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Timothy P. Nixon
Andrews University

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Justice and Mercy

BY TIMOTHY P. NIXON

On January 6, 1946, an unknown Protestant pastor stood before the representatives of the Confessing Church in Frankfurt, Germany. His words spoke to his community as they watched silently while others were mistreated. It was a simple speech with profound meaning, and it has become the challenging call for all people who witness injustice and remain idle.

He is credited with saying, “When they came for the communists, I remained silent; I was not a communist. When they locked up the social democrats, I remained silent; I was not a social democrat. When they came for the trade unionists, I did not speak out; I was not a trade unionist. When they came for the Jews, I remained silent; I was not a Jew. And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out.”

His name was Friedrich Gustav Martin Niemöller, and today we share his sentiments. In the Trayvon Martin tragedy, we cannot remain silent. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we see justice and equality as divine principles that God extends to all humanity. The Bible teaches us that the Sabbath, like no other command, reminds us that we are all God’s children, created in His image and likeness. God instituted the weekly celebration of the Sabbath, during creation, as a consistent and perpetual reminder of our common humanity and brotherhood as sons and daughters of God. And the Sabbath rest that God commands is extended to all humanity, regardless of their race, nationality, status, station or



Thalia Stewart

gender. Any attempt to deviate from this basic truth must be challenged by those who profess to be Christ’s followers.

It is this basic truth that compels us as Christians to stand against any institution or system that promotes the inequality or inferiority of anyone who is a part of the human family. It was this ethic of equality and brotherhood that compelled Jesus to cleanse the temple and announce to *all* that His house would be called a house of prayer for *all people*. And because Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, He has called His people as the repairers of the breach, to bind broken hearts and rebuild broken relationships.

When bias and discrimination are practiced, God’s people cannot remain silent. And so we gather today not to throw a brick, but to build a bridge — a bridge of hope, healing and harmony.

And we call on our nation, from all political and ideological persuasions, to follow their better angels and unite to stand together for the weak and the voiceless; for the innocent and the ostracized; for peace, reconciliation, unity and harmony. For we are joined together by a single thread

of mutuality. You cannot hurt without me feeling your pain. You cannot suffer without me sharing your distress. We are our brother's keeper.

And because every person is our brother and sister, we stand not only with Trayvon, but we also stand with George Zimmerman. For he is our brother as well. As Christians, we cannot choose whom we shall love. Jesus commands us to love our enemy. So, whatever you may feel about this incident, we must love George as well because he is our brother.

And while we call for justice, we also seek mercy, for no one lives this life free of fault or failure. No one stands with clean hands and pure hearts. No one is without sin; hence, no one can cast a stone. We all call for God's justice, but we all need God's mercy. And it is because of mercy that we live under God's grace. God's grace can bridge the distances that divide us, and heal the wounds that hurt us.

So, today, we add our voices to the chorus of voices that have been heard across this nation calling for justice. And with that justice, we add mercy — mercy that heals the victimized and forgives the perpetrator; mercy that tears down the walls of division that separate us; mercy that teaches us that love is more powerful than hate, because God is love. And that love is the greatest power in the world. It can heal a fractured nation and unite hostile people. God's love has the power to turn people from each other, toward each other.

We reject the superficial synopsis that determines a person's value based solely on their clothes or their color. For the Bible says, "Man looks on the outward appearance but God sees the heart" (see 1 Samuel 16:7). We reject those who attempt to dismiss injustice and those who, in the face of injustice, attempt to exploit it. We reject those who demean or devalue another human being and dismiss acts of incivility against them. We reject all those who attempt to turn our differences into divisions. And we stand with all citizens of good will who seek positive solutions to end unwarranted violence and unnecessary death.

This is our hope; this is our aim. And this is the movement that we represent, and stand ready to join all of those who seek justice and mercy.

Timothy P. Nixon is a chaplain at Andrews University and a member of the Pioneer Memorial Church pastoral staff. He shared these thoughts from the steps of the Pioneer Memorial Church at the conclusion of the justice and mercy prayer march on March 31.



Photos by Thelma Stewart