



The Importance of Voices

We are in a time when many people feel they have no voice. Some have turned their frustration into violence because it is easy; because it gives them a feeling of power and control; because it gets attention. For others, frustration turns their focus inward. Personal concerns and needs take over. Nothing and no one else matters. In the name of getting what they want, they will do most anything, even give up or take away rights and privileges; and destroy relationships generations of people have struggled to achieve, preserve, and protect. There are some who glory in such times as these because they know how to step in and manipulate frustrated people. They use fear not facts. They belittle and demonize those who have different views. They encourage division and create suspicion. They build a cult of personality around themselves, claiming they alone can fix whatever is 'wrong' since only they have the power and ability to do so. There is another way of facing these times, and some do choose it. Reaching out not inward is required. It means not assuming you are the only one who is frustrated or hurting. It means looking for common ground with those around you. It is critical to understanding that every time you try to get what you want at someone else's expense, you hurt them and yourself. The idea that anyone is 'self-made' or can 'go it alone,' is a myth. Everyone is important and valuable in God's eyes and should be in our eyes too. Value comes from being created in God's image, not from wealth or position. We are all better off when we use the voices we have to work for the common good. Jesus charges us with the responsibility of caring for our brothers and sisters as well as for ourselves. When we seek isolation and superiority, we hurt everyone including ourselves. When we seek the common good, everyone is better off.

This week, in your prayer time remember:

- **Hungry People** – Over 40 million people in America do not know where they will get their next meal. They live with food insecurity, meaning they do not have consistent access to nutritious food. (See the Church of the Brethren Office of Peace Building and Policy *Action Alert* for information on some thing you can do to help. <https://mailchi.mp/brethren/food-insecurity?e=9be2c75ea6>)
- **The people in the Middle East.** The newly announced agreement between the U.S. President and the Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel is "nothing less than a recipe for endless oppression and injustice," says a statement from Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP). "Palestinians for far too long have suffered under Israeli military control.... The proposed plan would further entrench the Israeli security establishment, ensuring that generations of Israeli young men and women will serve in a military tasked with continuing control of the Palestinian people. The inevitable result will be more human rights abuses, trauma, and violence.... It is clear that Christian values are being weaponized in an attempt to give a veneer of moral legitimacy to a plan that is, in fact, meant to facilitate further Israeli control over Palestinian lives, land, and resources. The use of Judeo and Christian religious and spiritual imagery to justify political aims and agendas is idolatry." (see https://cmep.org/2020/01/29/response_trump_plan for the full CMEP statement.) This agreement will make Israelis less safe and Palestinians facing greater abuse and oppression.
- **People Facing Religious or Ethnic Discrimination & Persecution.** January 31st, the American President expanded his Muslim ban by suspending immigrant visas that can lead to permanent status in the United States for nationals of Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Burma, and **Nigeria**, while also banning **Sudanese** and Tanzanian nationals from obtaining "diversity visas," provided to individuals from countries with low rates of immigration into the U.S. This ban, along with the Presidents "Migrant Protection Protocols", now a year old, violate the human rights of all people affected, is a shameful act by a nation created by emigrants, and is a violation of God's call to his people to welcome the stranger and care for those in need. (see the Church of the Brethren Office of Peace Building and Policy Action Alert, "Call on Congress to oppose the new Muslim Ban Expansion", and the Church of the Brethren 1982 Statement on Undocumented Persons and Refugees in the United States)



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