



Protest as Sacrament

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It was May of 2020. The COVID pandemic gripped the world and forced us into isolation. Grief, loneliness, and worry consumed our days. We kept our distance in the interest of public health, our love of neighbor made real.

And then George Floyd was murdered by a white police officer outside a convenience store in Minneapolis. For 9 minutes and 29 seconds the officer pressed his knee into George Floyd's neck, literally squeezing the life out of him. The blatant cruelty and injustice of George Floyd's murder ignited outrage across the United States and world, chants of "black lives matter" demanding a reckoning.

Cloistered at home, I watched it in dismay. As the Minnesota Conference Minister then, I was desperate to take to the streets, and to invite our clergy and churches to do the same. I weighed the risks of gathering people during a pandemic with the risks of staying silent. A clergy friend and I quietly shared our plans to meet at the site of George Floyd's death. People came: masked but resolute, distanced but joined in stubborn solidarity. We prayed. We protested. We proclaimed God's love and pleaded for God's justice to roll down. We showed up for one another, for our community, and for the more loving and just world we envisioned.

Protesting on that Minneapolis street, a pandemic pressing in on us and George Floyd's brutal murder haunting us, something holy broke through. It felt like sacrament.

St. Augustine described sacrament as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace.” A sacrament is a vessel for the holy. It’s a way to convey the persistent gifts of God’s boundless grace and love amid the everyday brokenness of life. It pierces the veil between human experience and sacred mystery, invites us to come in all humility to experience the wonder and mercy of God.

When we protest, we push back against the evil and injustice that destroys God’s vision for the peaceable kin-dom and harms God’s people. Our uplifted voices and our hastily scrawled posters declare that love is still present. We signal that something within us still believes a better future is possible, that God’s goodness can carve its way through the mess. We boldly gather in beloved community to “pray with our feet,” to make our faith visible.

Last week, outside a Coast Guard base near Oakland, California, hundreds gathered in the early morning to protest the Trump Administration’s deportation efforts and the militarization of American cities. [Among them stood Rev. Jorge Bautista](#), a United Church of Christ minister, wearing his clergy collar and carrying a protest sign. A masked federal agent stood mere feet in front of him and shot Rev. Bautista squarely in the face with a pepper round. The video taken of the scene is horrifying to watch, the callousness of the agent chilling.

This incident, and many more like it taking place across this country, tell us something about the character of these days we are living in and about an administration hell-bent on erasing freedom of speech. They also tell us something about the cost of discipleship and the sometimes risky requirements of faith. When we speak truth to power and show up for justice and peace, it is holy and sacrificial work.

Protest is sacrament. An outward and visible sign of God’s holy hope and limitless love.

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