

July 29, 2020

In Boston and around the country, we mourn the death of Mimi Jones, a veteran of the civil rights movements, who lived in Roxbury and visited this church, speaking on several occasions and serving communion. As news of her passing spread, tributes from local officials and national leaders have poured in. So, we add our tribute by dedicating this reflection to Mimi Jones, Civil Rights Activist and Justice fighter.

Will you pray with me? Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, Amen.

And Elisha prayed, open his eyes, “Lord so that he may see.” 2 Kings 6

One day, out of the clear blue, a man found himself surrounded and in what seemed like a hopeless situation. Threats were on every side with no way out. Frightened and confused, he ran to his boss, the prophet Elisha, who was nearby. Elisha quickly reassured him that what he perceived was only part of the truth, and far from the full picture. The man’s eyes could only see the impending adversity, yet they were blinded to the presence of God. All he could see was danger!

Have you ever responded to a circumstance this way? As the saying goes, “Seeing is believing.” But what about the times we do not see the whole picture? Do we have the faith to know that God is at work and there is more involved than what meets the eye?

Even now as a nation, we are facing difficult times with threats and adversity all around us. We have people who are infected from the Covid-19 virus, the rate is increasing in parts of the country, and we mourn the loss of nearly 150,000 people - our friends, family members, colleagues, neighbors. Many parents are concerned about sending their children back to school. People have lost their jobs, housing, businesses, and ability to feed themselves and their families.

There is great suffering and loss. The pandemic has made it impossible to ignore deep systemic inequalities as civil unrest and protesters of all hues of color and ages are raising their voices and marching in the streets across this nation.

The disease of racism is not just a white policeman kneeling on a black man’s neck.... it is decades of housing policy that leave the average black family in Boston with \$8 in wealth while the average white family has approximately \$ 250,000. We are all looking for relief! Yes! Some days we feel helpless and as I say, “out of order.”

You do not have to go looking for trouble, because it is seeking us out, demanding our attention and working to impact our thought process and our mindset.

In these times it is critical for us to know that that there is more to the story and the circumstances than what is screaming for our attention.

There are other factors at play, like the fact that God is love, and is working on our behalf. God is one who puts Himself in harm’s way to show love and care. We need to be reminded that we are not in this thing alone, my friends.

In our scripture we learned that the servant saw looked at the circumstances in front of him and feared the worst.

Elisha saw at as an opportunity and moved towards it in confidence. His prayer was not to take away the threat, or remove fear, or to give strength, but simply, “open his eyes,” that he may perceive the true story, the picture. Open his eyes, so that he sees God in the storms of life and there is no reason to fear.

“Open eyes” are what changes things in us and for us. Not only does the opening of our eyes cause the silencing of our fears, the opening of our eyes empowers us to move in every given circumstance with confidence that God is in the picture.

In 1964 a 17-year-old girl named Mimi Nell Ford Jones joined other young activists in a “swim-in” at a white-only hotel swimming pool in St. Augustine, Florida to protest Jim Crow segregation. Photos of the demonstration - including one showing Mimi screaming while the manager of the hotel poured acid into the pool behind her - became iconic, circulating around the world. In recalling the events of that day, Mimi reported that a fully clothed policeman jumped into the pool, not to *help* the protesters but to *arrest* them.

With open eyes Mimi Jones saw the “big picture” of the God of JUSTICE and LOVE at work....in the universe and at work in her life.

With open eyes she could see freedom not just for herself, but for others as well. That is selfless love.

She could taste the freedom and the right to vote that were promised to black people after the Civil War but systematically denied. Instead, for many decades black people were brutalized and traumatized by state-sanctioned lynching. And it was in the 1950's and 1960's that courageous people like Mimi Jones, her family, and countless others marched, demonstrated, protested, and prayed, until Jim Crow and segregation were legally dismantled. Mimi Jones' moment of protest propelled a movement that lit the fuse for the Selma and Montgomery Campaigns, which resulted in the Voters' Rights Act of 1965.

Mimi Jones was my friend and she was a friend of Old South Church. She looked at the world with Open Eyes, spiritual eyes, because seeing is not always believing. God invites us to open our eyes so that we can come up a little higher and see the sunlight and see God's power and majesty at work.

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Seeing with open eyes enables us to do as our God does - Love anyway as Mimi and Elisha did.

Elisha prayed, open his eyes, “Lord so that he may see.” May it be so...