
Letters to A Young Episcopalian: Heartbreaking

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

[Last week's letter](#)

[Back to all letters](#)

Dear Anna,

I thought your blog post was beautifully written and a poignant reminder that the fight against inequality in this country is far from over.

Watching the protests that spread across the nation last week in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis filled me with more emotions than I have words to describe. I appreciate that the protests are not just about Mr. Floyd. In a tragic way, his death stands as a symbol of the systemic racism and mistreatment that has characterized the black experience in this country for more than four hundred years.

It breaks my heart.

I want it to break our collective heart too. I want our reaction to what is happening to people of color in this country to break our collective heart open. I want us to feel all of the suffering that we can imagine and know that they feel more. I want us to feel tired in this moment and know that they have lived their lives like this.

And, I want us to cry. I want our tears to remind us of how vulnerable we are and the need to keep on loving anyway. Only then do I think we can find the compassion and grace to do what needs to be done.

I realize that this might not sound like enough. It doesn't seem to hold the promise of a list of things to do, or laws to pass, or reparations to be paid. It might even feel like a subtle strategy to get on with things without having to make any changes.

I'm convinced, though, that it's the most important thing.

Sometimes you can't move forward until you go back and get what you left behind.

We left behind our commitment to honor the dignity of people of color.

I remember someone telling me once that the most important ethical decisions we make are the ones we take for granted. I think that's not a bad test for a heart broken open. I look forward to the day when we take the dignity of people of color for granted.

So, yes, let's do the things we need to do and pass the laws we need to pass. (I'm going to leave the question of reparations for another day.) But, let's also take up the habits of the heart that we will need to learn how to recognize the dignity of all people.

As they say, we'll know all lives matter when black lives matter.

Your affectionate uncle,

Ames

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