On racial justice: Voting with a heavy heart

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My heart is heavy...so very heavy.

People who look like me continue to be killed.

Before the world saw a man with a white body murder a man with a handcuffed black body by kneeling on his neck in public, in broad daylight, how many times had the claims of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color been assumed as too outrageous to be believed?

When will this seemingly neverending list of victims killed because of systems rooted in the 500 year-old lie that whiteness is superior end? When will my life be more important than white fragility?

As horrific as recent tragedies have been, they are not new. I was startled that these traumas caused the resurfacing in my body of the same tension and hope I experienced as a child during the Civil Rights Movement. Even then, my body was aware of this lived reality long before I had the vocabulary or understanding to speak of it. The tension is from the grave personal risk when long held and unjust privileges are revealed. The hope streams from an unshakeable belief in, and knowing of, a loving and merciful God.

My lived experience as an African-American teaches me that neither myself nor my family is immune to this violence. Regardless of the legal term applied or, in the case of Breonna Taylor, not applied, those whose ancestors survived the Middle Passage are grieving as their loved ones are killed. As they learn to bear this ineffable burden, they also struggle with the fact that, most often, no one is held accountable and society is indifferent to the fact that we too are created in the image and likeness of God.

For 400 years, dominant society in this nation has declared God to be a liar and we are the component of creation that is not good. In fact, God's word was grossly disfigured, or whitewashed, to support the economic, civic, and social disenfranchisement of those considered less than human solely for the economic gain of various European crowns and colonists.

 You see our systems are corrupted by the biases of the Founding Fathers and others who sacrificed their dignity by using the flawed construct of race for their personal gain through the stolen labor – the stolen lives – of kidnapped Africans. This corruption is the weakest link in all of our systems including education, employment, financial, healthcare, legal, and, yes, even our faith communities. Did we not hear Pope Francis speak to us of Day, King, Lincoln and Merton – four of our own who worked for justice?

A native of Alabama, I remember when apartheid was openly and faithfully implemented by those who self-identified as God-fearing Christians. Regardless of our regional stereotypes, I also learned as a child that racism was not confined to the south when I was called the n-word for the first time while sitting on my aunt's porch in Ohio. Unlike chattel slavery, Jim Crow laws reigned from sea to shining sea as does their legacy.

Moreso, my body carries the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, an intergenerational trauma that lives in this body that was taught as a child to say, "I'm Black and I'm proud." When I say today's mantra, "Black Lives Matter," I am affirming and reclaiming my dignity. I am daring to defy the nation's founding principle of human lives for economic gain. I acknowledge that my mere existence is a blessing of the God of Creation, the God of Life, the God of Love. With this in mind, and with a heavy heart, I will vote.

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