

Dear friends in Christ



St. Francis Episcopal Mission Outreach

Rev. Dr. John C. Forney  
All Saints Sunday

“In our Custody, In our Care”  
Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9; Psalm 24;  
Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

“In our Custody, In our Care.” That’s the motto of the Minneapolis Police Department.

This last week the jury that had convicted Derek Chauvin of murder assembled with the media for the first time since that fateful trial. Seven of the eight met for an interview with the host of CNN’s Don Lemon Tonight.

Several jurors reported a moment of epiphany when it dawned on them that something was missing. Some critical act missing that was triggered by the motto of the Minneapolis Police Department – “In our Custody, in our Care.”

The forewoman explained: "At some point, I think it was Jodi, I'm pretty sure it was Jodi said, 'Wait a minute, does the intended act of harm have to be the death of George Floyd, or can it be him not providing the life support?' And it was like all of a sudden the light bulbs just went on for those people that I think were undecided or on the not guilty side.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Paschal, “Jurors Reveal it was Something Derek Chauvin didn't do that Convinced Them all to Vote Guilty,” *Yahoo Entertainment*, October 29, 2021.

As Jodi said, for her the defining moment of that incident is not what the officer did. It's what the officer failed to do. That, for her, proved intent.

As another juror added, "George Floyd was in their custody. He was never in their care." That was the assessment of juror, Sherri Hardeman.

Thus came the first ever guilty verdict for a white officer for killing a black man — "Never in their Care."

Yet, CARE was not derelict. Never absent at that scene. A young woman who gave a care steadfastly kept her camera rolling as those fateful eight minutes, forty-six seconds ticked by.

And millions of Americans gave a CARE as in outrage they took to the streets to protest the indignity shown George Floyd. Unfortunately, our congress has yet to muster up the courage to show the same spine, the same CARE as that young bystander.

As we celebrate the Saints of God, I am coming to believe that it's all about CARE. They are the ones who simply give a CARE.

That's the entire story of the resurrecting of Lazarus. Jesus is the cosmic embodiment of CARE. As might any suffering loss, suffering the sting of death of a dear friend, Jesus wept at the news of his friend. He and the entire village, had unabashedly joined Mary and Martha in mourning the loss of their brother Lazarus. Here we find the shortest verse in the Bible, John 11:35, "Jesus wept." Those two words encompass the entire mercy of God.

We are drawn to a God who promises to wipe away our tears when in a season of weeping. A promise of comfort, of CARE.

We have lost several dear ones at St. Francis in this past season of weeping: Our sisters Alicia, Stephanie and Diane. Our brothers Fred and Oliver. Numbered among the Saints of God to be sure. In their own inimitable ways, they gave a CARE for us all and for the Church of Christ.

But, more than that, we worship a God who summons us back to life. Just as did those millions of marchers who filled our streets after the death of George Floyd. Black, white – all ethnicities – rich and poor – urban rural. All of them calling America back to its founding principal motto: E Pluribus Unum – Out of Many, One. Calling this nation back to life.

That trembling young woman with a cell phone, steadfast, she is one of the Saints of God. She would have never claimed to be anyone special, would never have claimed any special notoriety. She just followed the instincts of

the Spirit-implanted humanity in her soul. She simply did her duty as a fellow human being, a Saint to be sure! Calling us to witness. To life.

Yes, as the hymn proclaims, “You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea, in church or in trains, or in shops or at tea...”<sup>2</sup> A saint has that force within to kindle the life quality where it was not.

Sometimes it’s by raising a ruckus, like those who steadfastly protest the indignities heaped upon the “least of these.” They are about “trouble, good trouble, necessary trouble.” As we move through the process of “sausage making” in congress, the Saints of God are on the alert for indignity heaping. Senator Patty Murray is one, an exemplar of that necessary trouble when she calls out “one seventy-four-year-old man” who would deny paid leave to women having to tend to a sick child or care for an elderly mother.

Senator Patty Murray was in high dudgeon on Thursday: “We’re not going to let one man tell all the women in this country that they can’t have paid leave,”<sup>3</sup>

The outrage didn’t stop there. Remember the bit about “a woman scorned” and Hell’s fury.

“I think it’s horrific that one white man can make this decision,” said Dawn Huckelbridge, director of Paid Leave for All. “But I think it’s also a failure of our entire government...And this could have been a cornerstone program that would have helped every working family in this country. And we’ve squandered that opportunity.”<sup>4</sup> Shame. Shame on us.

Legislating, that so-called sausage making, is not a pretty process. Much *Sturm und Drang*. Especially when it’s the little people, the “least of these” getting ground up in the process. Ground up and discarded.

To no one’s surprise, the folks with the most means don’t usually get pulverized in this messy process. In the midst of the offal and slime on the floor, God’s Saints call out privilege when they see it, when they smell it. The Saints of God continue to call America to values imbued in its founding documents, foundational tracts and essays.

Yes, Frederick Douglass, I’m thinking about you.<sup>5</sup> I’m thinking about those stirring words in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence. I’m

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<sup>2</sup> Lesbia Scott, *The Church Hymnal*, #293, Church Pension Fund, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Cillizza, “This Democratic Senator is Irate at Joe Manchin,” *CNN State of the Union*, October 28, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in unsigned op. ed., *Wealth & Equity*, October 28, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Speech given to Independence Day celebration for the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society, July 5, 1852.

thinking about Jane Addams at Hull House and Susan B. Anthony. I'm thinking about a good friend and fellow marcher, Rabbi Leonard Beerman. A companion on the journey who always asserted, "My marching feet are my prayers." Mine too. All Saints of God who have mentored our democracy through its fitful journey to the present day. Raised us back to life.

I'm thinking of those intrepid guides who followed the "Drinking Gourd," leading the enslaved to freedom up north. I'm thinking about Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman – all the anonymous conductors, Black and White, on that most blessed Underground Railroad to freedom. All following a bright North Star -- leading America to a brighter destiny. These are the incandescent Saints of God I celebrate today. Holding the "least of these" in tender care.

Yes, you can meet them on trains, but also in demonstrations, at the workplace and in the Halls of Congress. You find them on the internet, lobbying for a just politics. You can find them in our Pilgrim Place dining hall, writing letters on behalf of those imprisoned and tortured for protesting tyranny and dictatorship. Yes, I'm thinking of you who monthly write those letters on behalf of Amnesty International. Right here in Pilgrim Place, in our churches and around the world. They have a CARE for the most despised and forgotten. Saints, to be sure.

One more thing. In researching the turmoil around the Build Back Better Bill and paid family leave, I came across an outfit of insurance brokers serving the Black community. This business was created because many national companies, due to "red-lining," had refused to issue policies in minority or poor neighborhoods.

Wealth & Equity, a non-profit, was "created to unite the insurance industry on a mission to educate, underwrite, and empower the Black community by leveraging life insurance and enhancing financial education, while also helping Black agents and agencies reach their highest level of career success."<sup>6</sup>

These people looked around and noticed that most insurance companies thought communities of color and low-income neighborhoods were not worthy of their effort. This discrimination led some righteous souls early on to enter that market. As a result, the nonprofit, Wealth & Equity was given birth as a Black owned enterprise. They gave a CARE. And still do.

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<sup>6</sup> Wealth & Equity, "Who are We," <https://wealthandequity.org/>.

If ever business folks could make it into the pantheon of Saints, these self-help, non-profit folks are Saints of God! They're all about respect and empowerment.

Yes, saints galore. Closer to home, so close -- saints who abound.

These are the husbands and wives, who over the years have gone the extra mile with tokens of love and affection. Flowers for no special day. A favorite breakfast. A spontaneous day in the park together. Even through kiss-and-make-up arguments. Sometimes it's loved ones who forgive the unforgiveable. Cherished quiet time they allow one another. It's how they've made allowances for each other, cut one another some slack. It's those joyous moments of celebration like the discovery that a new baby might be on the way. It's shared moments of sorrow too deep for words. They do the necessary chores to keep things going, day in and day out, without complaint. Saints to be sure! Folks who daily give a CARE.

Saints are those who've kept up long-term friendships that have weathered misunderstandings and absences. Friendships that year after year spring up, even after the years and months have flown by, as if not a day had been missed. Folks who will always have your back. The ones who bring out the best in you, expect the best from you and are willing to believe the best about you. People who hold you in prayer and tender thoughts. Precious, indeed, in the sight of the Lord. Saints to be sure.

The Saints of God – “They lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still, the world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus’ will.” The Saints be Praised, AND May I be one too. Amen.