

To Zion's Family of Faith  
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### **A PANDEMIC OF LOVE?**

Many have asked, "Where is God in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and now in the world-wide protests and riots?" I confess that I question, worry, and am afraid during these trying times. I wonder what the younger generations must think of a world that is now filled with what seems like a pandemic of hate. Hate takes many forms.

In December 2018, I attended the Lower Susquehanna Synod's annual Winterfest high school event. The Rev. Reginald Hansome was the guest speaker. Rev. Hansome is an ELCA pastor and a well-known prolific storyteller. His stories are real and a bit raw. He opened the weekend event with a story entitled "Hate." He starts this story as he does most ... he builds on the suspense of the unknown ending. Within minutes he has his audience held captive on every dramatically paused word. "When I was a chaplain at a local hospital," he began, "there was a trauma patient on a gurney being rushed to the closest E. R. cubical. I entered her room, in clerics, dressed in black. Upon hearing my voice, she reached up with all her strength and grabbed my hand. 'Pray for me,' she demanded. I clutched her hand and opened my mouth and with a soft voice I introduced myself. As soon as she heard my voice, she quickly opened her eyes. Her eyes were wide and fixed on mine. She immediately withdrew her hand from my gentle clasp and said with a loud voice, 'You're no priest, you're a you're a...' and she used the N word to describe a black man." The entire room fell silent. Then with a booming voice, Rev, Hansome crouched down on the stage and looked each of the audience members at eye level and concluded his story. "As I gained my composure," he began, "and as I reflected upon this very unsuspecting moment as a chaplain, having never been called such a name in all my years as a pastor, I realized something very profound, very tangible, very soul shattering ... hatred comes in many forms and sometimes you'll never know it until it reaches out and grabs you by the hand!"

Today I am reflecting on what I see on TV, social media, and even in my own city. I take a deep breath and remember that God created each of us in God's own image and that we, all descendants of Adam, are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14). I start to look for signs of God's love in the COVID-19 pandemic and in the riots. The virus, which has caused so much death, started from something no one can physically see. A deadly germ. It infiltrated every community and culture regardless of skin color, political or religious affiliation, and social status. But I have also bore witness to the other pandemic. The pandemic of love ... God's love ... the inescapable, unconditional, unending love of our creator. In human form, God walked the earth, lived among his own creation, and loved them all the way to the cross. God's redemptive love was and is for all humankind ... then, now, and in the age to come. God's promised Holy Spirit descended from heaven as a way and a means to not only communicate to the Father through the Son, but to lead, guide, comfort, and teach God's human creatures the very ways of God's love.

There are many masked warriors, heroes, and front liners who sacrifice health and life to attend to the sick and dying and even in providing the essentials necessary to the rest of us who need food, clothing, and shelter. I see white, black, yellow, and red embracing amid those burning cars and buildings. I don't just see people, I see God's children of every color, creed, belief, and social status embrace, kneel in prayer and in solidarity for equal justice.

Perhaps you have seen or heard the many quotes of Martin Luther King on social media regarding peace and justice for all of God's children. I have seen God's words written on banners and on billboards. However, God's love is in the hearts of his children, called to brave the hopelessness of hate every day and see past the actions of those propagating it. As people of God, we need to remind ourselves and our children daily that we are all God's "earth creatures." We are not a lowly life form creeping over the earth, but a mirrored image of the ever living and ever-loving God. We are to take care of one another by loving *all* people from *all* walks of life. Let actions of love drown out hate. Let our children and grandchildren witness God's love in action and not in word alone. Check in on one another. Refrain from judging others especially if you don't fully understand where that person has come from (their life experiences). Care for one another the way Christ cares for his church. Be a presence to those we don't understand or who share a difference of opinion, faith, or political affiliation. Start by praying in earnest. Move from prayer to action. It starts with one kind gesture to that stranger with whom we cross paths. Move from kindness to loving-kindness. Check in on the sick and dying. Comfort those who are hurting physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. *Walk* the Lord's Prayer each day. The pandemic of love is not meant to be invisible, but it is meant to be contagious.

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" -MLK