

A Reflection on the Dallas Prayer Vigil



On July 8th of this year, I along with other faith leaders and elected officials attended a prayer vigil held at the behest of our honorable mayor, Mike Rawlings, following the tragic police shootings here in Dallas. It was reassuring to know that a man who believed in the power of prayer was administering at a very turbulent time in the life of our city, so I felt compelled to join him for prayer.

Upon my arrival at Thanksgiving Square (the site of the vigil), I sensed a cautious calm that stood in stark contrast to the chaotic confusion witnessed here only hours earlier. As I exchanged collegial greetings with the august assemblage of influential leaders, I prayed silently that this epic gathering would not morph into a mere photo op captioned by pious platitudes and impotent phrases, because the swollen eyes of our city and even our nation were looking to Dallas for comfort, guidance, and hope in the midst of unimaginable turmoil...and amazingly, my prayer was answered!

As each speaker stepped to the podium and delivered their profoundly relevant message or conciliatory prayer, I was immediately struck by the sincerity, urgency, and unity of thought that weaved its way through each of their inspired presentations. Had it not been for the oppressive Texas heat, I would have gladly lingered in the cathartic optimism longer than the hour allotted. The prayer vigil ended peacefully amidst a hail of hugs, handshakes, and a heightened sense of hope. I left the square feeling blessed for having come yet wondering how long this uneasy peace would last.

While I was personally proud and grateful that my fellow faith leaders and our elected officials had come together to give a collective response to the senseless slaying of innocent police officers that fateful Thursday evening, I'm still a bit anxious regarding our seemingly tacit response to the growing necrology of young Black men slain at the hands of a nefarious few who swore to 'protect & serve' the very lives they've indiscriminately taken.

Today is a watershed moment in American race relations. We can ill-afford as a diverse nation of people to be passionately sympathetic about Dallas, but passively indifferent towards Falcon Heights, Baton Rouge, Tulsa, Charlotte, or El Cajon. If we sincerely desire corporate healing to begin in this nation, then we must be willing to confront the reality that **both** casualties deserve to be treated without implicit bias—that **both** inequities beg for public censure and social redress—that **both** atrocities were abhorrently evil and morally unconscionable—that **both** tragedies leave behind wives, children, parents, and other significant family and friends to mourn the unspeakable

loss of loved ones—that **both** protesters and protectors accept the incontrovertible truth that ‘Black Lives’ do matter, and ‘Blue Lives’ matter too, simply because ‘All Lives’ matter and were created equal by God regardless of complexion, creed, or social context!

I appreciate the crucial conversations taking place all across this country regarding race relations in America; but I believe it’s high time we move beyond the ramped up rhetoric, circular sound bytes, and well-meaning marches and begin formulating cogent solutions to address the racial divide. It’s time we start implementing an actionable agenda that will help ameliorate the disturbing disparities inflaming marginalized communities all across this country.

As a nation, America must vehemently denounce racism anywhere; vigorously defend social justice everywhere; provide unbiased due process to the suspicious deaths of unarmed American citizens as is given to slain innocent peace officers; embrace diversity as a distinction rather than a distraction of our society; ensure that our public policy is fair, equitable, and beneficial to all; and rally our efforts around credible leadership capable of synergizing our disparate concerns into a viable movement for transformative socio-economic change.

The Black community and law enforcement in particular must work earnestly towards healing their strained relations and rebuilding trust by insisting upon the ethical demolition of the ‘blue wall of silence’ in order to give justice a voice; by initiating a respectful dialog of mutual understanding regarding each other’s perceptual and actual plight in this country; and by creating an ongoing collaborative that will continuously invent and invest in new initiatives (e.g., police/community sensitivity forums, police de-escalation training, community policing, comprehensive mental health screenings) to help promote better relations as a result of their civic engagement.

The church too must reconnect with the community **before** something happens within the community. Historically, the church has always been a prophetic voice for social responsibility. A church that sequesters itself behind the stained glass piety of its internally focused walls has no altruistic value to its surrounding community and therefore has no legitimate reason to exist. ‘Abel’s blood’ still cries out for justice even in our day, and we by sacred legacy are still ‘our brother’s keeper!’

How ironic that during his historic visit to Dallas in 1963, the late President John F. Kennedy was to conclude a scheduled speech at the Dallas Trade Mart with the following prophetic words until an assassin’s bullet preempted it and claimed his young life:

“We in this country, in this generation, are—by destiny rather than choice—the watchmen on the walls of world freedom. We ask, therefore, that we may be worthy of our power and responsibility, that we may exercise our strength with wisdom and restraint, and that we may achieve in our time and for all time the ancient vision of “peace on earth, good will toward men.” That must always be our goal, and the righteousness of our cause must always underlie our strength. For as was written long ago, “Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”— (Psalm 127:1b).

In the subsequent weeks following the prayer vigil, I’ve often reflected upon that remarkable experience at Thanksgiving Square, especially in light of the recent unrest besieging other cities across our nation. Like Kennedy, I too am totally convinced that ‘unless God keeps the city,’ we will never really achieve uniform justice or lasting peace. No amount of incisive thought or human invention will ever suffice for His divine guidance and intervention. That’s precisely why our esteemed leaders gathered to pray for God’s help one incredible day in Dallas after a horrific night of despair.

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