



Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's call to be present: July 7, 2016

In Luke it says, "When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day, as was his custom. He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. To let the oppressed go free. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'"

Here we are ... again. Just days apart, two African American men were shot by police. This is an all too frequent occurrence in our country. And I think it's because we can't see. We can't see each other as fully children of God. And we tend to look at each other through the lens of suspicion and fear. Communities of color wondering what an encounter with the police will bring, police and others in law enforcement automatically suspicious, it seems, of communities of color. We can't see. And we need – we need – to open our eyes.

As the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we have to recognize that this kind of violence, and also the threat and fear that it brings to our brothers and sisters in the African American community and other communities of color, is real. We, as white people, have had the privilege of not having to see. But now we recognize that this kind of violence and this threat is real. And we have to also understand that it's happening not to them, but to all of us. We are killing ourselves. And until we, in the white community, feel that the death of a person of color is our death too, it's not going to change.

We do have the promise, however, of a God who can bring sight to the blind. We need to show up. We need to stand with and listen to our colleagues and brothers and sisters of color. Even if they don't want us to be there, or if they do, we need to show up. These people can no longer be invisible. Our eyes need to be opened, and they are open.

And then we need to find a way to reach out and build actual connections with people who are visible and real and not just some sort of stereotype or archetype. Our eyes are open, and in this painful instance, Jesus is bringing sight to the blind. I urge each one of us in this church to be present in communities, to go out from our congregations and get to know other people. And also find a way to connect with law enforcement, so that they can understand that they are not doing this by themselves. And also have the opportunity for their eyes to be opened, that someone of another color is not automatically a threat.

For a long time, I think, we in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, particularly those of us who are white, have been able not to see. And have been able to say, "it happened someplace else." That's not true, and we know that now. So understanding and trusting that Jesus is already there, that Jesus has restored our sight, and that we can see, in the other, Christ, it's time to get out there, people. It's time to go out, dear church, and make the invisible visible and see these as brothers and sisters.