

**Sermon after the Police Officer shot and killed Philando Castile in Falcon Heights. Deep Mourning Habakkuk 1:2-4  
It is called the oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.**

Montgomery, AL - African American man **Gregory Gunn**, unarmed, a few steps from his home - gunned down by a white police officer.

Raleigh, North Carolina - **Akiel Denkins**, 24-year-old black man shot by a white police officer.

Baltimore, Maryland - **Freddie Gray**, who was a 25-year-old black man – died when his neck was broken in the back of a police transport van – by 6 white police officers.

North Charleston, SC, African American man, **Walter Scott**, unarmed, was shot dead running from a traffic stop.

Chicago, IL – **LaQuan McDonald**, a black teenager shot 16 times by a white police officer.

**Samuel Debose** - a former football player for the University of the Cincinnati - black and unarmed - shot by a white police officer after being pulled over for a traffic stop.

New York City, **Akai Gurley** was shot by a rookie white police officer.

Minneapolis - **Jamar Clark** shot by a white police officer.

Los Angeles – **Brendon Glenn** an unarmed black man shot in the back by a white police officer.

Arlington, Minnesota, **Christian Taylor** an unarmed black football player, a teenager was shot and killed during a “suspected” burglary at a car dealership.

This week in Baton Rouge, **Alton Sterling**, African American man, again shot by a white police officer.

And then here in St. Paul, **Philando Castile**, 31 years old, Nutrition supervisor for Magnet Montessori in Falcon Heights, stopped for a traffic violation,

girlfriend and her 4-year-old daughter in the car – he was shot four times before he could give the white police officer his driver's license.

**When I first heard about the Philando Castile, another black man shot, a man some of you knew personally - I was enraged.** Then I was grief stricken. And then I was overwhelmed with despair. Then I had to write a sermon - As I thought about what I might say - how I might address this evil, I sat in my office and wept. I asked the questions - *WHY GOD? WHEN WILL THIS STOP, GOD? HOW WILL THIS END, GOD?*

**I looked for an appropriate Scripture Reading.** An answer to the problem of this racial evil – but there isn't one. But I keep asking: **why is there such hate in the world?** *So I chose Habakkuk 1:2-4.* A lament for justice. Habakkuk the prophet thought that those who lived in the Promised Land **did the goodness of God;** their lives were about justice, mercy, humility, and love for one another. But instead, the reality was uncontrolled violence and God's help was nowhere to be seen.

*So, Habakkuk cries out for relief. He longs to understand why God seems so far and he absolutely cries out for justice!*

**I believe - when we look at the problems of racial hatred in our country, we ought to repeat Habakkuk's complaint verbatim.**

I am not going to preach a sermon about comfort. I would rather. It would be a lot easier. **But I think we aren't ready for that yet.**

**Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a time for every purpose under heaven. This is a time for lament, so let us also cry out with the prophet: Listen for God.**

***O LORD, how long shall we cry for help, and you will not listen?***

Perhaps this is where I ought to start the sermon. The murder of Philando Castile is not only about the white police officers, Jeronimo Yanez and Joseph Kaiser -but the shootings in Chicago, Boston, and here in the Twin Cities is about us, about this culture, about the faith we embody and practice. My daughter's partner - an African American woman and social activist (whose brother was shot and killed by white police officers after he ran into his house and into the bathroom - told us not to post anymore videos of the shootings because they were being used for entertainment instead of condemnation.

Why are we fascinated by violence? Why does our daily existence depend on racist structures – those who are marginalized see it clearly but invisible to the powerful?

Why is it that we engage in the relentless denial of both these realities?

**Perhaps most importantly: why do so many of us practice a willful ignorance of the pain of our black sisters and brothers**

**Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save?**

Make no mistake: we are in the depths. We are stuck there. The Tribune on Friday – printed a cartoon that depicted two white people talking to each other after the once again police violence: **one said we don’t know enough details. The other one said, yea but look at the statistics.** This is not the **first time** that a white authority acted out his privilege. **Ask those who knew the four young girls killed and others maimed by white supremacy in Birmingham’s 16th Street Baptist Church. Ask those who witnessed Óscar Romero killed at the altar by his own government.** The forces of hate make their point clearly: we are never safe from evil and violence even in church.

**<sup>3</sup>Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.<sup>4</sup>**

I only have questions. How do you preach about racism? How do you talk about it especially against it? What can I do about it? Will people be angry because they are feeling blamed for racism? Will we leave it to the courts to figure it out? Personally, I am overwhelmed with the hatred and death that happened here in St. Paul, Minneapolis, Chicago, Boston, Louisiana – and those are ones that make the headlines. **I do not understand** why African Americans or any person of color -are disparaged because of the color of their skin, their accent, their culture, their sexual orientation?

Why does this kind of thing keep happening on the streets in the United States of America more than any other advanced country? **John Stewart** from the Daily Show said – “we fly drones, spend millions of dollars and send thousands of men and women to other places to help keep us safe and our freedom – **but meanwhile here at home we are killing ourselves.**”

**Habakkuk laments: - So the law - becomes slack and justice never prevails.**

RACISM IS the law of the land in so many ways. It's happens in the voting booths--voter ID laws require people to present a photo ID that have led to lower African American turnouts. It's true in the classroom, where Black middle-schoolers were nearly three times as likely to be suspended as their white counterparts.

Then there is the question of who gets arrested and who doesn't--something that was finally thrown into the headlines - by the Trayvon Martin case. Even though it was immediately clear to police that Zimmerman had killed an unarmed teenager, Trayvon Martin, a young black man walking in a neighborhood - Zimmerman wasn't charged with any crime--because a racist law protected him. Florida's "Stand Your Ground" self-defense law allows someone to use deadly force if they "reasonably believe" they are being threatened with death or serious injury.

**The wicked surround the righteous— therefore judgment comes forth perverted.**

Martin Luther King Jr wrote a letter to the white clergy who were sympathetic to the cause but believed that the end of segregation should be the courts responsibility.

*My fellow clergy, you deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.*

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

***I will stand at my watch post, and station myself on the rampart:***

Christian hospitality (my friends) has dangerous consequences when hate comes to visit.

I need to remember, as a white person, I need to look at my neighbors directly into their eyes – and listen as they describe what it is like to live with lack of security, because some neighbors have been singled out as special targets. Racism fuels the violence, even as it makes others casually dismiss its severity.

***I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint.***

Scripture tells us that God’s work is always with those on the outside - with those excluded from the story. Surprisingly, God says - those who don’t fit, those not welcomed at our table - will show us the way.

**Someone in the Emanuel AME congregation following the massacre in Charleston, SC crafted a letter in memory of those 9 who were violently martyred in a Bible Study:**

Dear young Man,

No need to call your name. You know who you are and why you did this. Yet, allow us, the Emanuel Nine to say, “Thank You.” We dare not say God orchestrated any of this vile. Yet, from our home on high, we say “Thank you.” “Thank you” –because of your atrocious, hateful crime millions will now know the legacy of Denmark Vesey. His revolutionary blood still runs in our church veins. “Thank you” –because what a bullet tried to silence now speaks forever on a national stage. People will never forget that lack of gun control killed yet another group of innocent people. “Thank you” –because the world must not forget that African Americans are still in peril—at the pool, playing on the playground or praying to our Creator. We are not safe, period.

“Thank you” –because you did for us in our death what could not have been done in life. This nation will be reminded that faith is a dangerous exercise. Nevertheless, we are not afraid. More so, we are not ashamed of the gospel. We are not ashamed in life. We are not ashamed in death. “We are not ashamed...for we have everlasting life.” In Life Everlasting, The Martyred at Emanuel

**<sup>2</sup>Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.**

When Rep. Luis Gutiérrez (D-Ill.) took the mic on Thursday, he told House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) that he had intended to talk on something else, but the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, two black men shot by police this week, changed his mind.

Gutiérrez then launched into an impassioned speech calling for a national conversation on police violence, to be led by Congress.

Sandra Sterling mourns at a community vigil in memory of her nephew Alton on July 6. *Gutiérrez said the truth:* There is no national strategy and no national conversation” on police violence. And then slammed the congressional hearings on Hillary Clinton’s email server, the Benghazi attacks and defunding Planned Parenthood. “When Americans are literally crying out in the streets that, yes, in fact, black lives matter, we have no response from this Congress, the people’s house. None,” he said. “Young men are shot by police, videotapes are withheld from the public, and nothing happens,” **Gutiérrez added.**

The congressman ended his speech by once again calling on Congress to step up and do something about police killings.

” Mr. Speaker,” Gutiérrez said, “this Congress needs to come together and lead. And we need to start right now.”

**<sup>3</sup>For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.**

**Ok there is the sermon I tried to say something worth saying –**

**The final question for me - Where to do we go from here?**

***(King says) Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends. And so even though we face the difficulties of today and***

***tomorrow, we still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.***

***I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all of us are created equal."***

*I have a dream that one day in the streets of St. Paul, Minnesota - the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*

*I have a dream that one day even the state of Louisiana, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.*

*I have a dream that my four little children north Minneapolis will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

*I have a dream today!*

*I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."*

**Emmanuel – God is with us. Amen.**