

Dear Chavraya,

The heavy swath of blue, color meant to tell of the heavens above embracing us all, came instead to divide, roughly applied from a bucket of confusion quickly turned to an expression of hate. The email that came yesterday from the clergy of Hope Central Church on Seaverns Avenue was deeply disturbing. The Black Lives Matter banner in front of the church was defaced during the night, the night following Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Christian journey to Easter. The word "Black" had been blotted out, leaving only the words "Lives Matter." Earlier in the day, we had been together at a JP Interfaith Clergy meeting. We talked about the Black Lives Matter vigil to take place that evening. We were all together, feeling the warm connection among us, neighbors and friends tending fields without fences, whatever our differences, all as one, able to knock on each other's door.

I could feel tears welling as I read the letter. The same thing had happened earlier in the year, more than once, defaced and stolen, to the Black Lives Matter banner in front of the Baptist church where the vigil takes place. I felt sick and ashamed for the pain caused to others, to Black people as though erased. The subject line of the email spoke of resilience and love: "Black Lives Matter banner defaced, but we are not." Addressing their clergy colleagues, Rev. Laura Ruth and Rev. Courtney explained what had happened and of the path they are seeking to walk: "We're figuring out how to respond pastorally and prophetically, creatively, and educationally, lovingly." They wrote a beautiful letter to their congregation from which I draw in sharing with you, in its essence a love letter:

*Beloved,*

*Every Sunday morning during the announcements, we say that we are a congregation doing Racial Justice because our lives depend on it. And we ask you to pray for our People of Color, especially our people of African descent.*

*Here is why. Overnight, after our Ash Wednesday service, someone defaced our Black Lives Matter banner. You can see, someone painted over the word "Black." This is how common racism works, a thousand tiny cuts, an erasure of existence, a not seeing, a not hearing, a not believing, a not allowing another's life and reality to be central, insisting on one's own place at center. This is why I'm asking you to pray for our people of color today and always - for encouragement and support. But also so we may identify the strength and resilience inside us all, for the living through everyday racism.*

*We're also asking you to pray for our congregation as we gather wisdom about how to respond to such defacement and erasure....*

*Here is what feels important, at least today. The sign is only a sign and a symbol of our divine commitment to be beloved community, the body of Christ. It feels so important to preserve our energy, see after and care for our people of African descent, and then to begin to know how we as individuals and as a congregation will interrupt the systems of racism that ensnare us all. We will not repay evil for evil, nor praise the devil. We will seek to love, educate, interrupt.*

*Love from your pastors,  
Courtney and Laura Ruth*

A moment of pain can become a moment of learning, a teachable moment, a moment of connection and love deepened. It is an essential truth that all lives matter. It is also a painful historical truth that all lives have not mattered equally in our society from the very first steps of white people on these shores. The brutal backdrop of this nation's founding has yet to be fully acknowledged and the repentant turning of *t'shuva* done; the decimation of native peoples; the bringing of African people in chains to suffer in bondage to the Pharaoh of this emerging nation.... All lives matter..., but that truth is too often forgotten in regard to some lives, some people and peoples, black people..., immigrants, at times it has been Jews. All lives matter, but at times we forget and need to be reminded. The suffering of some requires that we be reminded that their lives matter among all lives. We are called then to highlight their need to be recognized, not blotted out..., reminding them and us that among all lives their lives matter too.

This week's Torah portion, *Parashat T'rumah*, opens with God's call to build the *Mishkan*, the desert sanctuary, *v'asu li mikdash/they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them/v'shochanti b'tocham* (Ex. 25:8). Each of our bodies is meant to be a place of God's dwelling. It is for us to make it habitable and hospitable in the way of our living and respecting all of God's other dwelling places. Every human is meant to be a sanctuary of God, each one mattering infinitely to God, none forgotten as can happen so easily among people. The rabbis make the link between the *Mishkan* and us very clear, comparing the *Mishkan* to the human body and to the heavens, the upper worlds that call us to reach and strive in godly ways. Comparing the *Mishkan* to the body, the rabbis say so simply, *ha'mishkan k'neged gufo shel adam/the Sanctuary corresponds to the human body*. Of each and every human, they explain: *zahav zu ha'nefesh/gold – this is the soul, kesef zeh ha'guf/silver – this is the body...*, and onward in great and loving detail. Rabbi Sh'muel then picks up the brush to paint with love of Creator and creation in all of its expanse: *mishkan k'neged hal'elyonim/the Sanctuary corresponds to the upper worlds, zahav zu chamah/gold – this is the sun, kesef zu l'vanah/silver – this is the moon..., t'cheylet zeh ha'rakiya/blue – this is the sky....*

Of creation's grandeur and human majesty, none forgotten in their mattering, even of those who would hate and hurt, may that be the blue we see, gentle brush strokes of love to include, our eyes opened to the sky above that embraces us all, every single one a sanctuary of God.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor