

Dear Grace Church Family and Friends,

Like many of you, I turned on my television last night, only to see the heartbreaking images coming from Baltimore: angry residents throwing rocks at police, who were lined up in riot gear; cars and buildings set on fire; stores shattered and looted.

In response, Governor Larry Hogan declared a state of emergency. Schools are closed for today in order to keep children safe. A city wide curfew is in effect. And, the National Guard has been activated, the second time in six months a state has called out the National Guard in response to violence over the death of an unarmed black man at the hands of police.

I think we can all understand the frustration and exasperation of community members. The death of Freddie Gray is only the latest chapter in an ongoing narrative of racial inequality and injustice that includes the names of people like Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

Yet, as we also all know, violence solves nothing. Violence only leads to more violence. And, violence is not the way of Jesus.

Amidst last night's chaos, there were many people trying to restore peace to their neighborhood. Regular, ordinary people. Watching on television, I saw Robert Valentine place himself between the police and rioters. Tall and rail thin, a Master Sergeant who served thirty years in the military, Valentine was resolute in his position. "I love my country, and I love my city," he said. "This is no way to respect the [Gray] family."

That is the way of Jesus.

As you go about your day, I ask you to join me in praying for the people of Baltimore:

For the friends and family of Freddie Gray in their grief;  
For the residents of Baltimore who are angry and frustrated;  
For the police and firefighters who serve our communities;  
For those in elected office overwhelmed by circumstances;

And, for all the Robert Valentines trying to make their block, their city, their country, and their world, a better place.

With the hope of peace,  
*Andrew*