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The Kin-dom Comes

"My help comes from God, the maker of heaven and earth." Psalm 121:2

Back in April, Bradley sent me an article from *The New York Times* reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the United States of America.¹ Even though it was written two months ago, the article perfectly describes how the virus has shone a spotlight on the tragic inequalities of opportunity in American life. These are the same inequalities and injustices which are currently the subject of the peaceful protests in the *Black Lives Matter* movement.

For those of us wondering how people got so angry so quickly, and why protests became riots, I find the reflections of The Editorial Board almost clairvoyant as they lay out how we got to this point. The murder of George Floyd was a spark which landed in dry tinder.

The present crisis has revealed the United States as a nation in which professional basketball players could be rapidly tested for the coronavirus but health care workers were turned away; in which the affluent could retreat to the safety of second homes, relying on workers who can't take paid sick leave to deliver food; in which children in lower-income households struggle to connect to the digital classrooms where their school lessons are now supposed to be delivered.

It is a nation in which local officials issuing stay-at-home orders must reckon with the cruel irony that hundreds of thousands of Americans do not have homes. Lacking private places, they must sleep in public spaces. Las Vegas painted rectangles on an asphalt parking lot to remind homeless residents to sleep six feet apart — an act that might as well have been a grim piece of performance art titled "The Least We Can Do."

The magnitude of a crisis is determined not just by the impact of the precipitating events but also by the fragility of the system it attacks. Our society was especially vulnerable to this pandemic because so many Americans lack the essential liberty to protect their own lives and the lives of their families. This nation was ailing long before the coronavirus reached its shores.

...For those at the bottom, moreover, the chances of rising are in decline. By the time they reached 30, more than 90 percent of Americans born in 1940 were earning more than their parents had earned at the same age. But among those born in 1980, only half were earning more than their parents by the age of 30.

...The inequalities of wealth have become inequalities of health. A middle-aged American in the top fifth of the income distribution can expect to live about 13 years longer than a person of the same age in the bottom fifth — an advantage that has more than doubled since 1980.

¹ "The America We Need", by The Editorial Board, April 9, 2020

...Advocates of a minimalist conception of government claim they too are defenders of liberty. But theirs is a narrow and negative definition of freedom: the freedom from civic duty, from mutual obligation, from taxation. This impoverished view of freedom has in practice protected wealth and privilege. It has perpetuated the nation's defining racial inequalities and kept the poor trapped in poverty, and their children, and their children's children.

The results are clear enough: Executive pay has skyrocketed, and shareholders have enjoyed rising stock prices, at least until recently, while most workers are falling behind. If individual income had kept pace with overall economic growth since 1970, Americans in the bottom 90 percent of the income distribution would be making an extra \$12,000 per year, on average. In effect, the extreme increase in inequality means every worker in the bottom 90 percent of the income distribution is sending an annual check for \$12,000 to a worker in the top 10 percent.

...There is also a need for new ideas, and the revival of older ideas, about what the government owes the nation's citizens, what corporations owe employees and what we owe one another. This moment demands a restoration of the national commitment to a richer conception of freedom: economic security and equality of opportunity.

Freedom, security and opportunity. The Editorial Board might have used our Christian words: Grace, Mercy and Peace. No matter what language is used, it is clear that we are talking about God's Shalom, the kin-dom where all belong, the banqueting table that Jesus talked about, laden with food for the poor and the lame.

People of faith have always carried this vision. Now it is being demanded in the streets. It's about time!

Grace to you, and peace.

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*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*