

December 9, 2014

Dear Grace Church Family and Friends,

Over the last two weeks, I participated in several discussions regarding the recent grand jury decisions in Ferguson, MO and New York City, including at our own Advent Book Club, in which some parishioners shared very moving and heartfelt reflections, and among diocesan clergy who serve multicultural congregations. In most of these conversations, I focused on listening, trying as hard as possible to really hear what other people were saying and understand their experiences. As a white, heterosexual male, I am part of the demographic which has long held the power and privilege in our society, and so I feel it is incumbent upon me to acknowledge and comprehend, as best I can, other perspectives.

As you might imagine, I heard several powerful stories these last couple of weeks, most of them coming from the mothers of young, black boys. One told me how her 9 year old son was stopped by police for spitting on the sidewalk. Another, bordering on tears, spoke of the fear she has for her son growing up in this country. A third talked about having "the discussion" with her son, making sure he knew how to act if ever stopped by the police.

While I am the parent of three boys myself, these experiences were completely new to me. I never had these worries. I never knew these fears. I never felt compelled to have "the discussion" with Thomas or James or Timothy. None of it was part of my being a parent. So, it was imperative that I listen and hear what these mothers were saying.

Listening is the first step on the path to healing and reconciliation. Listening is an integral part of being Christian.

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus always listened to other people, particularly those cheated by society. They would bring their needs and concerns, their worries and their fears, and Jesus would hear their stories. He had this uncanny ability to empathize with the others, and by listening to their experiences, he was able to relate to them. He became one of them. And, their heartache and pain was met by his love and compassion and mercy.

If we ever hope to move forward in this country, we need to listen to each other, especially those who are different from us. Listening leads to understanding. Listening builds bridges. Listening helps us recognize our common humanity. After all, we are all related, all part of the same, one family, because we are all children of God.

Are you listening? What do you hear?

See you in church,
Andrew