

DEAD HOPE RESURRECTED TO
A LIVING REALITY:
REFLECTIONS ON THE DEREK
CHAUVIN VERDICT

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Lamentations 4:17 (The Message) describes the Black experience of waiting for sleeping justice to wipe sleep from her eyes. "We watched and watched, wore our eyes out looking for help. And nothing. We mounted our lookouts and looked for the help that never showed up." It never showed up for many others, specifically Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, but on April 20, 2021 dead hope was resurrected to a living reality with the verdict of Chauvin being guilty on all three counts. The Message Bible reminded us in the faith community that "God's loyal love couldn't have run out, his/her merciful love couldn't have dried up. They are created new every morning".

The saying, "God moves in mysterious ways" ceases to be trite and threadbare when we reflect on the teenager who filmed George Floyd's death. Without her deep sense of right and wrong and her quick thinking of recording the video and sharing it on social media justice would not have been served. Prior to this event she was just an unknown, unrecognized 17-year-old wearing flip flop sandals and blue pants who lived a quiet but ethical life. The police version of Brother Floyd's death was "man dies after medical incident during police interaction" and did not mention officer Chauvin's knee on Mr. Floyd's neck for nine minutes. But people around the world saw the video and heard the voice of the helpless Floyd saying, "I can't breathe."

Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us that "everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace and a heart generated by love."

Some years ago, as an activist pastor for justice, I served with others to persuade the mayor of Oakland to hire within the department Captain Joseph Samuels as the first Black Chief of Police. He was very well educated and progressive in his thinking. He was an active deacon in the Allen Temple Baptist Church and was loved in the city by all racial groups.

Captain Samuels wanted to do community policing among other forward moving steps. He was blocked in making these changes by The Police Officers Union, conservative politicians, and a new power-hungry mayor. Chief Samuels left and ascended up the ranks in law enforcement where he now serves as an official in The Department of Homeland Security. The police culture across this nation resists change and is supported by strong politicians who preach law and order minus justice.

Unfortunately, some white supremacy groups have infiltrated police departments and the military of our nation. In 2020 the Southern Poverty Law Center tracked 838 hate groups, which was a decrease over the previous year of 11 percent. Yet, the January 6 attack on the US Capitol is evidence that divisive rhetoric and hate still remain.

Thanks be to God for seminaries and schools like Berkeley School of Theology that equip emerging leaders and pastors with the skills for replacing groundless conspiracy theories with reconciling action to heal fractured communities that delay the coming of the beloved community.

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