

At the outset, I must acknowledge my own inadvertent racism and my complicity (if inadvertent) in the systemic racism around me. I am constantly aware that I function in the space of white privilege whether or not I “know” it or own it. Please know also that my narrative and my art come from my soul as well as from the experiences of life that shaped me. Whatever I have seen and heard and felt, whatever I have experienced over many years of life, somehow catapulted me into a life-long journey of justice advocacy.

My quest at times led me to fight for justice for women, for victims of abuse, for prisoners, for black and brown persons, for immigrants, for the poor, for LGBTQ+ persons. For whatever reason, My upbringing created in me a person who abhors injustice and who passionately advocates for justice. I don't apologize for that, but I do continually seek God's guidance in the ways I act for justice.

One of my advocacy commitments is to use my voice, my writing and my art. In a vigil following George Floyd's death hosted by the Alliance of Baptists, I made a commitment to create the *Transforming Injustice!* Series of watercolor paintings. This narrative grew out of that commitment.

About the Transforming Injustice! Watercolor Series

Transforming Injustice! is a watercolor art series that began as a response to the murder of George Floyd and the resulting protests in cities across the nation. The art will not end there, for the anger, pain and grief of thousands of protesters may have been sparked by the image of George Floyd being asphyxiated by the knee of a law enforcement officer, but that spark is only small ember compared to the fires of racial injustice that have burned throughout our history. The art series will begin with the death of George Floyd, but each watercolor that follows will seek to evoke emotions around the racial injustice and systemic racism that has been the fabric of life for centuries.

We cannot simply protest against racial injustice, or pray for its end, or demand that our systems change. The evil depth of the racial injustice in our world must be transformed, both within each individual heart and within the systems that have continually perpetuated racial division and hate. May our God, and the Gods worshipped by all people, inspire us to discover the ways through which each of us might begin the transformation.

The Inspiration Behind the Transforming Injustice! Series

My cousin Nick, who has forever been a modern mystic and a deep thinker, recently sent me the following words. He pondered, as he often does, and found this buried deep in his spirit.

What I Was Thinking This Morning _____ *nick talantis*

*Over 100,000 dead. And there's one more.
Not the corona.
A copper's knee.*

*I can't breathe.
It's happened too many times to count.*

*I can't breathe.
It happens in the east.*

*I can't breathe.
It happens in the west.*

*I can't breathe.
It happens in the south.*

*I can't breathe.
It happens in the north.*

*I can't breathe.
The white man is keeping the black man down.*

*I can't breathe.
A badge of pride gone to shame.*

*I can't breathe.
Where is the hope we can overcome?*

*I can't breathe.
Hope is lost in the fire of anger.*

*I can't breathe.
How does sanity prevail?*

*I can't breathe.
Eye for eye—no—it's not the way.*

I can't breathe.

*When the fire dies down.
Take a breath.*

*When you are face to face.
Take a breath.
When you sit together.
Take a breath.*

Remember Martin's way. Remember, when we sit in peace, breathing.

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness;
only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate;
only love can do that.
Martin said that.*

*A riot is the language of the unheard.
Martin said that.*

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
Martin said that.*

And I believe him.

I say we have to get back to non-violence.

We have to kneel, in the face of adversity.

We have to have equality.

Equality for every man, every woman, every race, every one.

We are all the same.

We all have the right to breathe.

— Nick Talantis

Amen, cousin! May the very breath of the Spirit make it so through us.

Again, my family rose up in defiance of injustice. I received these words from my brother, Andrew.

How about we dispense with the “law and order” approach—which we’ve tried over and over—and try a little “liberty and justice for all”—especially for African Americans, who have endured four centuries of White Supremacy.

All of this, by the way, is again happening in what White Evangelicals call “Christian America.” But anyone who thinks we are a Christian nation simply hasn’t taken a long, hard look at our history and the legacy of the slave ship, the auction block, the overseer’s whip, and the lynching tree. In the late nineteenth century, African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Reverdy Ransom wrote that, despite being faithful Christians and loyal Americans, blacks had never gotten much justice out of Christian America. Not even Jesus had been able to break the color line. Then he said: “If Jesus wept over Jerusalem, he must have wept for America an ocean of tears.”

OK, White America, isn’t it high time we actually do something about the problem we created. We built the structures of White Supremacy; it’s time we worked to dismantle those structures. And since the edifice of White Supremacy was built with the blessing of white Christian churches, it is only right that white Christians get out there en masse and say, “Open Season on African Americans is hereby closed forever.” Civil rights activist Ella Baker’s famous slogan is just as powerful and true as they were in the 1960s: “Those who believe in freedom can never rest until the death of a black mother’s son is as important as the death of a white mother’s son.”

— Dr. Andrew Manis

Finally, my friend and kidney donor, Greg Adams offers this insightful perspective on the murder of George Floyd:

Many of us have wondered what is different about this moment in our long history of racial injustice. The death of George Floyd is another terrible example of a death of an unarmed African-American brought about by those responsible for protecting all of us from violence. It is tragically not unique—we have heard and seen too many other terrible examples. So why has this death led to nationwide, and even worldwide, protests?

I would offer this perspective to the mix as one of the many factors making this time different: George Floyd's death happened in slow-motion with witnesses and videotaping. He begged for his life, and public witnesses begged for his life. Meanwhile, the officer with the knee on Mr. Floyd's neck acted with impunity and no concern for Mr. Floyd or the fact that his actions were being witnessed and recorded. He believed he could do as he pleased and showed no concern for the consequences. He acted as if Mr. Floyd's life mattered little, if at all. While the officer continued his abuse of Mr. Floyd despite Mr. Floyd being handcuffed and on the ground, three other police officers stood by and offered no help to Mr. Floyd. They saw the knee on the neck, they heard the pleas for help from Mr. Floyd and the witnesses, and they did nothing to stop the violence. Their silence and inaction communicated a callous disregard for Mr. Floyd's mistreatment, suffering, and ultimately his life. They were more loyal to their fellow officer and his cruelty than to the basic humanity of Mr. Floyd.

The American people, and the people of the world, has seen this pattern at the highest levels for the last three and a half years during the Trump presidency. Repeatedly, Mr. Trump has acted with impunity as he words, actions, and policies have abused so many and so much: migrant children and their families, regular citizens, public servants, norms and values of decency and honor, respect for honesty and the rule of law. This is, tragically, just a partial list. While Mr. Trump has used his position of power and influence to abuse individuals, families, communities, states, organizations, and systems designed to protect good government, elected officials of his own party have almost universally done nothing to protect the targets of his abuse.

Their silence and inaction have communicated a callous disregard for the mistreatment and suffering caused by Mr. Trump. They have been more loyal to Mr. Trump and his cruelty than to the basic humanity of anyone who finds themselves the recipient of Mr. Trump's abuse.

We know quite a bit about bullies. We know that they are ultimately only successful if bystanders offer their support, and this support can be in the form of silence. Without the active or silent consent of the bystanders, the bully-victim cycle falls apart and the bully is marginalized and disempowered.

An increasing number and an increasing diversity of Americans are sick of it. We are sick of the impunity of those in power who abuse others and of those who stand by silently and watch the suffering, destruction, and deaths that follow.

More and more of us recognize that Mr. Trump's abuses and the knee in the neck of Mr. Floyd are not just individual moral failures—they are the failures of the system. A failure of us. And if this is true, then when we change, we can change the system.

It's coming and it's happening. And if we keep the faith, and keep working, and vote in November, we will thankfully have more to celebrate and less to protest against.

— Greg Adams

Thank you to my cousin, to my brother, to Greg Adams, to my other friends and family members, to my colleagues in ministry and to the sisters in my Sunday school class for your willingness to dialogue, to speak your minds and to add your rich and important perspectives to mine.

One of the ways I have committed to work for transformation is through watercolor art and narrative, in hopes that at least one person will have an emotional response to the art that inspires and calls out to the person, “Are you transforming injustice? Will you transform injustice?”



**Watercolor #1 in the
Transforming Injustice! Series
“I Can’t Breathe!”**

The art is foreboding and heavy, depicting the murder of George Floyd.

In the midst of the darkness of the watercolor, a tree spreads its branches. The verdant green of the leaves reach across the darkness as if to say, “Hate and violence will not prevail over all that’s just!”

<https://kalliopeswatercolors.wordpress.com/2020/06/09/i-cant-breathe/>

George Floyd pleaded as police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck and pinned him to the ground on a Minneapolis street until he died. His death sparked protests in cities all over the world.

The New York Times reconstructed the death of George Floyd from security footage, witness videos and official documents. On May 25, 2020, The Times created a video entitled “8 Minutes and 46 Seconds: How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody,” which was published on June 4, 2020. This painting is based on a frame from that chilling video.

Floyd’s chilling final cries of “I can’t breathe” are not only the same words uttered by Eric Garner as he was being choked by police officers in New York in 2014, but also by Jimmy Mubenga who in 2010 died on a plane on a Heathrow runway while being restrained by three immigration officers.

For all of us, it is hard to breathe while watching the video of George Floyd unable to breathe, calling out to his mother. It is hard to breathe when we have seen the stark reality of racial injustice.

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION



Lament may well be the beginning of transforming injustice. Spend a moment lamenting the unjust, violent deaths of our brothers and sisters.

George Floyd could not breathe as he was being murdered. Meditate on the times when danger, pain or suffering caused you to feel as if you could not breathe. In what ways did you experience suffering of the soul?

Could your soul's suffering move you to deeper concern for those harmed by racial injustice? Can you acknowledge complacency, refusing God's call to work for justice? Jesus rebuked this in the Pharisees:

*“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!
You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin.
But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness.”*

(Matthew 23:23 NRSV)

— A Prayer of Lament —

*God of justice for all creation,
Give us hearts that lament the sufferings of those who are oppressed.*

Comfort us in our own times of suffering.

*When deep pain causes us to cry out, “I can't breathe,”
infuse us with Spirit breath,
that we might rise and stand firmly against injustice.*

*May our soul's lament stir us to transform injustice,
in every place, for every person, whenever racism threatens,
for this is your will and our holy mission. Amen.*





<https://kalliopeswatercolors.wordpress.com/2020/06/19/riot-gear-projectiles-and-tear-gas/>

Watercolor #2 in the
Transforming Injustice! Series
"Riot Gear, Projectiles, Tear
Gas and Tears!"

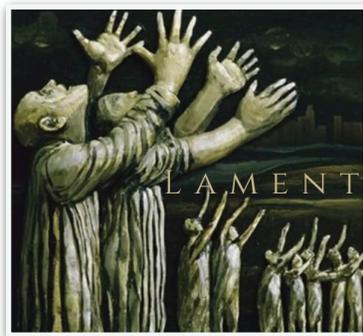
Thousands of protesters marched through central London in an overwhelmingly peaceful Black Lives Matter demonstration sparked after the police killing of George Floyd in America.

The demonstrators, the vast majority of whom were under 30, chanted: 'No justice, no peace, no racist police', 'I can't breathe' and 'the UK is not innocent',

in a lockdown-defying demonstration that was largely organized through word of mouth and social media, not by established anti-racism groups.

"I can't breathe!" I can't forget those words. I won't forget those words. But I know in my heart that change will arise out of the ashes of racism. Officer Derek Chauvin and three other policemen involved in the incident have been fired from the force. Chauvin has since been arrested and charged with third degree murder. Change will come.

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION



If lament is the beginning of transforming injustice, then our lament as a spiritual discipline is the foundation for our prayer and meditation.

Spend a moment lamenting “tear gas and tears.”

Consider the fear that our brothers and sisters must have felt as they experienced this violent assault. Consider the indignity they felt, their thoughts in that moment as others treated them as if they were less than human.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt the oppression of indignity, that you were not being treated as a person of worth. If you can not recall such a time, ask yourself if privilege shielded you from experiencing disrespect.

Meditate on the times when you were cruelly and intentionally treated as if you had little or no worth. How did that experience feel? In what ways did you experience suffering of the soul?

Could your soul’s suffering move you to deeper concern for those among us who are not afforded dignity and worth?

Will your advocacy for justice include your proclamation that all persons are persons of sacred worth, loved and cared for by a God who abhors injustice?

*O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;*

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.*

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.*

*My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance . . .
I come to the end — I am still with you.*

(Psalm 139:1-2; 13-16; 18 NRSV)

— A Prayer of Lament —

*O God, who created us all in your image,
Give us souls that lament over the suffering of those who feel they have no value,
those whose oppressive life experiences have convinced them
that they are not persons of sacred worth.*

*Comfort us in times when we feel we are of little value.
When deep pain causes us to lament,
grant us the Spirit’s wind of comfort.*

*If we resist your call for justice,
grant us Spirit wind and fire
that we might rise and stand firmly against injustice.*

*May our soul's lament stir us to transform injustice,
in every place, for every person, whenever racism threatens,
for this is your will and our holy mission. Amen.*



A PERSONAL LAMENT

I am the mother of a black son. Being his Mama is not my lament; it is the deepest joy of my life. As he grew up, though, my lament was to come. As a young child — precious, cute and full of mischief — he was dearly loved by all who knew him. We raised him in a modest house in a black neighborhood in Little Rock, Arkansas. Racism's ugly head did not take long to rise up in his protected world.

Why do you look so blackish? — An elementary school teacher

Why are your parents white? — A question he was asked numerous times

Just words! Not all that hurtful. But in his teenage years, the hurt began. We never knew about it until one day he told us in one of our rare conversations. This conversation actually went beyond, “Tell me about your day.” “It was fine.” Period. That was it. End of conversation. But on this one day, we sat together and talked for quite a long time and talked about many things. I will never forget what our son told us that day.

The police stop me all the time. I'm not speeding or doing anything. They just stop me, especially when Andre, Mark and Jarrett are with me. They pull us out of the car and push us to the ground head-first, with our legs and arms spread out on the hot concrete. Everybody who passes by can see us and they don't know we weren't doing anything wrong. While one of the police watch us so we don't move, the other one searches the car. There's never anything in the car except our basketball stuff.

I was furious. *Beyond furious!* Fortunately it was night and offices were closed, so I had a few hours to compose myself and let my anger dissipate a bit. But the next morning I gathered every ounce of my white privilege and headed first to see the Little Rock Chief chief of police and after that, the Mayor, both colleagues and friends. “Privilege” — white privilege and connection privilege — got me into their offices immediately.

You see, I was “connected” as a trainer of law enforcement and district attorneys from all over the country including in our city. I chaired the Little Rock Commission on Domestic Violence and the Little Rock Commission on Children, Youth and Families. I served on the Little Rock Prevention,

Intervention and Treatment Grant Committee, approving grants and dispensing funds to community programs.

I taught classes every week to inmates incarcerated at the Pulaski County Detention Center and to young people at the Pulaski County Juvenile Detention Center. I was president of the board of the Arkansas Coalition against Sexual Assault, executive director of our Children's Justice and Protection Center and I was involved in the courts as a certified child forensic interviewer. I served on the FBI's Task Force on Sexual and Domestic Violence, on the Sixth Judicial District Sexual Abuse Management Team, on the Pulaski County Multidisciplinary Child Abuse Team and on the Arkansas Women's Health Workgroup.

I tell you all this so that you can understand that I walked into those offices with a *boatload* of privilege, white privilege and "connection" privilege. It shames me and breaks my heart to say that, because even in my conversations with city officials that day, I knew my privilege spoke for me. I was the WHITE mother of a black son and I was totally connected in the work of our city. I could not help but wonder if a *black mother* of a black son would have received such wide-open doors to the city's "system."

I don't think so, and I say that with the most sincere regret and the shame of being a part of an oppressive system. Yes, it is true that my presence within that system may have made it somewhat less oppressive. Nonetheless, I was there working with that system, helping it function, contributing to its survival and thus, condoning its oppressive acts by my involvement and my tacit sanction.

This is a story about living with the sins of the past, about watching a shocking, scandalous, shameful video in which a black man cries out, "I can't breathe!" and knowing that you have done so little to end such blatant injustice. There are now so many names that we don't even remember, and the more recent ones that we do remember, the ones that strike close to home for me:

TRAYVON MARTIN

PHILANDO CASTILLE

AHMAUD ARBERRY

BREONNA TAYLOR

TAMIR RICE

STEPHON CLARK

ERIC GARNER

GEORGE FLOYD

I can't begin to record every name, but I want to end with this one that is special to me because I so admire his mother, a long-time friend.

BRADLEY BLACKSHIRE

Bradley's mother, Kimberly Blackshire-Lee, was in the trauma class I taught at the Pulaski County Detention Center. Over time, she became a dear friend and colleague. Kimberly works as a substance abuse counselor at Phoenix Recovery Centers of Arkansas.

Her son, Bradley, was killed on February 22, 2020, by a Little Rock police officer who fired his gun through Bradley's windshield 16 times.

May they all, and the ones whose names are not here, rest in peace, and may their memories be eternal.

In July of 2014, a cellphone video captured some of Eric Garner's final words as New York City police officers sat on his head and pinned him to the ground on a sidewalk: "I can't breathe." On May 25 of this year, the same words were spoken by George Floyd, who pleaded for release as an officer knelt on his neck and pinned him to the ground on a Minneapolis street until he died.

"I can't breathe!" I can't forget those words. I won't forget those words. This morning, although I have already hundreds of words here, I can say in honesty, I have *no* words. At least I have no words that mean much in these horrific days.

I have tears. I have sadness. I even have some anger that the people I love whose skin is not "white" are living in grief, frustration, bewilderment, anger. Once again, the system has betrayed them. I say only that right now, injustice and oppression clings so closely to my friends, today as in centuries past.

**All the Black
people in your life
are tired today.**

**Don't ask us for
nothing.**

One of my close Little Rock friends posted these words on Facebook: "All the Black people in your life are tired today. Don't ask us for nothing."

I hear her. I hear my friend cry out for justice.

I hear her using words to make sense of it all, and I hear her voice, *and every voice*, fall silent.

Silent, with just these words posted by my friend, "I'm tired."

I want to see her face to face. I want to sit together. I want to comfort her, hoping beyond hope that it is not too late for comfort.

After responding to her post, I happened to read this horrific headline:

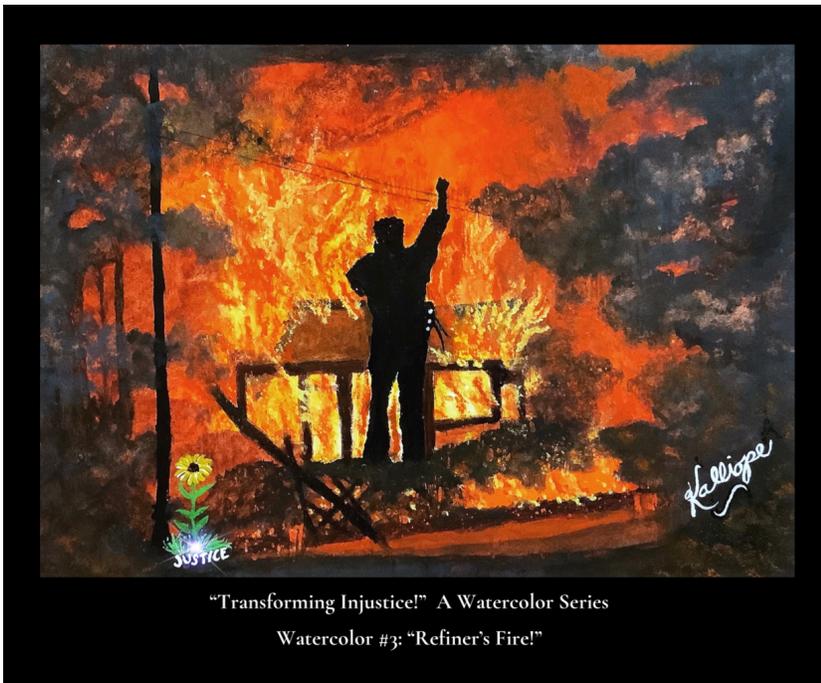
Prosecutors in Hennepin County, Minnesota, say evidence shows Chauvin had his knee on Floyd's neck for a total of 8 minutes and 46 seconds, including two minutes and 53 seconds of which Floyd was non-responsive. — ABC News

"I'm tired!" "I can't breathe."

**Watercolor #3 in the
Transforming Injustice! Series
“Refiner’s Fire!”**

The painting is inspired by a photo of a Minneapolis check-cashing business burning to the ground as a protester raises his fist. (Photographer: John Minchillo / AP)

This watercolor is almost completely filled with fire — raging, out of control, consuming fire. In the center, a man stands in the embers unafraid, raising a clenched fist.



“Transforming Injustice!” A Watercolor Series
Watercolor #3: “Refiner’s Fire!”

Why is he raising his fist? In protest of racial injustice? Or perhaps to welcome the Refiner’s Fire, the kind of fire it will require for America to dismantle racial injustice!

Think for a moment about the powerful words of the Prophet Zechariah:

*And I will put this third into the fire,
and refine them as one refines silver,
and test them as gold is tested.*

*They will call upon my name,
and I will answer them.
I will say, ‘They are my people’;
and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’”*

— Zechariah 13:9 English Standard Version (ESV)

We can only guess at the reason that the man in the painting is standing before the fire, fist raised. Most would consider his stance to be defiant or angry. Perhaps he welcomes the destruction he is witnessing. Perhaps he has had enough of racial injustice and is ready to fight in the movement to dismantle it.

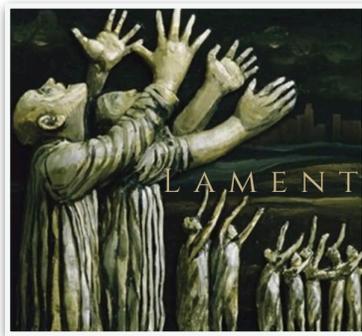
But I would like to offer a different reason: that the unnamed man is declaring that he is ready to offer his life in the quest for justice. Maybe he has already been in the Refiner’s fire, purified! Giving himself to the cause of justice, knowing that the Refining God desires justice even more fervently than he does, and remembering in his soul the words of the Prophet . . . Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:24 New Revised Standard Version NRSV)

The time has come for us to transform injustice, to watch as justice rolls down like waters throughout our nation and to see righteousness flow into every heart with transforming grace and mercy. But to see the advent of true transformation, we must be willing to plunge ourselves into the Refiner's Holy Fire, so that every one of us willing to protest and to work will do so with purified, righteous hearts.

God stands ready to use holy fire to refine us and purge our sins, for God is a God of justice, When we can honestly declare, "The Lord is my God," we will be ready to invite God's refining fire to burn away the dross of our collective and personal sin of racism, leaving a "refined" people — a precious metal purified and standing ready to transform injustice! May God make it so!

As a people who have invited God's refining fire to purge our sin, we move forward in the slightest measure of hope. For my black and brown brothers and sisters, my prayer is that they are able to hold on to hope as their ancestors did so courageously. I pray that they will see this moment in America as a transformative moment that will finally bring about systemic change. Most of all, I pray that this moment truly is transformative and that positive changes will last.

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION



Lament may bring us through the Refiner's Fire. Our lamentations as a spiritual discipline must be the rock upon which we stand in working to transform injustice. Indeed, lament is the foundation for our prayer and meditation.

Spend a moment lamenting the current fires of protest in our nation. Meditate on the reasons for a refining fire for individuals and for collective groups of people.

Are you courageous enough to ask God for the "refiner's fire" you need? The burning of the soul's dross that will empower you to confront injustice?

Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt the suffering of a refining fire in your soul? Were you frightened? Did you consider it a part of God's preparation for your calling?

Could your soul's suffering move you to deeper concern for those among us who are in a fire of suffering caused by those who would harm them because of the color of their skin?

Will your advocacy for justice include your conviction that all persons deserve justice and your unwavering intention to join them in the struggle?

*Listen to me, my people,
and give heed to me, my nation;
for a teaching will go out from me,
and my justice for a light to the peoples.
(Isaiah 51:4 NRSV)*

— A Prayer of Lament —

*O God, who knows the fires of the soul we have endured,
Give us the strength to lament as we languish.*

*Create pure hearts in us and help us to tenderly touch the hearts
of those who suffer the oppression of racial injustice.*

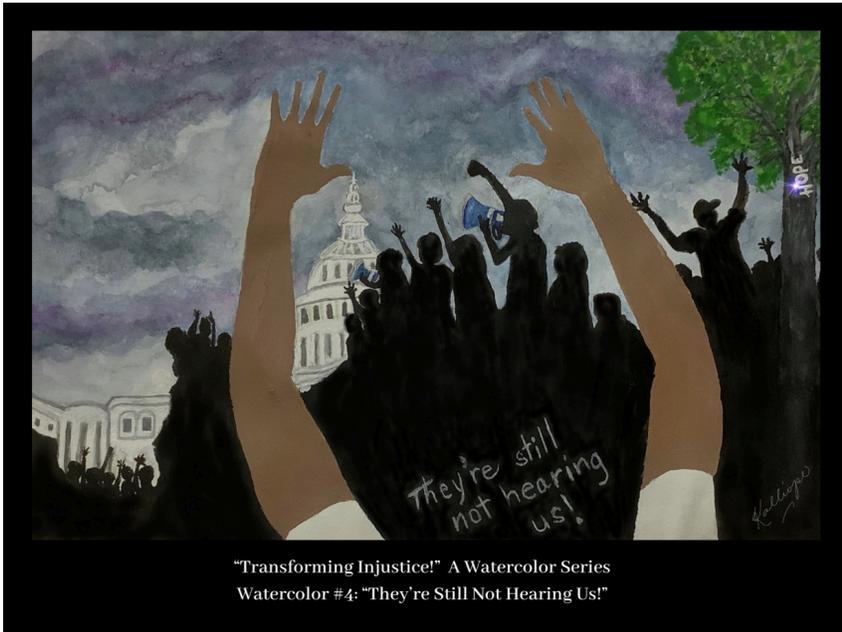
*Grant us the courage to abide in your refining fire
until the dross in our souls becomes as pure as fine gold.*

*When deep suffering causes us to lament,
grant us Spirit comfort and healing.*

*If we resist your call for justice,
nudge us into holy action.*

*May our soul's lament stir us to transform injustice,
in every place, for every person, whenever racism threatens,
for this is your will and our holy mission. Amen.*





**Watercolor #4 in the
Transforming Injustice! Series**
"They're Still
Not Hearing Us!"

This painting is inspired by an Associated Press news photo taken by Jacquelyn Martin, who captured this historical moment in her photo of demonstrators gathering to protest the death of George Floyd — on Wednesday, June 3, 2020, outside the U.S. Capitol.

<https://kalliopeswatercolors.wordpress.com/2020/07/25/theyre-still-not-hearing-us/>

What inspires me most about this news photo is that it depicts a group of people engaging in a protest of *voices* calling out for justice with *arms* raised, imploring their government for change. It is not a protest of guns or clubs or other instruments of violence. It is simply a protest from hearts that tirelessly cry out, "They're still not hearing us?"

Indeed "they" are not hearing. "They" responded with military force to this nonviolent event.

According to Associated Press reporters Robert Burns and Michael Balsamo, the National Guard of the District of Columbia is investigating the use of one of its helicopters to make a "show of force" against protesters near the White House, while President Donald Trump is encouraging authorities to get tougher to quell the unrest over George Floyd's death. The helicopter, normally designated for use in medical evacuations, hovered low enough to create a deafening noise and spray protesters with rotor wash.

In a phone call with governors on July 20, President Trump and Attorney General Barr encouraged more aggressive action against those who cause violence during protests. Trump said he was "taking immediate presidential action to stop the violence and restore security and safety in America." More than 17,000 soldiers and airmen have been activated to confront nonviolent protesters. An article written by Luke O'Brien and published on July 21, 2020 in the Huffington Post begins with these very troubling headlines:

Trump Has Unleashed Authoritarian Violence In Portland. What City Is Next?

From tear gas to kidnappings, the Trump administration has thrust America into a constitutional crisis.

Luke O'Brien's article also pointed out that during the last two weeks, federal law enforcement agents in Portland have terrorized peaceful protesters by bundling them into unmarked vehicles without probable cause and pulling masks over their faces — a development experts say is “a classic way that violence happens in authoritarian regimes” and that has deeply alarmed several members of Congress.

House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-S.C.) called it “the activity of a police state.”

“This is what dictators do,” Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-Texas) tweeted.

For the sake of historical significance, I am including the following 2020 news photos depicting the deployment of federal soldiers.



In spite of this frightening activity ordered by the president, citizens cling tightly to hope, no matter how small hope might seem. So you will find hope hidden in this painting — “They’re Still Not Hearing Us” — with a steadfast hope that is genuine enough and strong enough to sustain those who seek justice.

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION



How long, Oh Lord, must we endure ears that refuse to hear, systems that refuse to listen to the cries of the soul?

May our lament be our spiritual discipline this day as we cry out before our God of Justice. Lament is the foundation for our prayer and meditation.

Spend a moment lamenting the reality that anguished cries for justice are not heard. Meditate on how you feel when your voice was not heard, today and in times past.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt your voice was not heard? Did it make you feel anger?

Did you consider your anger to be a part of God's preparation for your calling?

Can you express angry lament when injustice seems to be rampant? Are you courageous enough to persevere, to persist, to raise your voice before ears that will not hear your words?

Will you allow your angry lament to be transformed into holy resolve to seek justice?

Will you continue to protest and allow your heart to tirelessly cry out, "They're still not hearing us?"

*For the hearts of these people are hardened,
and their ears cannot hear,
and they have closed their eyes—
so their eyes cannot see,
and their ears cannot hear,
and their hearts cannot understand,
and they cannot turn to me
and let me heal them.
(Matthew 13:15 NLT)*

— A Prayer of Lament —

O God, who heals our brokenness,
Help us to continue to lift our voices until ears are open,
until those who have refused to hear finally listen to those who suffer injustice.

Receive our angry lament and transform our anger into righteous action.

Hear the anguish of every mother assaulted by violence against her child. suffer

Hear the angry shouts of young people as shouts of frustration, fear and despair.

Grant us the courage to persist in shouting out your demand for justice
for as long as it takes.

When deep suffering causes us to lament,
grant us Spirit wind and let us soar.

If we resist your call for justice,
compel us to holy action.

May our soul's lament stir us to transform injustice,
in every place, for every person, whenever racism threatens,
for this is your will and our holy mission. Amen.



"Transforming Injustice!" A Watercolor Series
Watercolor #5: "Lift Hope High!"

Watercolor #5 in the
Transforming Injustice! Series
"Lift Hope High!"

My inspiration for this painting comes from a photo taken by Adrees Latif of Reuters on June 8, 2020.

At a candlelight vigil honoring George Floyd, the photographer captured an image that depicted small lights of hope lifted up by local residents and alumni of Houston's Yates High School.

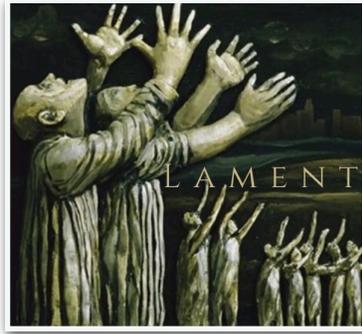
Cornell West has said, “Justice is what love looks like in public.” Indeed! I see in the people depicted in this image the kind of love that led them to gather as one community, expressing their love for their community and a longing for “Beloved Community.”*

In this image, the sky is filled with ominous dark clouds. Yet there is light that that peeks through to help us remember that hope abides. Hope is veiled at times, hidden from those who need light most.

The people in the image are holding up tiny lights. They doing this together, near one another, raising the light as one people. We cannot see the color of their skin, but it doesn't matter. What *does* matter is that they are lifting lights of hope — together. Perhaps when we lift lights of hope together, it will be just enough light to illuminate the next step in our quest for racial justice.

May the God of justice make it so!

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION



May lament be our spiritual discipline this day as we continue to lift hope high. Lament before God can keep us open to new hope even in the midst of despair.

Take a few moments lamenting the present reality of protest and pain. Meditate on how you feel when your hope is small. Think about the times in your life that caused despair.

What was your path to renewed hope?

Can you lift hope high for those who cannot hold their own hope, those who feel as if their cries for justice have been in vain?

Will you allow your hopelessness to be transformed into an unrelenting quest for justice?

*I do not have much longer to live; my hope in the Lord is gone.
The thought of my pain, my homelessness, is bitter poison.
I think of it constantly, and my spirit is depressed.*

*Yet hope returns when I remember this one thing:
The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue,
Fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise.
(Lamentations 3:18-23 GNT)*

*God of all hope, healer of the soul,
How great is your faithfulness!*

*Help us to lift hope high, to give hope away,
to lift up hope for our sisters and brothers until Black lives (really) matter.*

*Help us to cling to hope in the midst of our despairing,
to hold hope tightly in times when we are disconsolate.*

*Hear our lament and transform our despairing hearts into hearts of boldness
that inspire us to acts of justice and mercy.*

Hold the hopelessness of every Black family.

Hold the hopelessness of Black boys who fear violence that threatens.

Hold the hopelessness of Black girls who fear the terror of the night.

*And in the darkest nights of the soul,
O God, lift up holy lights of hope before us.*

*In your great faithfulness, God, give us faithful hearts full of hope.
And give us courageous hearts of perseverance,
that we might lift up lights of hope's justice
for as long as it takes to transform injustice.*

*When these days of violence cause us to lament,
grant us a Spirit of hope that soars beyond our despair.*

*If we resist your call for justice, God,
compel us to righteousness that lets the oppressed go free.*

*May our soul's lament stir us to transform injustice,
in every place, for every person, whenever racism threatens,
for this is your will and our holy mission. Amen.*



A FINAL WORD

A TRIBUTE TO U.S. CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

Finally, I am including a tribute to one of the heroes of the movement in the quest for justice. In his 80 years on this earth, he fought to make the world a better, safer place for all people. Congressman John Lewis ended his earthly fight of transforming injustice on July 17, 2020.

The son of sharecroppers, he survived a brutal beating by police during a landmark 1965 march in Selma, Alabama, to become a towering figure of the civil rights movement and a longtime United States congressman.



Portrait of U.S. Representative John Lewis by artist Carl Hess

This week I watched the many tributes and memorial services for Representative John Lewis. This morning — Sunday, July 26, 2020 — I watched him cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge For the last time.

From the New York Post:

US Rep. John Lewis made one last trip over Edmund Pettus Bridge — where the late lawmaker and civil rights icon was beaten by police more than five decades ago during the 1965 civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery.

The “conscience of Congress” — who died at age 80 on July 17 — fractured his skull during the confrontation, which became known as “Bloody Sunday.”

Lewis, who led an annual march over the bridge for the last two decades, made his “final crossing” just after 10:35 central time.

His body is set to lie in state in the Alabama State Capitol on Sunday afternoon.

Sunday’s procession is part of a six-day memorial tour that began Saturday in his hometown of Troy, Alabama and will pass through Washington, D.C. before wrapping up in Atlanta on Thursday.



The esteemed Congressman's crossing over the bridge this morning was not like a march heralding a public hero, though he was that. Instead, it was a solemn crossing, quiet and almost contemplative.

From Rev. Bernice Albertine King:

*What a moment to remember.
What a courageous journey in life.
What a powerful path in death.
We will miss you, but we're grateful.
For all of your "good trouble". . . Thank you.*

From The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center:

*A nonviolent warrior crossing the bridge
where he met physical force with soul force.
Farewell, John Lewis.*

The mourners on both sides of the street and at both ends of the bridge sang the freedom songs John Lewis had sung so many times over so many years, but this time they sang them quietly in an act of respect. The words were the same:

Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on . . .

*Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me
And before I'd be a slave I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free
No more weeping, no more weeping, no more weeping over me
And before I'd be a slave I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.*

*Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around
Turn me around, turn me around
Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around
I'm gonna keep on a-walkin', keep on a-talkin'
Marchin' down to freedom land.*

And, of course, this freedom song sung so mournfully as John Lewis was carried across the. Bridge . . .

*We shall overcome, we shall overcome,
we shall overcome someday;
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe that we shall overcome someday.*

I invite you to listen to the following video of “We Shall Overcome” sung by the Morehouse College Glee Club [arranged by Wendell P. Whalum] at the 2009 Candle on the Bluff Awards. Find it [HERE](#).

TRANSFORMING INJUSTICE! THE FINAL WORDS

The final words in this *Transforming Injustice!* series of watercolor paintings are words sung, not spoken, sung by mourners singing mournfully and reverently as John Lewis made his final crossing over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. The freedom songs they sang throughout their lives became mourning songs as they considered the death of a Civil Rights icon and all that his death might mean.

Transforming Injustice! — the Critical Task Before Us

I have a vision — a hope — that in the end, we will recognize that the hard work of transforming injustice enabled us to see clearly the vision of Beloved Community, and that Beloved Community *finally* came to be because of the transformation of hearts.

In the end, we shall overcome!

Amen! May the God of Justice guide our overcoming.

** Note: Martin Luther King popularized the notion of the “Beloved Community.” King envisioned the Beloved Community as a society based on justice, equal opportunity, and love of one’s fellow human beings. ... King’s Beloved Community is a global vision in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth.*