
WITNESS for JUSTICE

A weekly commentary from
the United Church of Christ

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We are All Affected

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I thought long and hard about what to say in this column. I wanted to share something that has not already been shared by thousands of people across this nation and around the world; to add to the conversation in some way. Like thousands of others I was speechless, but not surprised, by the Grand Jury decision to not charge Officer Darren Wilson in the shooting and killing of Michael Brown. Watching this dreadful incident unfold prompts more hazard than it does security in our lives. I can only imagine the fear felt by the young people who experience such violence all around them every day. It brought to mind a quote by one of our founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, who reminded us that “Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”

For those of us who do not live in Missouri, we may feel as though Ferguson is miles away. But if we think that we are unaffected, we need only wait a while because each of us will be in one way or the other. A similar tragedy is but one minute away in our own backyard. For example, I live just five minutes away from the Cudell Recreation Center in Cleveland, Ohio, where police converged on 12-year-old Tamir Rice. Surveillance video accounts show that shots rang out from a police weapon within a few seconds of their arrival. In an instant, another young African-American life was lost and his name added to the hundreds who are injured or killed every day. We are all affected by these tragedies.

Like all parents I worry about my kids, but I do not have to live in extreme fear for their safety because of the color of their skin. I am deeply saddened to hear the stories of parents who must coach their children daily on what to do if they are confronted by a person with the power to end their life, or how to appear nonthreatening in order to stay safe. In this unjust reality, parents must think beyond providing for their family’s basic needs like food, housing, and health care. Instead they struggle to provide basic safety and security.

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
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This is about life and death. I weep with the parents of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and others who have lost their sons and daughters in senseless acts that could have been avoided. We are all affected because when one child suffers, we all suffer.

As Christians, we have just entered into the season of Advent, a time of prayerful anticipation of the coming of the Christ child. We observe this holy time by lighting candles of hope, love, joy, and peace as we remember that we are human beings in need of renewal. In this time of hopeful anticipation, listen to Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Our children are creative, they are truthful, they are joyful, they are hopeful, and they are resilient. But we cannot allow them to endure such injustices. We must demand a change in the systemic conditions that harm their lives and their spirits.

Whether we are directly affected or not, we should be outraged by the violent loss of even one young life to whom the kingdom of heaven and earth belong.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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