



Presbytery of Yukon

October 30, 2020

Seizing the Kairos Moment - Rev. Curt Karns

"And you, O mortal, ... lie on your left side, and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it... For I assign you (to lie on your side in front of the people) for a number of days, three hundred ninety days, equal to the number of the years of their (the nation of Israel) punishment..."(quote comprised of sections of Ezekiel 4:1-5)



The Rev. Curt Karns

The Bible asks us to keep our eyes open to recognize those Kairos moments—those powerful times when God makes real change possible, and to seize on those moments. This should be one of those moments. Recently, I have been wondering how God works to bring about those watershed moments when significant change can happen. So far, thank God, I haven't heard God calling me to lay down in public on my left side for 13 months! However, it is clear that some significant social change is needed, and that we should be looking at how such change could happen.

What I want to talk about today is criminal justice. In the past decade momentum has been building across the country to reform America's criminal justice system, a problem that impacts people of color more severely than the general population—and Alaska is not immune to the need for change. People of color suffer, here, too.

So far, the Presbytery of Yukon has shown leadership in this area by helping form Intergenerational Arctic Ministries, an ecumenical approach to healing wounded souls, and reducing social ills like substance abuse and various kinds of violence. However, it is clear that we also need a better justice system, one that follows more of a restorative justice approach than our current punitive justice approach. We need to improve our system, because it really is not working for significant parts of our population.

A few statistics might help show what I mean. [Alaska Natives and African Americans](#) comprise only 15% and 4% of the Alaskan population, respectively, but 37% and 10% of the prison population. Similarly, [Alaska's pre-coronavirus statistics](#) show that Alaska Natives were 214% more likely to live in poverty than the general population, and African Americans were 10% more likely. I cannot find statistics, but I strongly believe that Native Americans have been struck much more strongly by the economic impacts of the coronavirus. However, in Alaska, the increase in violence caused by the stresses of 2020 have hit Native Americans and other people of color much more severely than the general population, which means more suffering and more arrests. We need a restorative,

rather than a punitive approach of intervention to help all individuals and families.

Unfortunately, even though state and federal legislators on both sides of the aisle have been interested in addressing criminal justice reform, this election cycle has brought congress's progress on this issue nearly to a halt. Though death of George Floyd and others have ignited passions, and have now brought our nation through months of public demonstrations pushing for criminal justice reform, the violence perpetrated by a small percentage of demonstrators and counter-demonstrators has caused a segment of the public to write off this basic need for justice.

America needs a justice system where few people are killed or injured, and where the social needs of all people are cared for in ways other than lengthy imprisonment. All lives matter means nothing, unless black lives—and Native American lives—matter as much as any. We cannot be satisfied with the disparity in treatment we see across our country, or our state.

So, as I have been wondering how God works to bring about those watershed moments when significant change can happen, I have turned to the Bible for guidance.

In the Bible, whenever there has been need for significant change, God's people have taken action to disrupt the status quo. The Old Testament prophets were notorious for staging some dramatic public action. Ezekiel, quoted at the beginning of this article, spent all those months laying on one side, while cooking his food over dung from that lying down position, as a symbol of Israel's consequences to come if they did not change. Jeremiah paraded around wearing a yoke, to warn of invasion. Jesus famously overturned the temple's money tables and then drove the priests out of the temple with a whip. And God first used Moses and Aaron to denounce Pharaoh's slave practices, and then brought a series of plagues upon Egypt to enforce the change.

As biblical people, we should expect significant disruption to be a part of the process needed to bring significant change. Although protest acts like demonstrations are truly uncomfortable, especially for those more privileged citizens, who have benefited from the status quo, we cannot forget that God hears the cries of the oppressed and acts in history to bring change on their behalf.

As a person of faith, I believe that we need also to denounce those who would use violence as their means to bring change. Americans' right to protest and demonstrate is enshrined in our constitution—it is one of the prime American methods for creating disruption in the service of increased justice. However, Christians know that loving our neighbor, and even our enemy, is God's commandment for us. Turning violence against our neighbor is unbiblical, and should not be condoned.

So, the questions I have today are these:

1. How to do we assure that the bad actors in our current moment in history do not succeed in their efforts to derail this moment for bringing reform to America's criminal justice system?
2. And, what can we people of faith do to add momentum toward an improved criminal justice system within our own state?

Online Bible Study - Faith and Voting

Video by Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Director of the
PC(USA) Office on Public Witness



Available at
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=342311910202674&ref=search>

Good Medicine Monthly Broadcast

Watch the "Good Medicine" Monthly Broadcast from PC(USA)
Co-Moderators Elona Street-Stewart & Gregory Bentley on the 2nd Wednesday of every month on Facebook Live at
<https://www.facebook.com/pcusa>
at 10am AK time



"There are so many ideas that are being generated for conversation, including things like Indigenous People Day or others. In the last few weeks, Native people in the Presbyterian church have become quite visible," said Street-Stewart. "This could be a phenomenal way for the most invisible people in the church, the original people who were evangelized here, to have higher visibility."

"When you have a body that is in crisis, the remedy often comes from the margins," said Bentley. "It comes from those whose voices have been silenced or dismissed and just acknowledging their work. I think it would help lift up the importance of good medicine."

"God Be With You"

Hear First Presbyterian Church of Anchorage Choir singing *God Be With You* on a Zoom call! All so far apart geographically, but truly together in song. (click photo to play)



Student Loan Debt Assistance

The Reverend Jessica Paulsen was faced with the challenge of carrying student loan debt that would take years to pay off. A Minister Educational

Debt Assistance grant helped Rev. Paulsen pay off that debt in just 12 months.

"People my age have so much debt and so much of it is student loan debt," says minister aided by the Board's Assistance Program.

[See More...](#)

Prayer Requests



For everyone, especially our Alaska communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mark Your Calendars

February 2021

Winter Stated Meeting of the Presbytery
Location To Be Determined

Presbytery of Yukon
616 W. 10th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99577
907-276-0914



www.pbyukon.org