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*"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female,  
for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Galatians 3:28

The deeply troubling events of the past week south of the border have left us stunned and saddened. As a white woman of privilege, I struggle to know what to do, what to say, how to respond. How can I even begin to imagine what black people are feeling?

But I feel it is my personal responsibility to try and understand. And as someone in a position of leadership, it is also my duty to encourage others to do likewise.

And so over the past few days I intentionally dedicated some time to reading and listening to what black voices are saying regarding the current tragic situation in the U.S.

South African TV host Trevor Noah spoke candidly about African Americans' long history of oppression now being amplified by the COVID19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on the black population. While the stories may at first seem unrelated, he explains how the domino effect of people's ongoing struggles, increased poverty and unemployment, along with the future's many unknowns, are compounded by a lack of moral leadership. Noah further explains that while society is supposed to function as a contract of common rules by which all parties abide, the brutal murder of George Floyd by a white police officer acts as a flagrant display that this societal contract has been broken. When the accepted rules of behaviour no longer apply to those in authority, how can others be expected to fulfill their part of the contract? Hence, the eruption of rioting and looting, which Martin Luther King once described as *'the language of the unheard.'*

While not condoning such action or violence, ESPN football analyst Emmanuel Acho commented that people express their unspeakable pain and hurt through such behaviour. He has begun a series of online videos called "Uncomfortable Conversations with Black People" through which he is striving to increase understanding and compassion. In the first of the series, Acho compares white privilege to having *'a head start intrinsically built into your life.'* He uses the example of the white woman in Central Park calling the police complaining of a black man telling her to leash her dog, to show how white people unfairly use their whiteness as an intimidating weapon.

Black people, whose basic rights have been limited for so long, regularly experience such insidious forms of racism. Michael Blair, of the United Church General Council's 'Church in Mission' unit, wrote that George Floyd's dying words *"I can't breathe"* are a daily reality for many black folks who are metaphorically choked by the habitual racism they encounter. Blair challenges white people with these words: *"If you are serious about taking steps to name anti-black racism and racial violence (not just the physical!) then your starting point is a commitment to stay silent no more."*

Silence is compliance.

White people need to educate themselves by listening to black voices and hearing about black experiences in whatever format feels right. Maybe start by finding some online resources on You Tube or Facebook such as I've named above, or by watching movies like 'Selma' or 'Hidden Figures' or 'The Help' to better understand the lived reality of the black experience. Perhaps read a book about white privilege – there are a number of good ones out now including 'White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism' by Robin Diangelo.

Acknowledging white privilege is a difficult yet important first step in raising awareness. But one that is necessary if our broken society is ever to mend.

In his long ago letter to the Galatians, Paul reminds us that we share an underlying unity, as brothers and sisters in Christ. And yet our differences – including skin colour, race and religion are important elements of who we are and should not be denied or erased. They are also integral parts of our identity and contribute to our unique perspective on life experiences.

White people cannot solve or fix the enormous and ugly truth of racism, but what they can do, is listen with compassion, become realistically informed and then, have the courage to speak out against all forms of racial discrimination.

And perhaps most importantly, is in naming that intrinsic head start of white privilege.

And so this week I leave you with this question to ponder: What advantages have you had or not had in life, because of the colour of your skin?

**Be well, stay well,**

*Elise*

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*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.  
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*