

**June 28, 2020 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Jeremiah 28:5-9, Matthew 10:40-42**

Rev. Ingrid Rasmussen's piece from Facebook where she quotes Brian Dragonfly:  
<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10222987309214132&set=a.1904179447137>  
Also, Charles Aaron's commentary on Jeremiah 28:5-9 for this date on Working Preacher:  
[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4501](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4501)

**Grace and peace, yes, peace, to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**We speak his name: George Floyd.**

There is something so important, so vital in speaking a name, in remembering, in paying attention.  
Especially these days.

Especially in these times when the pain is so much,

and the desire to duck away is so strong.

There is something important about paying attention.

His name was George Floyd.

**You know, they say that after a crisis,** a shooting, for instance,

our attention span is 21 days.

Maybe that's because it takes 21 days to form a habit and,

God, forbid, this work of protesting or vigil keeping

or praying for and advocating for institutional change would become a habit!

Maybe it's because there's just so much that can or does capture us, essential or not,

and attention is limited.

Maybe it's because the cost is greater when we move beyond 21 days.

More of our lives have been dedicated to concern and action,

More of our mind has been given over to strategy,

More of our heart has been broken, never to heal quite the same.

Of course the media carries some responsibility for this attention, for better or worse, no doubt.

And so does the human heart.

On the one hand, our capacity has limits...there is just so much, too much.

On the other hand I'm amazed at how our capacity can be stretched,

yes stretched beyond 21 days, and our best selves can show up.

**I say all this on the 34<sup>th</sup> day after George Floyd was murdered.**

And on Friday the US saw more than 45,000 new cases of COVID 19, a daily record, surpassing

Thursday's record by more than 5,000 people.

I say this in a week when one of you told me of your 100<sup>th</sup> day of quarantine.

I say this when the conversations I've shared with many of you these last days have been about hitting a wall, exhaustion, intensity and violence, up and down emotions, stress and distress, anxiety...  
...for kids and adults alike.

This is hard, incredibly hard, and many of us are struggling.

In the midst of that, on this 34<sup>th</sup> day, we say his name: George Floyd,

but also say: Jamar Clark, and Philando Castile.

We say Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade, beloved of God, all of them.

We say their names, we remember.

**I am grateful for the witness and the words of my colleague Pastor Ingrid Rasmussen** from Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on 31<sup>st</sup> near Minnehaha.

Their congregation is deeply engaged in meeting the needs of their neighbors.

Some of you have been volunteering at Holy Trinity on Wednesday mornings.

Over these weeks Pastor Ingrid has shared much, and on June 3<sup>rd</sup> she wrote about tending the flame.

The day before Pastor Ingrid had been approached by one of their church's neighbors, Brian Dragonfly.

Brian's organization, MIGIZI, has been around since the 1970s,

focused on "countering misrepresentations and inaccuracies about Native people in the media" and on Native youth empowerment."

MIGIZI's building next to Holy Trinity had burned down the night before.

While they had survived the first night of unrest, on the second night, even with the care and tending of members of the American Indian Movement, a spark from another nearby building caught theirs.

When Brian Dragonfly had arrived the building was still smoldering.

"I decided to capture the fire," Brian told Pastor Ingrid, "holding up his lantern."

He wondered if the Holy Trinity community "would tend the fire with MIGIZI until they could rebuild."

Pastor Ingrid found a candle and they used the flame from MIGIZI to light it.

Now Holy Trinity shares in tending the flame, in remembering, in hold hope.

**I've thought a lot about that story in these last weeks:**

what it means to tend the flame,

how we cross lines in remembering and holding hope,

how central trust and vulnerability are for both Brian Dragonfly and the MIGIZI community,

and for Pastor Ingrid and the Holy Trinity community.

**Our Hebrew Bible reading this morning is from Jeremiah.**

It's a challenging reading, and somehow seems fitting for this time that also is laden in complexity, that doesn't have easy or quick answers.

Nearly 600 years before the time of Jesus, while the people of Judah are living a long and painful season of exile in Babylon, apart from all that felt familiar, the prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah spoke.

Looking back now, we remember Jeremiah's words as true: time clarifies.

But at the moment, Hananiah's words were the popular message, the quicker, softer fix, the easier, more appealing prophecy.

Our reading today is Jeremiah's response to Hananiah:

like a good prophet, Jeremiah recognizes that Hananiah may be correct.

He's diplomatic enough to acknowledge this

even while foretelling a much longer, harder season than they can fathom.

### **I'm caught by this strange reading from Jeremiah this weekend.**

It reminds us just how complex things can seem in the moment.

It turns out that Jeremiah held the truth that day, not Hananiah.

While hindsight may give us clarity, on the ground, in the moment, we, like the people of so long ago, do our best at discernment.

As Professor Charles Aaron asks, "When do we settle in and accept what life has given us? [And] When do we resist and throw off the shackles of the life we don't want or deserve?"

Both responses can be faithful, both have their moment.

### **From our vantage of privilege,** we may want the truth before we add our support.

We seek clarity before reaching out in welcome.

But so easily we miss that first line in today's gospel: Whoever welcome you welcomes me, Jesus says.

It's an easier, more straight forward to be the one who welcomes another, who shares the water.

It's harder for many of us to be the one who is welcomed.

It makes us vulnerable, dependent, with much to learn, and mistakes to make, .... and grace to receive.

### **While some of us woke to the injustice 34 days ago,**

others of us have felt this pain, this knee on our necks, for generations.

While for some talk of defunding the police,

or a department of community safety and violence prevention is a new conversation,

others have proposed this, studied this, debated it, for decades.

We're all joining this movement at different spots, it's that complex.

Hindsight will give us wisdom, but in the meantime we do our best to listen well, to act with grace, to tend the flame, to remember.

**This Pride weekend**, I'm mindful that most years we celebrate Pride with one of the largest parades of the summer. Rainbows flood the city

Our beautiful, God-given, God-blessed sexuality and gender identities are centered.

There's an ease, a joy in Pride.

Truth is: we celebrate Pride this weekend because it was 51 years ago today that the Stonewall riots began at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village in New York City.

Let's be clear: the police raids and state-sponsored, and often church-affirmed, violence and oppression of those days of unrest wasn't all rainbows and parades.

It was harsh and violent.

It was traumatizing and dehumanizing.

And it was one step in a movement that began years before and continues still today.

**We speak the name, George Floyd, and in that litany is also the name Tony McDade.**

You probably aren't so familiar with Tony.

Tony died on June 1<sup>st</sup>, also a black man killed by the police, a black trans man in Tallahassee.

That was 28 days ago, and attention never made it to Tony.

**Remember what Brian Dragonfly told Pastor Ingrid**, lantern in hand, a small flame flickering?

Brian said: "I decided to capture the flame."

In this time of prophets and meaning making,

when the issues are as complex as they were for Jeremiah and Hananiah so long ago,

In this time of heartbreak and hope,

In this time of soul searching and stepping up as our full selves,

...will you be part of tending the flame?

Will you say their names? George Floyd, Tony McDade, each one of them beloved?

Will you remember more than 21 days? More than 34 days? As long as it take?

For by grace, even in the complexity, we claim our vulnerability and our power.

For by grace we welcome as we've been welcomed.

For by grace we tend the flame.

In the name of One who always remembers. Amen.