

DEMONSTRATIONS, VIGILS AND OUR OWN DUTY

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by

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Tragic events which cannot be ignored compel me to turn from the topic which was to have been our subject for tonight. There are times when even what we regard as our most serious concerns fade in contrast to problems which really pierce to the core of human dignity and freedom.

Last week, as we all know to our shame and sorrow, a young clergyman, James J. Reeb, died from a skull fracture inflicted by the brutality of white men in Selma, Alabama. All over our nation there was horror among sensitive people who had their troubles adjusting to the fact that such could happen in these United States. There were prayer services, demonstrations, vigils and the like. James Reeb was mourned. I submit to you that to mourn is not enough.

Another event fits into the death of James Reeb as the only right piece fits into the missing space in a jigsaw puzzle. Exactly one year ago to the day that James Reeb died, Kitty Genovese died the victim of a brutal murder in Kew Gardens, New York. You must recall that her death could have been prevented because 38 persons witnessed the murder, heard her screams and did nothing. Kitty Genovese was mourned. But I submit to you that to mourn is not enough.

In a recent evaluation of the effect of the death of Kitty Genovese, the police department of New York is quoted as saying in effect this: "Most people shun involvement out of fear or apathy. They still do not notify the authorities when they have witnessed a crime. Nor do they help a victim, nor are they willing to give evidence of what they have seen."

How much crime and violence and suffering and death in injustice and defamation of the human soul have been visited upon some only because others shun involvement out of fear and apathy! How much pain has been endured because there are those who will not help a victim nor are willing to give evidence of what they have seen!

This is not just a matter of lament over a Kitty Genovese or a James Reeb. There were others. We think of well known names like Medgar Evers and John F. Kennedy whose brains were blown out by fanatic twisted and warped minds. And there are the hundreds of others like the little school children whose names we've forgotten who were blown apart by a bomb in a church just for being black instead of white.

The other day among the marchers in Selma there was a tiny nun. She tucked her eyeglasses into the sleeve of her habit because she said she had been told that the police wouldn't mind breaking them. Then as the group approached the line of troopers and police lined up to stop the march an Episcopal minister on one side of the nun and a priest on the other lifted the little lady by her elbows so she could see the armed men who faced them. And the nun said: "I've always believed in original sin and the reality of it, but I've never seen it before, until now."

I am the last to quarrel with that lady's theology. But we must ask whether this is really "original sin" or our sin.

There are some in our community who are proud of the fact that there has been none of what is euphemistically called "trouble" in our community. We are a well related community, so they say.

I want to say that I am deeply troubled that the injustices of race relations are

March 10, 1963

Harold Sidney H. Brooks

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During events which cannot be ignored compel me to turn from the topic which we have been our subject for tonight. There are times when even what we regard as our most serious concerns find in contrast to problems which really press to the core of human dignity and freedom.

Last week as we all know to our shame and sorrow, a young clerkman, James J. Reed, died from a skull fracture inflicted by the brutality of white men in Selma, Alabama. All over our nation there was horror among sensitive people who had their troubles relating to the fact that such could happen in these United States. There were many services, demonstrations, vigils and the like. James Reed was forgotten. I submit to you that he was not forgotten.

Another event fits into the death of James Reed as the only right piece into the missing space in a jigsaw puzzle. Exactly one year ago to the day that James Reed died, Kitty Genovese died the victim of a brutal murder in New York City. You must recall that her death could have been prevented because 38 persons witnessed the murder, heard her screams and did nothing. Kitty Genovese was murdered. Not I submit to you that he would be forgotten.

In a recent evaluation of the effect of the death of Kitty Genovese, the police department of New York is quoted as saying in effect later: "Most people shun involvement out of fear or apathy. They still do not notify the authorities when they have witnessed a crime. Nor do they help a victim, nor are they willing to give evidence of what they have seen."

How much crime and violence and suffering and death in injustice and dehumanization of the human soul have been visited upon some only because others shun involvement out of fear and apathy! How much pain has been endured because there are those who will not help a victim nor are willing to give evidence of what they have seen!

This is not just a matter of lament over a Kitty Genovese or a James Reed. There were others. We think of well known names like Medgar Evers and John F. Kennedy. Names which were blown out by fanatic twisted and warped minds. And there are the hundreds of others like the little school children whose names were forgotten and were blown apart by a bomb as a punishment for being black instead of white.

The other day among the reporters in Selma there was a tiny man. The linked eyes gazed into the slave of our heart because she said she had been told that the police wouldn't mind breaking them. Then as the group approached the line of troopers and police lined up to stop the march an Episcopal minister on one side of the man and a priest on the other. The little lady by her elbow as she would see the small man who faced them. And the nun said: "I've always followed in original sin and the result of it, but I've never seen it before, until now."

I am the last to quarrel with that lady's theology. But we must ask whether this is really theological and spiritual.

There are some in our community who are proud of the fact that there has been some of what is unfortunately called "teaching" in our community. We are a well trained community, so they say.

I want to say that I am deeply troubled that the influence of such education and

so carefully and effectively controlled and concealed in our community. I commend all those who have demonstrated in behalf of race relations here and elsewhere. But the time has come for a new kind of demonstration and new kind of protest and a new kind of vigil.

I'd like to see a private demonstration in every home and school and office and factory and business. How much blood will be spilled and how many brains will be dashed out of the skulls of decent men and women before we realize that these things have their beginnings in the slick pretenses and polite evasions of men and women just like us? Yes, us. Every one of us is a neighbor or an employer, a voter, a business man or a realtor, a seller or a buyer. Every one of us has some kind of relationship with our fellow citizen. And it is on that front that the demonstration ought to be shown. We are all elders and teachers and parents. And our children will reflect what we teach of the equality of man. Enough pretence. It is not enough to mourn the dead nor to parade the sidewalks. NOR to preach. Now is the time to live the demonstration.

Let's get off the streets and into OUR homes. Let's get away from the lament and the clucking of tongues over what's happening in Alabama and pay attention to what we are doing here and now. Because we are NOT different than others. We are not exempt from our part in maintaining the status quo. And all the rationalizations in the world will not justify us.

One of the most devastating indictments of the depths to which men can sink was reported in the press which covered the initial march in Selma, at which time Rev. Reeb was struck. When the troupers moved forward to club and beat the marchers, young people and old standing along the sidelines cheered as the marchers fled in terror and in pain.

I wonder: did not the Nazis likewise cheer when the Gestapo humiliated our Jewish brethren in the streets of Germany? I wonder: have there not always been those on the sidelines who cheer when the power of tyrants beats upon the heads of the innocent and the afflicted?

What was it the police in New York said: "Most people still do not help a victim nor are they willing to give evidence of what they have seen."

The police were talking about legal evidence. I speak of spiritual evidence. We've seen what can happen. Isn't it time to give evidence to what we have seen by setting our own house in order.

Hold, then, your own demonstration for righteousness, for justice and truth. Take some time for a vigil of your own that will turn the temper of your mind and spirit and make you one with our fellowmen.

Weep for Rev. Reeb and weep for the slain children and weep for all who are victims of our indifference. And when you are through with weeping, try thinking and testing your own behavior and try joining the human race.

We'd better all do that. For surely justice will triumph and truth will be made to rule. It's not original sin. It's our sin that impedes the day of righteousness.

In the book of II Kings an historian is writing of a period in the history of Israel that was plagued by callousness and an immorality. Such history is, of course, written from the point of view that God moves through human events and that moral standards cannot be ignored without suffering destruction. In the time of this writer, Judah was indeed destroyed. And this is how the episode is recounted by the author. "Surely this (destruction) came upon Judah at the command of the Lord,

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all those who have demonstrated in behalf of race relations have and otherwise.
But the time has come for a new kind of demonstration and the kind of protest and
new kind of action.

It is time to see a private demonstration in every home and school and office and
factory and business. How much blood will be spilled and how many brains will be
washed out of the skulls of decent men and women before we realize that these things
have their beginnings in the sick pretenses and polite evasions of men and women
just like me, yes, us. Every one of us is a neighbor or an employer, a voter,
a business man or a teacher, a neighbor or a buyer. Every one of us has some kind of
relationship with our fellow citizens. And it is on that basis that the demonstra-
tion ought to be shown. We are all elders and teachers and parents. And our con-
science will reflect what we teach of the equality of man. Through pretenses, it is not
enough to mount the head not to parade the sidewalks. Now to practice. Now to
time to have the demonstration.

Let's get off the streets and into OUR homes. Let's get away from the lament and
the mourning of tonight over what's happening in Alabama and pay attention to what
we are doing here and now. Because we are NOT different from others. We are not
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One of the most devastating indictments of the depths to which man can sink was re-
ported in the press which covered the initial march in Selma, at which time Rev.
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The police were talking about legal evidence. I speak of spiritual evidence. We've
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ing our own consciences in order.

Hold, then, your own demonstration for righteousness, for justice and truth. Take
some time for a vigil of your own that will turn the temper of your mind and spirit
and make you one with our fellowmen.

Weep for Rev. Reeb and weep for the slain children and weep for all who are victims
of our indifference. And when you are through with weeping, try thinking and test-
ing your own behavior and try joining the march here.

We'd better all do that. For surely justice will triumph and truth will be made to
rule. It's not originalism. It's our sin that makes the way of righteousness.

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that was plagued by calumnies and anarchy. Such history is of course
written from the point of view that God moves through human events and that moral
standards cannot be ignored without suffering destruction. In the time of this
writer, Israel was indeed destroyed. And this is how the episode is recounted by
the author. "Surely this (the destruction) came upon them at the command of the Lord,

to remove them out of his sight for the sins of Menassah, according to all that he had done and also for the innocent blood he had shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord would not pardon."

It has ever been thus. Our destruction or our salvation lies within the context of our own moral behavior. It is time to act.

As President Johnson put it: "The time for waiting is gone"

Amen

to remove them out of his sight for the time of his death, according to all that he
had done and also for the innocent blood he had shed, for he killed Jehonathan with
innocent blood, and this blood would not pardon."

It has ever been thus. Our destruction or our salvation lies within the contents of
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as Jehonathan's blood was the "time for waiting is gone"

Amos