

A World In Need

March 28, 2018

Milwaukee Presbytery doesn't shy away from tough issues. When asked after the Presbytery Gathering what issues you think we ought to tackle in our communities, you jumped right into the fray, identifying huge problems of our day. Your responses read like a list of superlatives:

Opioid crisis/drug addiction: drug-overdose deaths from opioids have reached epidemic levels, five times higher than in 1999;

Gun violence: the US rate of murder by firearm is the highest in the developed world, leading hundreds of thousands of people to march this past weekend for an end to gun violence;

Hunger: in the US, 41 million people, including 13 million children, struggle with hunger;

Racism: Milwaukee is still considered the most racially segregated city;

Mass incarceration: the United States has the highest prison population rate in the world, outranking even countries with similar penal systems;

Human trafficking: more people are enslaved in the world today than at any other time in recorded history;

Homelessness: Milwaukee County has the highest homeless population in Wisconsin; and so the list continues.

The magnitude of these problems may make us feel hopeless, angry, anxious to get moving, saddened, or overwhelmed. We live in a world with great pain and injustice.

As we complete our Lenten journey this week, however, we are reminded starkly that this is the world Jesus Christ chose to enter, and the world for which he chose to suffer and die. We can scarcely imagine of the depth of God's love for a world such as ours. We would rather, I think, tidy up our churches and polish the pews to welcome the risen Christ on Easter Sunday, putting our best face forward.

But Christ is not fooled by our façade. Knowing full well that this world labored with addiction, violence, greed, division, and evil, Christ came anyway. No, it's more: Christ came precisely because of that. Fully human and fully divine, he chose to take on all our sin, once and forever, out of love. That truth should drop us to our knees.

But we can't stay on our knees, and you've shown that you know that. We are called to love our neighbors, imperfections and all. We are called to seek the wellbeing of our communities, no matter how flawed. Don't fret: we are *not* called to save the world by our own efforts. We are only asked to turn our focus outward to the world God so loved that he chose to give his only Son, so that all may have eternal life. By that promise – not our efforts -- we will find the certain hope the world so desperately needs and the courage to act.