



### Trudging

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This week we trudge toward the crucifixion. We walk toward Good Friday with Jesus, who stumbled under the weight of the physical cross he carried. Carrying a metaphorical cross as well, he also bore the weight of the systems of oppression and injustice that our sins had built. Jesus ministered on the margins. He met with, dined with, cured, and forgave people on the fringes of society. When religious practices and doctrine excluded all but a privileged few, he challenged the system. When cultural norms systemically suppressed women, poor and sick people, and foreigners, Jesus showed both a love of neighbor and unrelenting advocacy for change. The cross he carried to Golgotha was heavier than just the lumber from which it was built.

This week, as we trudge toward the crucifixion, we, too, should reflect on the cultural and religious systems that continue to oppress and marginalize people. Our government leaders are now confronting the statistic that African Americans have a much steeper rate of infection and death from the coronavirus than the Anglo population. President Trump acknowledged the racial disparity at yesterday's White House task force briefing. According to a study reported by the Washington Post, **counties that are majority-black have 3 times the rate of infections and almost 6 times the rate of deaths as counties where white residents are in the majority.** Not all counties report COVID-19 patients by race, but those that do confirm this statistic. In Milwaukee County, African Americans account for about 70% of the dead but just 26% of the population.

Milwaukee Mayor Barrett acknowledged this on a call with faith leaders last week. He couldn't explain why it was occurring but was quick to recognize the role that systemic racism and segregation has likely played. Due to job inequality and housing discrimination, Blacks are more likely to live in denser housing units than on suburban acreage, to rely on public transportation than the privacy of a personal car, and to hold service jobs that demand constant interaction with the general populous than corporate occupations with private offices.

These aren't hard and fast rules. White people experience poverty, ride buses, live in apartments in the inner city, and work in fast food. African Americans live in the suburbs, drive nice cars, and have occupations that bring authority and wealth. Statistically, however, greater percentages of African Americans face the economic inequality that drives these life patterns.

Then, there's access to healthcare. For all the same reasons, African Americans have historically lacked access to quality healthcare, leading to diseases that put them in a category of increased vulnerability to the coronavirus. Surgeon General of the United States Jerome Adams, a black man, explained the connection using a personal example, "I've shared myself personally that I have high blood pressure, that I have heart disease and spent a week in the ICU due to a heart condition, that I actually have asthma and I'm prediabetic, and so I represent that legacy of growing up poor and black in America."

This week we trudge toward the crucifixion, knowing that hundreds of thousands of people face the risk of serious illness or death AND knowing that sisters and brothers of color have an even heightened risk. The weight of that knowledge is the cross we bear. It causes us to stumble and fall to our knees. Were it not for the One who went before us to Golgotha, it would lead us to the tomb. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer!