

“Friends, Racial Justice, and Policing: A Biblical Economy of Care”

Cherice Bock

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute

November 15, 2020

Cherice Bock offered the following message as the worship leader at the Friends Committee on National Legislation annual meeting. The theme of the conference was “Fierce Love,” and participants lobbied their legislators on the Justice in Policing Act ([H.R. 7120](#) / [S. 3912](#)).

***Acknowledgements:** I offer my deep gratitude to Dove John, who served as my elder as I prepared and brought this message. I would also like to thank Friends S.Y. Bowland and Rubye Braye for their insightful comments and suggested edits. I am grateful for their attentiveness and wisdom in helping shape this message for the (digital) page.*

Hello, it’s good to be with you today. I’m coming to you from my meetinghouse out in Oregon. This is Kalapuya land.

My message today is called, “Friends, Racial Justice, and Policing: A Biblical Economy of Care.” I have to tell you that I have had this message on my heart since I was asked to speak to you all several months ago, but I was pretty worried about what we would be able to handle this weekend, depending on the outcome of the election. I imagine most or all of us felt a level of relief when we heard who won the presidential election. And yet, while it is important for those of us working tirelessly for justice to take a break and celebrate small and large joys and steps in the right direction, I am also acutely aware that the next administration is not likely to move us toward an actually just society without our continued advocacy and activism. My encouragement and challenge to you today is for each of us, and for us as a Society of Friends and other partners in this work, to continue working on our own hearts, opening up more and more to that of God in one another, and remaining firmly grounded in the fierce love that is this annual meeting’s theme.

I’m going to tell you about a few of my experiences at Portland’s racial justice protests in these last several months, and I do so not so you’ll be impressed by me (although it’s a mark of my privilege as a white person that you might be), but because I think it is incredibly important for white people to tell these stories and do the emotional labor of trying to communicate about police brutality, its links to racism, and the bigger links to economic access and natural resources. I’ll tell you some stories and connect this with the economy of care we see depicted in the Bible, and then share a few of the high points of my learning about my own internalized white supremacy and settler colonialism as I’ve noticed my own reactions these last several months. While this is in many ways a conversation I’m addressing to white folks, I hope it also shows solidarity with Friends of color, by taking on the work of speaking truth to other white people so you don’t have to, and if I’ve missed the mark on any of my analyses or if (when) I’m still showing blind spots in my internalized biases, I would be grateful for any corrections I need to be given.

Portland Protests

To get us into the themes of today’s message, I’m going to start off with a bit of a story. I was arrested about a month ago and detained for several hours at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement or ICE facility in Portland for tying a balloon to a gate. It was a silver star balloon, and it was one of 193 carried by protesters that night as we marched through the streets, chanting, “No justice? No peace,” and, “Whose streets? Stolen land.” Each balloon represents a life lost in ICE custody since the agency began in 2003. As we approached the building to deliver this symbol, federal agents emerged and arrested several of us, seemingly at random, and pepper sprayed the group—we had just arrived at the facility, and most of us had not yet donned our respirator masks and goggles, which have become standard protest equipment in the months since the murder of George Floyd. As the Department of Homeland Security officer held me down to put zip ties around my wrists, I watched my silver star balloon float away, eerily similar to the soul it represented.

Although surprised to be arrested for that nonviolent direct action, I did not feel particularly scared, which is a mark of the privilege I hold in my white skin and my citizenship status. I was inconvenienced for a few hours, and I spent those hours knowing I shared the building with those who are being detained—many without trial—for indefinite periods of time. I experienced minor police brutality, being thrown to the ground and feeling a bit of pepper spray drift. This punishment was hugely disproportionate to the alleged crime of not obeying the “lawful” order of moving away from the building immediately when asked. And this is why I was out there—I can put my white body on the line to show up the injustice and disproportionately violent reaction of law enforcement. But it is easy to see how this kind of law enforcement behavior, done in full view of members of the press and legal observers on nonviolent protesters, is magnified and intensified when the law enforcers are not being watched, and when they’re dealing with folks who are without the correct legal papers, or who are treated as less valuable in our society because of perceived low income or the color of their skin.

I was wearing a purple reflective vest that says “clergy witness” when this happened, as I have most of the times when I’ve participated in protests. As a Quaker, I don’t usually call myself “clergy” in regular life, as that’s not really the way we speak of ourselves as Friends, but since I’m a recorded minister, I’ll claim it when it allows me to show a visible sign of the faith community standing in solidarity with racial justice activists, and because I get to participate in a network of fiercely loving interfaith leaders. As one minister put it, “There’s something really sobering about being gassed by the state while standing next to a Jewish rabbi.” There is intense solidarity in this group of interfaith clergy. Sometimes protesters ask us why we’re out there, and often thank us for being there. Some get it, and say things like, “It makes sense, Jesus was killed by the state!” Exactly. (Even though we’re an interfaith group, this sentiment is one most of us can agree with.) And when I was in the ICE holding area, waiting to be processed, one of the other people asked me what faith tradition I was from, and I told him Quaker, and he said he was a Mennonite. We smiled behind our masks, and he said it was an honor to experience this together. I agreed, and said, “It is our tradition, as peace churches.”

And it is, isn’t it? At least, this is my perception of our tradition as Friends. Not everyone has to be out in the streets, but we have a history of speaking truth to power, we say we stand in solidarity with those who are being oppressed, and many of us aspire to get in “good trouble,” as

Representative John Lewis put it. Historic and modern Friends often speak up and stand strong when facing inequity, drawing from the spiritual power of justice through love, in the streets, and when lobbying government officials.

Yet, while attempting to speak from this space of truth and justice through fierce love, I'm also convicted about how much learning we have to do as a denomination, and how much we still need to listen and grow in our understanding of what true equity looks like. For those of us who are white, although Friends generally did not support slavery or taking land from Native Americans, we benefitted from cheap access to property and other economic benefits, and people of color have tried to communicate about the injustices we're helping perpetuate. Although those of us who are white are often sympathetic and feel badly about this harm, we tend to have a hard time actually doing anything to change the systems of oppression we're participating in. When the required changes feel like they would be uncomfortable economically, socially, or in terms of our accustomed lifestyles, it seems to me like we often have a hard time sticking with the conversation long enough or with enough openness to our own need for change to actually make it work. By sharing my story, it is my intention to present the case with sufficient honesty, clarity, and completeness that the case will compel us to truth and action this time.

And so, for the rest of what I have to share today, I want to first briefly sketch the connection between police brutality, racism, the economy, the land, and ecology. Then I will offer a few thoughts about what the Bible says about a just economy, presenting a biblical economy of utility, rights, justice, and care. (I realize not everyone here probably considers themselves a Christian, but I hope it will still be meaningful to you to hear about ancient societies that were trying to set themselves up in a way that was just and caring to the most vulnerable individuals in their midst.) And finally, I will offer some of my own learning this summer and fall, places where I've seen glimpses of the Beloved Community emerging among the counterculture of the protest activists, and places where I've felt myself running into my own internalized white supremacy and settler colonialism. It is my hope that this will help us spiritually prepare our hearts for the lobbying we'll do this week on the topic of police brutality, connecting it firmly to our faith tradition. I hope it will also help prepare us for a long-term commitment to action.

If you get nothing else from this message, know that what I am essentially trying to communicate here is that: *When we say, "There is that of God in every one," when we say, "Black lives matter," when we say we stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized, these are intensely relational and profoundly economic and ecological claims that place on us a responsibility of shared use, rights, justice, and care.* And when I say "care," I don't just mean a warm feeling in our hearts, but a responsibility of shared use, rights, and justice, actively showing our care in how we structure our society and lives.

Police Protects Supports Racism, Property "Rights," and Economic and Environmental Injustice

I don't have time in this message to connect all the dots regarding how racism and police brutality are connected to the economy and the land, but luckily, [Lisa Sharon Harper](#) did an excellent job of that yesterday, so if you heard her, hopefully we will already be on the same page. She drew the direct line between the hierarchical power structure present in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, which became the foundation for the Western world's concept of "civilization," to

the Doctrine of Discovery legitimated by popes in the 15th century, encouraging colonization and enslavement of non-Christian populations in order to evangelize them, and the laws in the United States that gave the right to vote only to white Christian males with property, and which continue to favor those categories. Thinking of human beings in this way allowed folks to imagine some as more and some as less human, some as subjects with rights and value, and others as objects to be acted upon, to be used as property.

Police forces emerged in this country as a way to return escaped slaves to their masters—property to its rightful place, under the protection of the “civilized” white man. Laws were created to control access to human and other property, and to ensure that those with property could keep it. Militias formed to take and defend property from Native people, but think about it—when did that land *become* property? Before Europeans arrived, the people belonged to the land. There was shared use of the land, and people practiced care for the land in the sense of mutuality, there was not a concept of ownership of the land. People and land became property on this land of Turtle Island only when it became colonized. People’s labor went into making commodities, and laws were created to keep this system in place. To enforce these laws, one had to buy into the idea that people and land could be property, and that individuals had a right to own them and profit from them.

I told the story about my arrest for trying to place a balloon on a gate because it shows the utter absurdity and arbitrariness of the laws and the way they are enforced. You can see they are protecting their building, and the laws that the building represents about who belongs in this country, and the value (or lack thereof) of the lives of those they say don’t belong. You can also see clearly the issue of protection of property over people in the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor that sparked this most recent energy in the protests for racial justice. George Floyd was arrested for being suspected of having used a counterfeit \$20 bill. For this, he was murdered—without evidence, and even if he had used counterfeit money, the legal punishment is not death. In the case of Breonna Taylor, when the verdict came out regarding the officers’ use of deadly force, the only charges that were found to be enforceable were the ones about the damage to the property of her neighbors. The officers could not be convicted for killing her, but they could be held liable for damaging property. We might well wonder, What were her rights? Were the officers negligent in their duty to care? Was there justice?

These examples make it clear the officers’ job is to protect property: the property of the store owner who thought the bill was counterfeit, the property of homeowners or landlords—and in order to protect that property, they can use lethal force against human beings, particularly those most closely associated with property, and with commodity production.

I gave you my land acknowledgement in the beginning: I live on Kalapuya land, and yesterday in the FCNL opening session we acknowledged the tribes whose land many of us are occupying as we attend this virtual conference. Unless you live on the few miles in Philadelphia that William Penn negotiated with the Native Americans to purchase, and a few other places where amicable treaties were made, the land we live on and the source of all our real property in the US is stolen land taken by force, with laws established after the fact to give us property rights. In my state, Oregon, slavery was never allowed—but it was established as “whites only,” so people of color were not eligible for the Donation Land Claims given out by the Homestead Act. Your state likely has similar stories.

I will not go into more detail here, but suffice it to say that justice is not served by enforcing current laws, for the issues of race, economy, and environment are intertwined with the laws that uphold certain individuals' rights to property, while others have fewer or suppressed rights. This inequity also extends to the heart of many of our laws, causing unequal access to education, voting, employment opportunity, living wages, housing, property, healthcare, and justice in the legal system. Therefore, FCNL's work is of great importance, as we organize together to advocate for just laws that may not be used by white people to continue to lawfully discriminate.

But I think it is easy for most of us who are white to say with our mouths that Black lives matter, and to believe it, and to care about racial justice, but when it comes to actually changing the economic, social, political, and ecological systems that prop up white supremacy in this country, and imperialist ideologies of wealth and status upon which white supremacy is based, we have a hard time actually doing the transformative work, since we benefit from the system as it is.

It's hard work to change the system, and I don't actually have to think about it all the time, as a white person, because it doesn't seem to be visible—it's hidden from me unless I'm paying attention. No white person I know is likely to be driving and get stopped by law enforcement and shot nine times, or have their house broken into by police and be killed in bed, or be out for a jog and be murdered in the street.

Some of this failure to take action is really a failure of imagination, vision, and awareness, because if we're white, we're not confronted with the day-to-day reality of ourselves and our loved ones being in danger. Some of it also comes from fear of what could happen to us, and greed: we must hold on tightly to what we have, because there is the very real concern that if you and I no longer fit our lives to the economic model as it is, because if we do not fortify ourselves with acceptable earnings, a 401k, IRA, savings, investments in the stock market, quality education for our children, health insurance, safe housing, and a retirement plan, you and I will be destitute.

We understand that there is no reliable comprehensive social safety net as a culture. The minimal safety net programs we do have such as SNAP, Medicare and Medicaid, and Social Security are constantly being threatened by cuts. We have no assurance that we won't simply fall down enough rungs on the hierarchical income ladder that we will no longer be able to afford food and shelter. We have no assurance in this country that we will not have to work until we die if we fail to hold a job where we can accrue retirement savings, and yet we rely each day on people doing the jobs that do not allow for savings.

In this way, each of us is constantly struggling to be worthy of being treated as a human being, each of us is competing, each of us is showing we are valuable because we are still producing. This is how the economic and social hierarchy of our society dehumanizes us all, treating us as interchangeable inputs of labor, to be used and discarded, but keeping us at different strata so that at least we're better off than "those" people, whoever is lower on the ladder than we are. In this model, we must live in a constant state of underlying terror, with little room for empathy. We must believe we got to the rung we are on by merit, that the laws that keep us with at least the level of comfort and privileges we enjoy must be just and correct, because otherwise we may lose the level of privilege we do manage to have.

Every once in a while, something breaks through this façade for white folks, like the combination of the pandemic and George Floyd's murder. We recognize injustice, and that this is no way to live, and that if we were not afraid, we would realize that we're all in this together. We

yearn for a society in which no one has to fear the lack of access to education, equal employment opportunity, fair wages, enough healthy food, safe housing, healthcare and medicine, legal justice, fair taxes, senior care, and responsible environmental practices. If our society operated by these ethics, we could acknowledge our own inherent value and the humanity of every one, we could care for ourselves, and we could care for one another.

A Biblical Economy of Care: the Beloved Community

This brings us to the next section, about the biblical economy of care, because it is this same vision that I believe the Bible points us toward, both in Jesus' vision of a [kin-dom of God](#) (Ada María Isasi-Díaz) and in the [shalom community](#) (Randy Woodley) to which the Israelites were invited in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Luke 4:18–19, Jesus announces his ministry by reading from Isaiah 61:1–2a:

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because I have been anointed
to bring good news to the poor.
I am sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jesus says his message is primarily good news to the poor, to prisoners, to the blind and the oppressed. Think about your meeting or church's main message. Do the poorest and most marginalized in your neighborhood consider it good news? Jesus sets this up as his mission statement, the message around which he shapes his ministry. His message is of meeting the needs of real people, feeding them and healing them, inviting them into community when they had been cast aside. This is a message that threatened the religious and political leaders of his day, for which he was killed, because it unmasked and refused to follow the systems of power that legitimated their roles in society.

Jesus proclaims the year of the Lord's favor, by which the text means the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Israelites were to practice the Sabbath on the seventh day of each week, set aside for resting and focusing on God; this is one of the ten commandments. The law also calls for a Sabbath year every seventh year, in which their land was to rest. The seven-times-seventh Sabbath year was extra important, the year of Jubilee: the people were to not only let their land rest, but they were to return all land to its ancestral owners, and forgive all debts. People who had been indentured servants would have their debts forgiven and they would be free. Each of the 12 tribes of Israel had traditional lands for their families to steward in perpetuity, and if any of them had to sell their land, the land would revert back to the tribe in the year of Jubilee. This would essentially be a big reset button on wealth inequality, as well as giving the land and its creatures time to rest and not have to produce. This went for the people, too. They would return to their ancestral lands and have a break. Everyone would have been saving up food to last them through this time, and they could eat the fruit the land produced on its own. In a passage that may

be familiar to Friends, Micah 4:3b-4a says:

3 they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;
4 but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;

In this vision of the community God intends for the Israelites to live in, each person has what they need: they have shelter and food; they do not need weapons. No one needs to be afraid. No group can overpower the others to take their land and resources forever. This is the vision of community shalom, or holistic peace, to which God invites the Israelites in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it is a community in which the social, the economic, and the ecological are in healthy balance, interconnected and integrally reliant on one another.

In Luke 4, Jesus proclaims that his message is like this year of Jubilee, it will be that level of good news for the poor and oppressed. It is a message of belonging and economic freedom, of creating a healthy space in which all can thrive, where each has their own vine and fig tree and no one needs to be afraid. Each person is valued and participates in an economy of care, making their needs known, receiving what they need, and providing for the needs of others.

His followers eventually learn this lesson, although at first, if you read the Gospels, you see his closest disciples think he's going to establish an earthly kingdom, and claim a throne of empire. He shows them his alternative vision of the kin-dom of God, or the Beloved Community as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called it (following Josiah Royce, see the [King Center](#)'s summary). In back to back passages in Matthew 19–20, we can hear Jesus' Jubilee message loud and clear. A rich young man comes to Jesus and says he's followed all the commandments his whole life, but still feels something is lacking. Jesus invites him to sell all he has and give the money to the poor, but the man goes away sad, unprepared for this level of discipleship. Jesus' disciples feel they have done this already, and he tells them many who are last will be first, and those who seem to be first will be last, then he launches into a parable about the kin-dom of heaven. He says it is like a landowner who pays the same wages to those who arrived at the crack of dawn as those who just arrived at sundown. The earliest ones seem to think this is unfair; they think they have earned more than the late arrivals, but the landowner asks them, "Are you envious because I am generous?" The economy in this image Jesus paints shows care for all the workers, not basing value on productivity, but on humanity.

And the final passages I'll point us to are in Acts 2 and 4. After Jesus is no longer with them in person, the disciples establish a community that gathers together often for worship and to eat together. While it is clear that this community is human—arguments break out regarding which people should be in charge of food distribution in chapter 6, and some are caught lying about their generosity in chapter 5—the community is set up to reflect Jesus' vision of the year of Jubilee.

Acts 2:44–45

44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Acts 4:32–35

32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

This was a community of genuine care, in which people felt so strongly included that they were willing to share literally all they had. That is what fierce love looks like, is it not?

Although these examples from the Bible seem somewhat idealistic, they tell us the kind of economy and society, the approach to land and resource distribution, that Christianity and Judaism point to, and that early Friends patterned their communities after. You may be tempted to dismiss it as communism or socialism, but this is straight out of the Bible. I appreciate what Lisa Sharon Harper mentioned yesterday regarding capitalism distracting white folks from anti-racism: she said any economic and political system can be used to distract us and help us harm others, if we idolize it. I think what happens is we get too stuck on the legalism of following all the rules, and we forget about the humanity of one another, we forget about simply caring for one another as human beings—we forget to think about whether the laws are helping or hindering other people. So, in whatever political and economic and social and ecological system we find ourselves, we can practice an economy of care for one another—and in whatever system we're in, if it's one that tends toward empire, it will try to separate us, make us afraid, and keep us from trying to care for one another. So that is our work wherever and whenever we are, to build an economy of care.

A New Beloved Community Forming in the Streets

Friends, this summer I have seen something beautiful emerge in the streets of Portland, something that looks an awful lot more like a church than a lot of churches (or meetings) do. It is messy and it is decentralized and I often wish there was more order to it, but I have seen so much kindness and generosity, so much mutual care, so much genuine concern for one another. Everyone is still human and there are annoying things that happen and there are power grabs, but there is also connectedness and the emergence of a new Beloved Community. This moves us to the final section of this talk, where I share some reflections about what I'm learning about an economy of care through the protests, and how I'm faced with my own internalized white supremacy and settler colonialism. I share these reflections in hopes that they will encourage and challenge you, too.

As the protests began outside the Justice Center in downtown Portland, folks noticed there were people living there, and they began bringing food and supplies to feed those who made their home in the park. Other protesters could eat, too, and folks could pay what they were able, and everyone got enough. People organized into mutual aid groups and began circulating around the protest group with supplies such as hand sanitizer, earplugs, wipes for getting tear gas out of your

eyes, and even respirator masks and new filters. Other groups brought snacks and water bottles (and plenty of hand sanitizer), and a snack van emerged. Medical teams formed, wearing red crosses to identify themselves. I saw countless medics helping others out of clouds of tear gas, helping them recover as they coughed, vomited, and cried the tear gas out of their systems. (I'll make a note here that although I went to a couple events early in June, I was initially concerned about protests as vectors of the Coronavirus, but after research started coming out that protests do not seem to be problematic virus spreaders, since everyone is wearing masks and being careful, I decided this was a worthy enough reason to venture out of my otherwise tight Coronavirus bubble. However, there is some risk to medics as strangers spew bodily fluids at them, one among many of the reasons many of us petitioned the city and the state to outlaw the use of CS gas, which they have not effectively done to this day, even though it is [illegal to use against enemy troops and civilians according to the Geneva Conventions](#).) So, there are heroic medics, risking life and limb to be ready to help those who are injured. A group called jail support collects donations and brings snacks and coffee to those being released from a night in jail, and helps ensure that each person gets safely home, even if their car keys and phones have been confiscated and sent to a different facility. (Yes, this happens regularly.)

Additionally, there are now a variety of service-oriented “blocs” popping up all over Portland. Each week throughout the summer and fall, numerous groups were offering their services, such as mending bloc, mechanic bloc, and art therapy bloc. Groups with a special interest or skill set up in a park and people come to learn, get help, and heal.

When the fires occurred in Oregon in September, the mutual aid groups switched from providing food and supplies for protesters to organizing necessities for those displaced by fires.

Protesters have been monitoring a Black-owned home for the last several months to make sure its owners cannot be evicted due to foreclosure, citing gentrification and anti-Black housing policies in the past and present. When raids by white nationalists or law enforcement happen in encampments of people without homes, the protest community is alerted and people arrive to stand in the way, to de-escalate, to help the residents gather up their belongings to move to another location, and to at very least bear witness.

Groups of protesters have formed out of this experience of bonding in the streets. In addition to my clergy group, I've been incredibly inspired by a group of Quaker young adults who formed a network, building community with other Friends we've known for years and friends of friends, coworkers, and so forth. This is our tradition, and although these young adults experienced some painful things in organized religion as our yearly meeting went through some really hard years, resulting in a split in 2017, these Friends retained the heart of our tradition: standing for justice in fierce love, and building community along the way, mutually supporting one another.

This reminds me of early Friends, who did not intend to become a denomination known for social justice, but who went about their own business, acting as faithfully and equitably as they could, and for this they were imprisoned. Going to prison themselves, their eyes were opened to the deplorable conditions, the lack of education and economic opportunity, and they began working in practical ways to help, as well as in using their voices to speak truth to power in the political realm.

Today's protest community can be challenging: there are grifters, there are those who want to use the protests to build their own personal brand and political influence, there are (every once

in a while) outside agitators or undercover agents trying to make protesters look bad. The people are human and the situations are stressful, and we're in the middle of a pandemic with tremendous economic impact. Many protesters are employed, but many are struggling financially and still trying to show up and stand up as best they know how.

This is the Beloved Community, a group of misfits and outsiders, folks who make mistakes and think too highly of themselves, and folks with kind and genuine hearts who refuse to give up on justice. Many of these protesters embody fierce love, and it looks a lot like the year of Jubilee and the Kin-dom of God I spoke of earlier. They are showing us what an economy of care looks like. In Matthew 25, Jesus said it's the folks who are feeding, giving water, and visiting in prison the "least of these" who are Jesus' true followers, so they are following in his Way.

Internalized White Supremacy Surfacing and Transforming

Although I was raised a Quaker and was taught our denominational history of abolition with pride, and although my family members participated in the Civil Rights Movement, although I have devoted my career to studying and teaching about biblical justice issues and I've done community organizing around environmental and climate justice, I realized this summer and fall I still have a lot to learn about my own internalized white supremacy and settler colonialism. Therefore, I want to share a little bit of my learning with you, because I think it will be helpful and instructive.

First, what is the first criticism you hear about the protests? You likely hear about violence and looting. I have personally not seen violence from the protesters, although I know that it does occasionally happen. I have seen broken windows (but no one taking anything from inside) and trash fires. I have bumped into major feelings of discomfort around this, and I've learned a lot. First of all, notice that you may have thought of broken windows and trash fires as violence, but this is actually *property destruction*. I think this tells us something about ourselves when we start to notice what we consider violence, and what we think of as justifiable to do to human beings in response to property destruction. Maybe you don't think police violence is legitimate in any situation, because you're likely a proponent of nonviolence in all circumstances, given the folks who are likely to be at an FCNL gathering. But you can see this line of thinking happening in society: that police violence is warranted because protesters are destroying property, which they term "violence," and I imagine many of you have thought of protesters' property destruction as violence. This shows us that we're *equating property with people*. I have heard a lot of outrage over broken windows in recent weeks, and quite a bit less about police brutality against the protesters, who are human beings. We, as white folks, get bored with the conversation and want to move on, or turn against the protests when their tactics might require us to confront unjust economic systems we benefit from. What does this say about us?

As a Quaker with a commitment to nonviolence, this conversation about what is an "acceptable" form of protest has stretched me, as I imagine it may have many of you. Part of the critique I hear is about how the protesters don't look, sound, and act respectable. When protesters must be impeccably "respectful," this is to tone-police: it is a way for white folks to set the terms of what is considered civilized. It allows those in power to imagine that if the protesters only looked respectable, if "we" felt comfortable with "them," then the protests would work, and society would change. This is a way of blaming the victims of violence, akin to blaming a woman for her

assault because she's dressed provocatively and, as such, did not deserve humane treatment and justice. It allows those of us who are white to be judgmental spectators who have not yet been moved enough by others' suffering to consider them deserving of our sympathy. This also assumes "we" (white people) have power to decide when "they" (people of color) deserve to be treated with dignity and value, whereas protests are a way for people to rise up with their own power and speak from a space of humanity.

If "we" (folks who have power in the system) are willing to respond to others calling out in this way to our own humanity, it does *not* mean we will deign to offer a helping hand—this is the charity model, in which those with power get to retain their power, but make things slightly more bearable. Instead, the claim being made on us is to respond to one another's humanity. This means we will join the struggle in solidarity, recognizing that our freedom is bound up together.

Furthermore, I have been challenged to recognize the intersectional nature of the civil disobedience (including property damage) that protesters are engaging in. Although it's easy for me, as someone who benefits from property rights as they are (for the most part), to condemn acts of property destruction and wonder why this is being done to protest racism, it looks quite different from the perspective of Native Americans and those whose ancestors were forced to work the land for others' profit. Who made these laws about land and property? How was the land obtained? Who has a right to what land? Who do these laws about land benefit? How are the laws enforced? Who assesses justice regarding land, and how is justice measured?

As discussed earlier, the economic aspects of racism are clear. By continuing to make visible both the economic impact and the brutality of police response, protesters are keeping us focused on these topics. You may not like their tactics, but for me, I've been challenged to come face to face with my own white supremacy in my thoughts about my and others' right to the land and economic benefits. I work hard and I honestly barely get by financially, but I'm educated and I'm able to own property because of my ancestors owning real estate before me, and passing down inheritance and connections. My Quaker forebears bought into the idea of Manifest Destiny, that this land was a gift and a blessing for us—"This land was made for you and me," not for those from whom we stole it (this implies)—and in so doing, we participated in stealing the land.

I've been confronted with my own lack of any actual entitlement to what I have. I've been confronted with the falsehood of my presumptions about what is fair in terms of land and property rights. While it does no one any good to feel shame about any of our ancestors who are of European descent, we can recognize the harm that has been done, and that it has yet to be righted. Civil disobedience, designed to point this out, continues to call us to recognize and acknowledge the lies and injustices upon which we're basing our lives and identities as Americans of European descent. Those engaging in civil disobedience are speaking the truth to *us* about the power we hold. This is a challenge to stop telling lies about our collective history, and to seek justice in every societal institution.

For those of us with some power in the system as it now is, how will we respond when we are the ones to whom truth is being spoken? Will we respond by recognizing others' humanity and just claims? Or, when the query becomes economic, will we get caught up in our learned patterns of white supremacy, assuming we have a right to this land and its resources?

And most importantly, how might we as Friends, or those in my community, model the moral practice of an economy of care for the world?

Consider these questions: What happens when something goes wrong in my life or in our economy and it is not enough to have worked hard my whole life, set by a 401k, IRA, savings, retirement plans, and investments in the stock market, invested in a quality education for my children, and had health insurance and safe housing? Who will be humane to me and to us? Will others do unto us as we have done unto them? Can we stop being afraid and self-serving long enough to begin to create a future with a Beloved Community, where the needs of all may be addressed?

This starts but does not end with elections and holding our lawmakers accountable to create just laws. Many of the elected officials currently do not align with values that honor the inherent worth of each person. While we may lobby them, in many cases the message falls on deaf ears. To create change, we must work to elect and support legislators and officials from top to bottom on the ballots, those with the courage and insight to change existing unjust laws, craft new equitable laws, and discontinue laws that do not serve all of us. This is transformational work. This is how we dismantle white supremacy, with the combination of organizing and activism in the streets, and lobbying and creating just laws that support our whole community.

Protesting in the streets is an important way to keep pressure on those who we've elected to make our laws, and using tactics that get and keep people's attention is essential in keeping up the pressure long enough to effect real change on the topics listed above. However, electing legislators who understand these matters and crafting more equitable legislation is also critically important for developing an equitable and sustainable political, social, economic, and ecological system. For example, Social Security and Medicare are government run social programs designed to care for the aged, and though not enough, are better than nothing, and could be improved through caring legislation. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a government run social program designed to provide food for persons who otherwise would go hungry.

Perhaps you have never needed food assistance. Perhaps you have good health insurance and a retirement plan that will sustain you beyond Social Security. This is not a foregone conclusion for many people in the United States, including myself, an "Xennial" who has worked hard since I was 15 but I'm currently in the first job in my life with real health insurance (for myself, but not my family), with student loan debt, and with few retirement savings. Imagine what the conditions for people who are aged and/or low income would be like without the partial safety net programs we do have. Now add in the fact that 44.7 million Americans hold a total of \$1.47 trillion in student loan debt, based on a 2018 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Many will never be positioned to pay this off with minimum wage jobs that do not even provide a living wage. Better legislation is needed to ensure our system works for all people.

Our legislators address education, loans, interest, jobs, wages, taxes, treaties, laws, and law enforcement. In the mid-1900s, legislators saw a need to care for the aged, ill, and families in need and created necessary and comprehensive policies, laws, and programs to address these needs. Like the treaties and laws that were used to steal Native American land, some of the laws were unjust and discriminatory. The "get tough on crime" laws were used to fill prisons with people of color. Redlining laws were used to restrict housing opportunities for people of color within certain parts of town. Neighborhood school laws were used to maintain segregated schools. The list could go on and on. The point is that legislators and legislation matter, and laws can be used to help or to harm. Engaging in protests to demonstrate against unjust laws helps lawmakers recognize the

importance of the moral choices they are making when they support new and existing laws.

The questions and the answers discussed here have helped me to confront truth about the injustice of laws past and present, and the unequal application of those laws through use of force by law enforcement. My experiences have also helped me prime myself for change. This is not change for the sake of change. The intent is to change in areas and ways that make it evident that we care about the humanity of all people and are committed to planning for our communal needs and safety.

The next area where I have learned a lot about my white privilege is in the area of policing. I have come face to face with police brutality, its basis in dehumanizing people and protecting property over people, and the racist practices law enforcement perpetrates. I've witnessed excessive and unnecessary use of force on peaceful protesters. At times when white nationalists have been present with weapons, I've witnessed law enforcement stand between the groups, facing racial justice protesters, protecting white nationalists. I saw this in Salem, OR last weekend, and it was on clear display the weekend of our FCNL annual meeting in videos from Washington, DC. When white nationalists threaten, physically harm, and mace nonviolent racial justice protesters, law enforcement officers do not intervene, or appear in normal uniforms on bikes. Contrast that with the armored vehicles and riot gear with which they show up to nonviolent racial justice protests.

While I understood in my head that police brutality was occurring, and that it occurred more often against people of color, particularly Black Americans, experiencing this myself has been eye opening. I have been surprised by the level to which the social and economic status quo requires control of property, including people viewed by our economic system as property, but this is only news to me because I'm white and I've had the privilege of being able to ignore it. But when I ignore this brutality, it does not go away: real human beings such as George Floyd die, real people are incarcerated on minimal or nonexistent charges, families are separated, and generations of people of color are systematically disenfranchised and receive unequal economic and educational opportunities. These challenges are not limited to people of color, but they are experienced at disproportionately high rates in communities of color. We must all recognize the need to build an economy of care, rather than an economy based on fear, inequity, and false notions of superiority.

Hopefully all of this communicates that an important movement is afoot right now in the United States: we seem to be at a moment of racial reckoning where more white people are engaging with this work than in previous waves of justice movements. Protests in the streets help keep the conversation alive, and keeps reminding those of us who can otherwise ignore it of the pressing nature of the issue of racism in this country, and its connections to police brutality and economic factors. For those of us who are white, this means we need to actually dig in and do some hard internal and interpersonal work. Part of this work is [listening to and believing people of color](#) about their experiences of racism. And then it means showing true care by opening our hearts and imaginations enough to change our orientation toward unjust systems, and to dismantle these oppressive systems in ourselves and the institutions in which we have power.

And so, I'll return you to the main point I told you I was trying to make: *When we say, "There is that of God in every one," when we say, "Black lives matter," when we say we stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized, these are intensely relational and profoundly*

economic and ecological claims that place on us a responsibility of care. As I've experienced these protests, I've noticed four things of significance: 1) There is an emerging Beloved Community in the streets that stands up with truth, fierce love, and a refusal to be dehumanized, 2) I've seen a glimpse of something like the biblical economy of care that can take different forms, such as the structured year of Jubilee of the Hebrew Scriptures or the organic group of folks trying their best to follow the Jesus Way to resist and dismantle the oppression of empire, 3) I've felt truth spoken to my unearned power, challenging me with an economic and ecological message regarding laws that created and uphold my unearned and unjust access to this land, and 4) my internalized white settler colonialism needs to be reframed to value people over property.

I invite you to let this message settle, and let it fuel your heart and spirit with truth needed for the continued work of justice. As we lobby our legislators this week and beyond, may we retain an ongoing commitment to individual and communal work to dismantle racism, including but not limited to police brutality. May we not tire of partnering with other organizations, may we use the power of our votes and our voices, and may we unseat and replace the local, state, and national representatives who do not stand with persons committed to the love and care of all of humanity and the active work of responsible environmental care. Again, this is our transformational work.