



August 25, 2020

Helping to Create the Beloved Community

By Keith June

One of my favorites hymns is “Amazing Grace” which includes the phrase, “I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.” The Bible frequently uses light and sight as a metaphor for believing and understanding.

One of the most inspiring metaphors where someone’s eyes are opened is Saul on the road to Damascus. This persecutor of Christians is struck down by a blinding light from God, but his eyes are opened. Jesus sends Ananias to restore Saul’s sight and fill him with the Holy Spirit. The scales fall from Saul’s eyes restoring his vision. He has a profound conversion to the Christian faith and changes his name to Paul.

Over the past few months, our nation and indeed our world have been profoundly transformed by witnessing the brutal killing of George Floyd. His

death opened the eyes of so many to the evil, injustice, and persistence of racism. Regretfully, we know his killing is not an isolated incident.

Already, through protests and unrest, the killing of George Floyd has jump-started a transformation in our society.

In part because of these events, Immanuel made a deliberate decision to ensure we focus our ministry to address racism and other social justice issues. Along with so many others, I will continue expanding our church's efforts to confront racism and promote social justice.

Why should Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill be concerned with this? Our Baptismal Covenant in the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 304-5) asks:

“Will you strive for justice, and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

Each time we read these words, we can reflect on our life, on our day, and how we have treated each person. Have we respected the dignity of each person and worked for justice and peace?

A key part of this journey is truth and being able to understand the sin of racism. As Christians and members of the body of Christ, we have a fundamental role to confront racism and other social justice issues.

As a retired Soldier and a believer in the great promise and dream of America, I am especially called to live the words and ideas of our founding documents -- that all men are created equal. I am inspired by the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who spoke of a dream deeply rooted in an American Dream and of a world where we are judged not on the color of our skin but by the “content of our character.”

As someone born in a segregated hospital in Monks Corner, South Carolina, and a middle-aged African American, I came into a world very much defined by race and racism. I have witnessed racism on many levels – personal and professional. This is not a badge of honor, but I hope, pray, and work for a better nation and a better world.

One of my many heroes is Jonathan Daniels. This remarkable young, white man from New Hampshire is someone everyone should know. The

Episcopal Church celebrates his life and martyrdom each year on August 14. He was valedictorian of his class at Virginia Military Institute, a brilliant student, and seminarian at the Episcopal Divinity School.

My dear friend and mentor, fellow parishioner at Immanuel, the Rev. John Smith, knew Jonathan Daniels and worked with him in New Hampshire at a regional youth conference. The Rev. John Smith described his colleague with admiration by saying, "I met a holy man of God who was clearly convicted of his faith."

In 1965, following the "Bloody Sunday" events in Selma, Alabama, Dr. King called on clergy and others to join the movement in Selma. Jonathan Daniels answered this call and worked to integrate Selma and provide voting rights for citizens in Selma.

Along with other civil rights activists, Jonathan Daniels was jailed for protesting discrimination. After being released from jail, he and Richard Morrisroe, a Catholic priest, along with two black teenagers who were civil rights activists, Ruby Sales and Joyce Bailey, went to buy a cold drink on a hot day.

Tom Coleman, a construction worker, and part-time deputy sheriff armed with a 12-gauge shotgun met them on the store steps and pointed his shotgun at sixteen-year-old Ruby Sales. Jonathan pushed Ruby to the ground, saving her life. But the rounds struck him, killing him instantly.

The deputy sheriff claimed he fired in self-defense and was acquitted by an all-white jury.

Jonathan Daniels did not have to go to Selma. His inspiration for us is that he lived the words of our Baptismal Covenant through his work and his commitment to create the beloved community.

"Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?" And we answer, "I will with God's help."

I pray the scales will be removed from our eyes, so we can bring transforming light and sight to the enduring sin of racism and its impact on our nation and our world.