

Trayvon Martin: A Larger History

A few days ago I was sitting in the White House beside President Obama at the annual Easter Prayer Breakfast. Over 150 Christian clergy were listening to African-American kids from the Mount Ennon Clinton Children's Chorus sing **gospel music**. In the midst of one song, a young boy bravely stepped up to the microphone and belted out a solo, "I've been through so many trials."

We were all chuckling at the disconnect of his age and those lyrics. The president grinned and whispered to me what we were all thinking, "Now how many trials can you have been through at 6 years old?" But he knew what we all know: Those words were an echo of a much larger history and a much larger hurt.

Two days later I was a part of a gathering of local clergy to pray for Sanford, Fla., in the aftermath of the **Trayvon Martin** tragedy. We are praying for the families, for the truth and justice, for the reconciliation and healing of our community, and for God to be glorified and the **grace of Christ** to be evident in the coming days. But we are thinking as we pray, "Of all the tragedies and injustices that happen in the U.S. every day, how is it that this one has garnered so much national attention?"

The answer is, of course, that the **Trayvon Martin** case is an echo of a much larger history and a much larger hurt. And it calls for a much greater healing.

There is much to take to the Lord: Our community has a history of discrimination, as does our nation. We all make judgments based on outward appearance (both people and circumstances). Our culture turns too quickly and routinely to violence. Our laws need to be constantly examined as to whether they do

damage instead of the good they intend. Our local officials need to be prayed for, supported, but also held to account-as do all of those who are in authority.

When our churches withdraw from each other or congregations practice only a type of individual **salvation** that is not connected with loving our neighbors or building healthy local communities, we fall short.

We pray for the Martin family and the Zimmerman family, and we also mourn the demise of family in our country. We repent of the vestiges of racism in our institutions, and also in our hearts. We hope that this horrible tragedy can wake us to our need to value each person as beings made in the image of God, and to build systems that prevent evil rather than just punish it.

If the Martin-George Zimmerman case is an echo of a larger history and hurt, then our prayer time must be an echo of a larger future and healing. We call upon Christ to make us into new people, building a future based on togetherness. Easter is the story of **resurrection**, not only of Christ but also of us. It is the promise of new life, not only when we die but also while we live. And it is the power to be made whole, not just as individuals but as communities.