

“Why ‘Black Lives Matter’ Matters”
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Menifee United Church of Christ

I heard comedian Tracy Morgan on the radio the other day. You probably know that Tracy Morgan was on “Saturday Night Live” and “30 Rock” for many years. You might call comedian Tracy Morgan an edgy comic. Tracy Morgan said, “I was once stopped by a white police officer.” He said, “I know why you stopped me: because I’m black.” The police officer said, “No. I stopped you because you have cocaine all over your nose.” Tracy Morgan is able to find humor in just about any situation. But black people being stopped by police is not usually a laughing matter. Sometimes it ends with unarmed blacks being shot and killed by white police officers. That’s why the Black Lives Matter movement started. Not that black lives matter more than other lives. But because black lives are sometimes not considered much of anything to some people, including, unfortunately, to some white police officers. And it’s not that blacks are being shot and killed by white police officers more than they used to be. Unarmed blacks. It’s just that now there’s cell phone video that shows us what happens sometimes to unarmed blacks. That’s why the Black Lives Matter movement started.

Dr. King woke people up to the idea that black lives matter. In his famous speech in Washington, D.C. in 1963. Dr. King said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” Dr. King’s dream has not been a reality for us. Recently in Louisiana and in Minnesota, two black men were shot and killed by white police officers. In Cleveland, a twelve-year old boy armed with a toy gun, was shot and killed by a white police officer. And recently in Florida a black therapist trying to help an autistic patient was lying on the ground with his hands in the air, maybe you saw this video, and he was shot by a white police officer. Thankfully, that black therapist was not killed. He asked the white police officer, “Why did you shoot me?” The white police officer said, “I don’t know.” Later police said he was shot by mistake, that the white police officer was aiming at the autistic white patient and he missed. The only problem with that is why did the police then handcuff the black therapist? These kinds of incidents, I’m sure, would upset Dr. King. I’m sure they would upset Jesus.

Jesus has a lot to say about this. But before I get to that, I should also say that white police officers have been targeted, shot, and killed by blacks. In Dallas and in other cities. Reportedly in retaliation for unarmed blacks being shot by white police officers. In an attempt to get justice. But that’s wrong. It’s wrong for unarmed blacks to be shot by white police officers and it’s wrong for white police officers to be shot by blacks. It’s not justice. It’s revenge. But white police officers being shot by blacks does not justify unarmed blacks being shot by white police officers. It’s all wrong. It’s like Jesus says in the gospel of Luke, chapter 12, “From those to whom much is given, much will be required and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, much will be demanded.” We entrust police officers, including white police officers, to keep us safe. And we demand that, especially white, police officers, not shoot unarmed blacks. But we know it happens.

An unarmed black man was fleeing from a white police officer, this happened in South Carolina. The white police officer shot and killed the black man. Shot him several times in the back and killed him. Then the white police officer took his taser and planted it by the body of the dead black man. In his official report, the white police officer said that the black man stole his taser and that’s why he shot and killed him. Initially the white police officer was believed. But then the cell phone video surfaced. Now the white police officer is in jail awaiting trial. The question is, will the white police officer be brought to justice. Will the black man’s family receive justice in that case?

The prophet Isaiah tells us about justice. In the first chapter of Isaiah, the prophet writes that God does not care about our assemblies. God does not care about our prayers. God does not care if we wave our hands in the air like we just don’t care. God cares about how we live our lives. Isaiah writes that we are to do good and avoid evil, seek justice. So if a prosecutor is presented with a case where an unarmed black person was shot and killed by a white police officer, will that prosecutor seek justice because black lives matter? If a jury is presented with evidence in a case where an unarmed black person is shot and killed by a white police officer, will that jury decide in favor of justice because black lives matter? Will a judge who is presiding over a case where an unarmed black person was shot and killed by a white police officer, will that judge judge fairly, seeking justice because black lives matter?

There’s a story of a black guy with a gun and a white guy with a gun. I saw this online. I believe it was an experiment. A white guy is walking down the street with an assault weapon over his shoulder. He is approached by a white police officer. The police officer says to the guy, “Why are you carrying an assault weapon?” The white guy says, “This is an open carry state and I have every right to carry an assault weapon.” Apparently that was the end of it. The white guy with the assault weapon was able to go on his merry way. Cut to a black guy walking down the street with an assault weapon draped over his shoulder. A cop car pulls up. A white police officer gets out of the car, stands behind his car door, points his gun at the black guy, and says, “Get on the ground!” The black guy gets on the ground. The white

police officer says, "Why are you carrying an assault weapon?" The black guy says, "Because this is an open carry state and I have every right to carry an assault weapon." The white police officer continues to point his weapon at the black man. Up come three more cop cars. More police officers get out of the cars with their weapons drawn until finally a white police officer comes up and confiscates the assault weapon from the black man. Do you get the idea that maybe racism exists in America? That some white police officers have racist attitudes? And that's why there is a need for a Black Lives Matter movement?

The Bible repeatedly says that God loves all people. God loves black people. In Genesis chapter one, we read that God created humankind in God's image. In the image of God God created them. And God blessed them. So black lives matter because God created black lives. Because black lives are made in the image of God and because God blessed black lives. In I John, chapter 4, we read, "We love because God first loved us." So black lives matter because God first loved black lives. In the gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, Jesus says "Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet God cares for them. How much more does God care for you?" So black lives matter because God cares for the birds of the air and God cares for black lives.

There are some things I would never do. I would never swim in shark-infested waters off the coast of California. I would never swim in alligator-infested ponds in Florida. And I would never argue with a police officer who pulls me over. "Get out of the car!" "Yes, sir. Would you like my keys so you can take my car for a spin?" Now that never happened. But one time I was pulled over by a white police officer and as I handed him my license and registration, I said, "Sorry." He said, "For what?" I said, "For whatever you pulled me over for." I did not get a ticket. Probably in no small part because I'm a white guy. But what if I was black? And what if I was pulled over by a white police officer every week for a year? I've heard this happens. Might I have a little problem with that? Might I ask, as the white police officer approaches my car, "Why did you pull me over?" When the white police officer says, "Get out of the car," might I ask, "Why do you want me to get out of the car?" Now I'm not saying anybody should do that, but I'm saying I understand why somebody might, who is African American. It's an indication of why, I think, black lives matter is important. Because unarmed blacks are sometimes shot and killed by white police officers. When that happens, we are living in bad times.

King David says God helps us through the bad times. In Psalm 50, King David writes that whenever we are in times of trouble, God will deliver us. It seems to me that we are in times of trouble, especially when it comes to unarmed blacks being shot and killed by white police officers. As I understand it, last year more than 100 unarmed blacks were shot and killed by police. About two a week. If ever there was a time for us to be delivered, now is the time. Now is the time for God to deliver us. To deliver us from evil. But now is also the time for us to ask a question. And it's a pretty big question.

Why does God allow evil to happen? More specifically, why does God allow unarmed blacks to be shot and killed by white police officers? Why doesn't God stop them? Why doesn't God prevent it? I think I'm supposed to say, "Well, that's above my pay grade to answer that." Or I'm supposed to say, "I'm in sales, not in management." Rabbi Harold Kushner, in his book "When Bad Things Happen to Good People," concludes that maybe God isn't all powerful. Maybe God can't stop bad things from happening. I prefer the conclusion that William Sloane Coffin comes to. When William Sloane Coffin's son Alex died when his car went into Boston Harbor and he drowned, a woman came up to William Sloane Coffin and said, "I'll never understand the mind of God." William Sloane Coffin says that he was up and at her before he even knew it. He said to her, "You're right. You never will understand the mind of God, because God does not have his fist around knives, God does not have his finger on triggers, and God does not have his hands on steering wheels." William Sloane Coffin said that when Alex's car went under the water, God's was the first of all of our hearts to break. I believe that's true. And I believe that when unarmed blacks are shot and killed by white police officers, God's is the first of all of our hearts to break. Because God believes, and I hope all of us believe, that black lives matter.

Let us pray...
God of love,
*Help us to remember that you created black lives in your image.
Help us to remember that black lives are your children.
And help us to remember that black lives matter.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes,
and was transcribed from a tape recording.)*