. I went to good schools. When I interviewed for a job, the interviewer looked like me. I do not need to live with the social impacts of slavery in

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“I must come to terms with my privilege.  
My starting point has been recognizing that I have it.  
Beyond that, I have more questions than answers.”

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my past. I have never been stopped by the police merely because of the color of my skin. I have never been followed in a store because of my race or feared being shot by an officer.

I must come to terms with my privilege. My starting point has been recognizing that I have it. Beyond that, I have more questions than answers. I am challenged by the story of the rich young man—also a person of privilege—who Jesus indicated was trapped by his privilege. Jesus suggested a radical way for him to deal with it: sell everything and give it to the poor.

The current situation challenges me to find more than symbolic ways to let go of my privilege and to relinquish those things given to me at others’ expense. ♡



*John W. Eby is a retired professor of sociology at Eastern Mennonite University, Goshen College, and Messiah College. With his family, he served three years with Mennonite Central Committee in Botswana. He has also worked in administration of Voluntary Service and I-W programs in the US and internationally. He is on the board of*

*ADVOZ, which sponsors programs in mediation and restorative justice. He currently lives at Landis Homes in Lititz, Pennsylvania and attends East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His hobby is photography, particularly flowers.*

# Holding Hands

by Peter Penner, Waterloo, Ontario

This poem was born when I was lying awake one night, worrying about the global, ecological and spiritual mess we're bequeathing my three granddaughters.

some day our granddaughters  
will look back with 2020 vision  
and say to their children  
once upon a time this planet  
made a decision  
dammit it said  
its time for serious revision  
releasing upon the world  
a plague of pandemic  
proportions soon  
everyone was in a panic  
the only cure was immobility  
friendship from a distance  
no one could ignore the signs  
not even the nobility  
holding hands became  
much too intimate  
much too risky  
much too sexy  
it became more binding  
than old fashioned  
out grown almost  
meaningless marriage vows  
holding hands  
the new wedding ban(d)  
the new norm  
a planet was reborn

*Peter Penner is a retired University of Manitoba math prof who began his teaching career in a one-room school in rural Manitoba at age 18. He and his wife, Leona, spent more than two decades as Mennonite Central Committee co-workers and co-administrators in southern Africa and in Winnipeg. They attend Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo, Ontario.*



# Grace under Fire

by Ann Minter Fetters, Wichita, Kansas

“Go Back.” This message covered the dumpster outside my Syrian friend’s restaurant in spray paint. The charred frame was all that was left of Petra, known in our city as one of the best places to get Middle Eastern food.

It was the morning after the blaze. Although there would be an investigation, it was clear to the people gathered there with Ghada\* and her family that this raging fire had been set as a warning to those of Middle Eastern descent: “You do not belong here.”

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“This raging fire had been set as a warning  
to those of Middle Eastern descent:  
‘You do not belong here.’”

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“The people of Wichita are good people, and I know that most of them are not like this,” my friend said softly into the reporter’s microphone, looking into the local television station’s camera lens. What grace, I thought to myself, after your dream to share the goodness of your culture was so violently destroyed.

But that was Ghada.\* I remembered her stories of experiencing the aftermath of 9/11 as a Muslim in Wichita. The hijab she wore was a visible sign of her faith, but many in America had come to fear those who wore it and even consider the hijab a threat to their safety. “My neighbors offered to buy my groceries in case I was too scared to be seen in public,” she recalled. “I felt loved and cared for.”

Would I be as gracious as she were I to live in a culture that despised my Christian faith? I don’t know.

Ghada and her family are now rebuilding. Petra will stand again—not only to feed us but also as a symbol of our better selves. 

\*Her name has been changed.

# My Shame

by Ann Minter Fetters, Wichita, Kansas

He had a smile a mile wide. He was soft-spoken and cordial, liked by everyone on the Hesston College campus. As an admissions counselor in the 1980s, I had recruited Sam\* from the Chicago area to attend Hesston. He enrolled in the nursing program and was a wonderful addition to our campus community.

That was why it was especially disturbing to hear our dean of students tell me that Sam—a black male—had been pulled over and taken into police custody in our little town. He had borrowed a friend’s truck to run an errand. He was not causing trouble of

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“Were white students pulled over for doing the same? I doubt it.”

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any kind. Still, he was put into the police car’s back seat and was being held at the police station when our dean was called.

Sam must have felt humiliated by his circumstances when the dean arrived to pick him up. In the meantime, two officers nearby talked about the big guns they owned.

Yes, Sam was driving a vehicle that was not registered in his name. But, it was common for students to borrow each other’s cars. Were white students pulled over for doing the same? I doubt it; I had never heard that it was a problem.

I am ashamed of the officers for doing such a thing; I am ashamed of the white race—my race— for producing them.

Dear God, help me listen to people’s stories so that I hear their pain. Convict me so that I can no longer remain silent. ♡

\*His name has been changed.

*Ann is an interior designer helping clients to create beautiful spaces in their homes. Building all those Barbie doll houses out of cardboard when she was little has finally paid off.*



# Chaos

by Elaine Maust, Meridian, Mississippi

The chaos of our time is jarring. Violence, illness, and rage seize our country as if a trap snapped shut on us; we cannot free ourselves. The tragedy and sadness of illness, death, and natural disaster are amplified by social distancing and economic uncertainty. Pent-up outrage explodes, our cities burn, and it's hurricane season. As if emblematic of my confusion and despair, I accidentally poisoned our tomato patch with Roundup, which I grabbed instead of insecticidal soap!

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“As if emblematic of my confusion and despair,  
I accidentally poisoned our tomato patch with Roundup.”

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I called Rev. Terrence Roberts. “Would you please share your pain and hope with me?” I asked. I think of Terrence as the pastor of Parables Church, an interracial fellowship in Meridian, Mississippi. He prefers to call himself “Lead Storyteller.” Terrence has a gentle spirit and dreads that fall well below his waist.

“I feel a myriad of emotions right now,” he said. “I am outraged, hurt, and frustrated. I am in mourning,” he said. He went on to share the following:

*“This isn’t new, but it is hurtful. It is frustrating when people I considered friends and colleagues say hateful things—revealing deep-seated bigotry that I would have said could never have been in their hearts.*

*“But I have hope. Looking back at history, the crowds have changed. The faces of those protesting racial injustice are more diverse. That’s a sign of hope. People are saying to me, ‘I see you. I grieve as you grieve. What can we do together?’*

*“The answer, again, is truly understanding the Gospel of Jesus Christ and living it out. People cannot honestly think they are following Jesus if they have hate in their hearts toward anyone.*

*“Love is one of the few emotions that needs to be taught. Laughter,*

sorrow, fear—other common human emotions—are instinctive. Love is not instinctive. Love is taught. Unfortunately, people in this country are behaving as they are because that is how they were taught to love.

“When Jesus says, ‘Love one another as I have loved you,’ he is saying, ‘Forget what your parents taught you about love. This is love.’ Until the church—until we—mirror the love of Christ, no one will know how to love. As we understand and imitate the love of Christ Jesus, when we say, ‘Follow me as I follow Christ,’ the world changes. It changes one person at a time, one household at a time. I don’t think it will take that many generations.”

Jesus came during the ferocious storm of Roman occupation when political, economic, and religious life was in chaos. The spark of the Renaissance and Reformation lit during the Black Death. Our Bible opens, “. . . the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep. . . . Then God said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:2-3). The intricacies of our beautiful world sprang to life as the Spirit hovered over formless, empty chaos.

Hearing Terrance’s gentle, powerful words, I felt less hopeless. “I’m glad you called,” Terrance said. “I feel lighter. I guess I needed to find words for all that is swirling inside me.”

In a time marked by distance, helplessness, and pain, two brokenhearted pastors remembered that the love of Jesus Christ is changing the world. ♣

**Note:** For the full version of this reflection, visit Elaine Maust’s Youtube video series, “[Looking for Loose Change.](#)”



*Elaine Maust is co-pastor of Jubilee Mennonite Church in Meridian, Mississippi, where she serves with Duane, her husband and ministry partner. Elaine is a Spiritual Director, a writer, and a bumbling gardener.*

# Transformation

by Sherah-Leigh Gerber, Rockingham, Virginia



There is no return

*listen*

It is a time of unraveling: revolution

There is only here and now

*learn*

It is a time of unveiling: revival

There is only before and after

*labor*

It is a time of revelation: restoration

There is no return

only reimagining with justice



# Yoga in a Time of Revolution

*by Sherah-Leigh Gerber, Rockingham, Virginia*

## Listening

Good morning yogis

You stretch  
You move into discomfort  
You hold longer than  
you think you can  
You focus on your breath

## Learning

Set your intention for the day

You hold longer than  
you think you can  
You shake and wobble  
You fall over and try again  
You focus on your breath



## Lamenting

Take time to integrate your work

You rest on the mat  
You give thanks for your body,  
imperfect as it may be  
You apologize to your body,  
for all the things  
You focus on your breath

## Leavening

## Namaste

You do the ordinary  
work of the day  
You move into discomfort,  
for the sake of others and  
for your salvation  
You fall over and you try again,  
because love endures  
You focus on your breath, which is  
also the very breath of God



# Revelation

*by Sherah-Leigh Gerber, Rockingham, Virginia*



“In the unraveling—  
    we are traumatized, weary, grieved  
for in our struggle we will discover that we are not  
ruined but rebuilt

In the unveiling—  
    we are awakened, repentant, humbled  
for in our struggle we will discover that we are not re-  
formed but recreated

In the revelation—  
    we listen, learn, labor  
for in our struggle we will discover that we are not returning  
but reimagining.



# Prayer for Protest

by Sherah-Leigh Gerber, Rockingham, Virginia

Blessed are those  
who hear

angry shouts  
tears of anguish  
lament

*Come, Lord Jesus, Come*

Blessed are those  
who take to heart what they witness

injustice  
trauma  
pain

*Come, Lord Jesus, Come*

Blessed are those  
who act

small acts  
risky gestures  
resting and repeating

*Come, Lord Jesus, Come*



*Sherah-Leigh Gerber is a wife, mother, pastor and creator living in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. You can find more of her work at [shergerber.com](http://shergerber.com).*



# Bible Verses and Other Good Things

by MaryLou Driedger, Winnipeg, Manitoba

“What Bible verse can help me, MaryLou?” My Dad is 91 and in an assisted living facility. For nearly three months, I was not allowed to visit him because of the restrictions associated with COVID-19. Dad is not computer savvy, so communication was limited to frequent phone calls.



MaryLou Driedger from Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, with her Dad in happier times before the pandemic. Her dad is a member of Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg.

The church has been at the center of Dad’s life since he was a child. Over the years, he has

assumed a long list of responsibilities in both the local and wider church. A retired physician, he did many short-term medical assignments abroad with Mennonite Central Committee. He was an advocate for mental health and immigration in Canada.

Dad became extremely worried about the way COVID-19 was affecting the many causes dear to his heart. He was also fearful about the way the pandemic might impact his family.

“Where will this all lead?” he asked me again and again.

When I couldn’t answer that question to his satisfaction, he told me to find some Scripture passages that might help him.

I came up with Matthew 6:34, “Do not worry about tomorrow,” and Psalm 30:5, “Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.” Dad said they gave him comfort.

My siblings and I decided that, in addition to supplying Dad with Bible verses, we needed to emphasize good things whenever he expressed worry during our phone calls with him. When Dad was troubled about his alma mater Canadian Mennonite University shutting its doors, we described how classes there were still taking place online. When Dad was anxious about the people in our family who had lost their jobs because of COVID-19, we

told him that they were finding new things to give their lives purpose. When he was apprehensive about how his church would navigate the pandemic, my sister (a member of the same congregation) told him that more than 100 people were participating in Zoom worship on Sunday mornings. When he expressed concern about his great-grandchildren's futures, we assured him they were happy and felt loved. When he was apprehensive about what would happen to Mennonite Central Committee, we explained that people were still generously supporting it.

After several months of being a cheerleader for Dad, I began to realize that working so hard to keep his spirits up was having a positive impact on me, too. I was being forced to look for things to be optimistic about at a time when the pandemic situation could so easily have discouraged me.

Now I am finally able to see Dad for outdoor, socially distanced visits. Being in the sunshine and fresh air is good for both of us. It is hard to keep my distance from him physically, to not be able to lend him an arm when he walks unsteadily or give him a hug when we part, but I know we are both feeling much less anxious.

My pandemic experience with my Dad has reminded me that there is always comfort to be found in God's word, and always hope to be found if you look for the positive. ♡

*MaryLou Driedger is the librarian at her church. She serves on the Winnipeg Friends of the Library board of directors and recently sold a manuscript to a Canadian publisher for a novel based on her grandfather's immigration journey from Kansas to Saskatchewan in 1907. Her greatest delight in life is in her role as a grandmother. During the pandemic, she and her husband have been exploring Winnipeg on their bicycles.*



# A Message from Gen-Z

by *Melía Hawthorne Klingler, Wheaton, Illinois*

I used to dream about putting all the white male baby boomers on a spaceship, wishing them the very best of luck, and sending them off into space. To members of Gen-Z like me, it seems like the perfect solution: old people just seem to be getting in the way of progress—so why not just send them to another planet?

While it does sound kind of fun, I now realize that it's not the best idea. Because, when I stop ignoring everyone over 60, I start to notice all the things they have done. My great-aunt was part of the women's rights' movement in the '70s. My grandma worked with kids in inner-city Chicago. My grandpa helps bring medical assistance to the homeless population of Portland. Even during the Black Lives Matter movement, I have seen older folks at protests, making signs and encouraging young people to keep moving. This gives me hope.

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A quick review of the generations for those who have no idea what I'm talking about:

- **Baby Boomers:** Individuals now in their 50s, 60s, and 70s, born between 1946 and 1964, during the post-World War II baby boom.
  - **Gen-Z:** The generation that was born between 1996–2010, following millennials, now in their teens and 20s.
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There is much we young people can learn from older generations, a treasure trove of stories of activism and resilience. Instead of labeling the elderly as “boomers” and mentally shoving them aside, we Gen-Zers should appreciate and build on the good things they have done.

But this also goes the other way. To my grandparents and older friends: I know that our dyed hair, avid use of cell phones, and weird slang can be scary sometimes. But, just because we

do things differently, please don't label us a superficial and or lazy. Though we may seem disconnected from the world, we truly care about it. This is the world that we are going to have to live in, and we will do everything we can to combat racism, global warming, police brutality, and all the other ugly things that sulk around.



Melia (in black) plays volleyball with her grandpa (right), and other family members

So put on your orthopedic shoes and come join us. We'll stand with you, and you'll stand with us. If each generation lifts each other up, I think we just might not need that spaceship. ♡



*Melia Jubilee Hawthorne Klingler is a high school student who has spent the quarantine reading, learning Arabic, protesting, and trying not to murder her siblings. She belongs to Lombard [Illinois] Mennonite Church.*

# America's Chickens

*by Karl McKinney, Lancaster County, Penn., and Baltimore, Maryland*

**I**t has been 31 days since Derek Chauvin held his left knee pressed upon the neck of George Floyd for 8 minutes and 46 seconds until he was dead. “J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane further restrained Floyd, while officer Tou Thao prevented bystanders from intervening.” [1]

Because of George Floyd’s murder and in response to sustained, worldwide, largely-peaceful protests, reporters began to search for other murders of people of color. The stories are being uncovered in a torrent. Rather than being misreported as a series of unfortunate “random” events, people are acknowledging that these events are part of a deep-root system. By hitting communities of color the hardest, COVID-19 has put systemic injustice on display. [2]

## **Where are the churches?**

One of the lifegiving aspects of today’s circumstances is that the world is acknowledging people of color’s plight. To date, more than 4,000 protests have occurred worldwide, and not only in big cities.[3]

On the other hand, the general unresponsiveness of white Christian congregations and some denominations saps my breath. White Christians in the U.S. seem confused about their role in the history of white supremacy and racism. Their focus on replicating worship services online and returning to corporate Sunday gatherings communicates more concern for maintaining the status quo than for doing justice and pursuing righteousness.

## **Listen to the prophets whom God has sent.**

Even though white Christians seem to be mute and confused, God is speaking loud and clear against the epidemics of injustice and unrighteousness in the United States. God has sent many prophets to condemn the white population of degrading human life through the murder, slavery, rape, and removal of people of color. For too long, white settlers have used the church, government, business, and violence of every type to maintain their hold on the

land they wrenched from its inhabitants' hands.

“America’s chickens are coming home to roost,” Dr. Jeremiah Wright thundered in a sermon post-9/11 decrying historic white enslavement to violence [4]. “We took this country by terror away from the Sioux, the Apache, the Arawak, the Comanche, the Rapahoe, the Navaho. We took Africans from their countries to build our way of ease... we bombed Granada... we bombed the black community of Panama...” And on and on, the violence has continued unabated, preached Dr. Wright.

Our cycles of violence have rarely resolved into lamentation and repentance. Never has there been a national consensus to make amends for the violence inflicted either domestically or on other shores.

In Jeremiah 2–3, God makes it clear to Judah that returning to God is not a formality and definitely not an invitation to return to business as usual. Translated for today, I believe God says to us that trying to replicate and eventually resume Sunday morning services as usual is not an option. God told Judah she had to renounce idols and return to God or experience God’s wrath (4:4). We should take heed.

When the chickens come home to roost, we can do nothing but lie down in the dust, repent, and ask for forgiveness and instruction. That’s where we are now, caught between two choices of response: remain rigidly obstinate to God and experience God’s wrath; or repent, renounce our racist idols, and seek ways to make reparations.

Now is a moment of reckoning gifted to a nation that cannot remember why it is infatuated with violence, hatred, white supremacy, and a host of other evil spirits and lies. We can at least lead our congregations into lamentation, repentance, and reparation. And, certainly, our churches can participate in leading the three branches of our government out of white supremacy and into justice and righteousness.

This is a moment of reckoning that will soon pass us by. ❧

**Note:** Consider joining the work of Coming to the Table (CTTT). Our local chapter [5] has attracted new interest since the world erupted in protest. People need groups like CTTT, designed to pursue restorative justice, provide safe space for one another to connect, tell our stories, seek healing, and take action together.

[1] The Killing of George Floyd, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing\\_of\\_George\\_Floyd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_George_Floyd) (accessed on 6/26/20)

[2] <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/06/25/883520249/cdc-at-least-20-million-americans-have-had-coronavirus-heres-who-s-at-highest-ri>

[3] See map created by Alex Smith, accessed 6/26/20: [https://www.creosotemaps.com/blm2020/?fbclid=IwAR28N-iX\\_CZZ06JZrR7fd64xp5lfPIYBvLiHb\\_sB-7g1Kb1-z70rCDBnX4qs](https://www.creosotemaps.com/blm2020/?fbclid=IwAR28N-iX_CZZ06JZrR7fd64xp5lfPIYBvLiHb_sB-7g1Kb1-z70rCDBnX4qs)

[4] Reverend Dr. Jeremiah Wright, (9 minutes and 56 seconds of his sermon delivered in the aftermath of 9/11/2001) <https://youtu.be/FqPUXjFYh38> (accessed on 6/26/20)

[5] You can reach Charlene Peachey and Karl McKinney, of the Lebanon-Lancaster chapter of Coming to the Table, at [preparingthetable@gmail.com](mailto:preparingthetable@gmail.com). Information about Coming to the Table can be found at their website, [www.comingtothetable.org](http://www.comingtothetable.org).



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Mural protesting colonization and gentrification,  
Querétaro, Mexico. —*Leslie Hawthorne Klingler*

## A Time Enduring

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