

God's Countermoves

Rev. Dr. Dietra Wise Baker, NBA Organizing Specialist and Clergy, St. Louis Racial Justice Group, Mid-America Region
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Genesis 50:20

"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as God is doing today."



Joseph's powerful words sting for a people whose neighborhoods were and are engineered for poverty, whose backs were broken in slavery, and who are served by systems that are fully infected with racism.

Joseph: sold into slavery by his brothers, rising to be the chief slave, then betrayed by his owner and thrown into prison for years, then rising to be second-in-command in Egypt. Like Joseph, all the injustice brown and black people have experienced over human history is almost too much to bear—except that when evil happens, there is a faint promise in scripture that somehow God can creatively use evil to make a countermove.

The last few weeks in St. Louis have been disorienting and disturbing. In the wake of the Stockley verdict, protestors took to the streets, and Disciples clergy and laity joined them. Our presence on the streets reignited the conversation local St. Louis Disciples clergy have kept alive since Ferguson: what about Disciples public witness in social justice crises, and our sustained presence in the dismantling of systemic and structural racism in our church and country?

Many of us go into the streets afraid—not of the protests, but of arrest, tear gas and pepper spray, metro buses full of police in riot gear willing to risk our safety, willing to risk our bodies, black and white. We've been standing together, Disciples in St. Louis, as one.

This week, we were encouraged to be fed communion from the hands of our General Minister and President, Minister of Reconciliation, and regional partners, for we have been hungry to be fed and affirmed by the church. Through them, you were with us at the table where all are welcomed.

During our gathering, we were comforted with words from white allies willing to suspend their white privilege and risk their safety to be with us in the streets. It was encouraging to see Disciples come from Nashville and Minneapolis because they see another movement birthing here in St. Louis. It was stirring to see clergy and laity, black and white, young and old, gay and straight, general church and local church, NBA and Reconciliation, all come together to say, this time, the Disciples will strengthen and deepen our collective impact in the movement for racial justice.

I'm not sure God planned for the evil that would befall Joseph. However, God did not walk away and leave Joseph alone, nor does God leave us alone. Instead, God is flexible, adjusting God's plans and muddling painfully but faithfully with Joseph until he is fully restored and reconciled.

This week in St. Louis, we felt a bit of God's heart for us. We are hoping the church will continue to hear our cries, in every congregation, in every region, and in every ministry, that the church would not turn away from us in this difficult time, but instead join God in this historical countermove and muddle through with us until we are restored and reconciled.

As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 in St. Louis by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at www.nbacares.org.