

Protecting Fragile Life in Ferguson

Google maps shows that Mike Brown was killed 1.5 miles from my church. After he was shot, I spent a week away from my church and city with our Pathfinders, a youth group, in Oshkosh Wisconsin. Each day I got calls with updates and requests to find a way to help. After the looting, men from our church, the Northside Seventh-day Adventist Church in St. Louis, Missouri, helped with the cleanup. Others went to be a positive influence to prevent illicit activity. The precious time I spent with my young people at the camporee, also allowed me to contemplate what I could pour into them to make sure they did not become a Michael Brown.

I know how precious and fragile life is as it says in James 4:14: "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." (NASB95)

When our twelve-passenger van neared Ferguson, we pulled in to the parking lot of the church, and started to unload the van. More than ten police vehicles with lights and sirens blaring darted past us as if the end of the world was at hand. We hurried home to see what the news was saying about our community. I wondered what I was going to do to make a difference.

Perspective

I reflected on my personal experience as a frequent traveler through Ferguson. Ticketed and going to court in Ferguson is something that most people around here experience. The scene in the courtroom is one that reveals why Ferguson is a powder keg: when I went to court, I counted approximately 15 court officials, all of whom are white, and of the 200 to 300 defendants, only a handful were nonblack.

I remembered watching a video depicting wild animals roaming through a city, and thinking how compassionate the people are towards *animals*. Search YouTube for "Bear in City." I found one, **Bear runs loose in the city** and I watched as no one rushed to shoot the bear. Ordinary citizens people and the police looked, but did not make a quick decision to shoot the wild animal. This bear first appeared when children were on their way to school and still no one thought to kill it because it was possibly a danger to children. Police, parents and others just looked on and kept their distance until a conservation officer came to tranquilize the bear. One young lady in the video says "I don't understand why they aren't tranquilizing him or something to get him out of the city." Just out of curiosity I decided to search YouTube for police dealing with wild dogs and came across this video **St. Petersburg police change way they deal with violent dogs**.

If we can look at the two videos and not see the lack of respect for the life of African Americans as compared to animals, we are in for more of what has taken place in Ferguson. I don't mean that animals should not be treated humanely—I believe that all humans should be treated at least as humanely as the animals in these videos. And, I hope after seeing these videos, some eyes open as to why there is so much anger, frustration, outrage, and volatility in Ferguson and the St. Louis area.

Who is calling for justice?

Outrage after the shooting of Mike Brown by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, has caused many around the country and world to come to my community.

I received calls from members of the international press, Germany in particular, who were coming to town to cover the shooting and its aftermath. As I walked in protest to lend my support to the Ferguson cause for justice, respect, and equality, I met Debbie Williams from Detroit, Michigan who came to prevent further abuse and mistreatment as something of her own unofficial observer.

"The story kept changing," Williams said. "Each day I would hear something different."

"I have an eye on you all, Williams said.

"The whole world is watching" chimed in an unnamed man for New York.

Jim Bryan and Meg Hegeman of the United Methodist Church in Columbia, Missouri were on their way back to their vehicle when I stopped them to ask why they had joined the protest.

"These are my people," said Hegeman. Even though she was not African American she wanted me to know that she was in Ferguson on behalf of her parishioners, many of whom are members of an urban community.

"This has been handled very badly, overkill," said Hegeman. "The role of the church is to speak truth to power."

Bryan answered the call, really an email, from the Missouri Faith Voices to travel to Ferguson and stand for justice because, as he put it, "the scenes [on TV] are heart breaking!"

Bryan marched with approximately 150 demonstrators and four members of the clergy. His witness of the events, the solidarity, the empathy, and the insight that came with being there on the ground, was worth a thousand pictures or words.

"Meg and I can't understand what it means to be Black in America." He alluded to all the injustice he had seen and shook his head and my hand and left. May the God we serve allow all who worship and love Him to learn from the tragedy in Ferguson and address the need to respect and treat all humanity as Jesus would have us do.

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