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“Settle with your opponent quickly, while on your way to court” (Matt 5:24).

Acts 11:21b-26; 13:1-3; Matt 5:20-26

A Living Word in today's readings addresses the need for deep reconciliation just as the nation is trying to move from street protests to meaningful policy change. The timeliness of this resonance between Word and World should not surprise us, because we are clearly witnessing an extraordinary moment of grace. A rising chorus of voices is crying out that we better get this right while events confront us, because the chance may not come again.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says that anger and hatred are equivalent to murder and will be judged as such. Calling someone a fool violates Torah, leads to hell and renders one unworthy to pray. Like litigants on their way to court, the disciples of Jesus are warned to settle quickly before a judge throws them into prison until the last penny is paid.

Jesus is describing what we call "mortal sin," when anger devolves into bitter contention, sinking roots into the psyche. How many family fights over honor, principle or money have divided siblings, destroyed the bond between parent and child, poisoned future generations who can't remember what the original rift was about.

Many say that American racism is so deep and destructive that it will never be resolved. Even if laws are changed, hearts will never submit to the hard work of truth and reconciliation because the sin is so imbedded in our politics, culture, history and even our religion. Jesus wept over Jerusalem for the failure of her leaders to know the hour of their visitation and the grace being offered them to avert disaster.

Jesus confronts the hypocrites who condemn murder but sow discord that kills the spirit of reconciliation that alone can bring healing. His teaching on forgiveness cut to the core of human pride, and few have followed it. Even Paul and Barnabas had a falling out that was unreconciled. Still, together they laid the foundation of mercy for a sinful church that still preaches and sometimes succeeds at keeping the ideal.

Conflict is part of life, tension is inevitable, why dialogue is so essential to create community instead of chaos. Humanity itself is a fragile experiment that proves that our shared vulnerability is why we all need the common good, just laws and social equality. God so loved the world that Jesus gave his life to teach us to love another, not as an option but as the only way the world will survive. Because of another terrible tragedy, we have the chance to be a turning point in the long history of brutal injustices instead of the tipping point into violence that will threaten everyone

who still dreams of a world where love and justice are the rule and not the exception.

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