

Last week, I reflected on the Christian proclamation of Easter and the hope it gives to the faithful - and through the faithful, to all creation. I have been intentional this Easter season to be mindful of all things hopeful. I invite you to do the same. What signs of hope meet you each day? How do they transform your outlook on life and our world? What do they say to you about the future? Consider keeping a journal for a few weeks or discussing these signs of hope (and these questions for reflection) with family and friends as you recap the day together.

I had the opportunity last week to participate in a gathering at the Capitol commemorating May Day (May 1), the internationally recognized workers' day. As a pastor, I serve a local congregation that is connected to a larger church body and engaged in ecumenical and interfaith relationships. As such, I am occasionally (with others) invited by these partner organizations to attend such events as a representative of the faith community. I was asked at this particular occasion to speak a gospel word to the gathered assembly. That afternoon was a sign of hope for me.

Standing in the rain were hundreds of people reflecting the beautiful ethnic diversity of our society. As Spanish-speaking organizers led a slow march through the streets of Madison, Latino high school students and a singing group of white women who call themselves "The Raging Grannies" led the assembling crowd in songs and chants about "being the light" and being a voice for equality and social/economic justice. As the march joined the gathered assembly, the speakers began their rally.

We heard from local artists and activists, from area students, teachers, workers, and farmers. We heard from Latino voices, African-American voices, women and men, youth and adults. I was most struck by the fact that while every speaker represented a particular group with particular concerns, they all took time to name the needs of others - immigrant youth speaking about LGBTQ+ justice, black women lifting up the needs of refugees, Latino men confronting the particular violence historically and presently endured by African-Americans, and young Arabs calling out the abuses in our state-run youth detention facilities.

It was a day set apart to address labor justice, but it turned into a beautiful display of a diverse community seeing the particular needs of one another and recognizing that an injury to one is an injury to all. As young and old, white, black and brown, wealthy and poor, rural and urban came together in solidarity and mutual recognition of one another, we all caught a glimpse of what hope looks like. For me, it was a glimpse at what the reign of God looks like.

An injury to one is an injury to all. As I took my turn at the microphone, I shared how my faith in Jesus affirms that statement, as we are all connected as branches of one vine, members of one body. When one of us suffers, we all suffer. And I shared with them the good news that we are one body united for life and known by a God of love and justice. It was a rare moment when it seemed that I was looking upon the faces of the very words of the gospel which I was speaking in faith. Here we were, young and old, of every race, gender, ethnicity, and economic status, gathered into one community where everyone was seen, heard, and cared for. The hope of dignity, justice, and life for all people was our shared vision and the proclamation in everyone's heart and voice.

Of course, we soon dispersed and returned to our everyday lives, but I remain inspired and changed by the experience. I left strengthened by the compassion and hope of these strangers who came together for a moment in time to say, "yes, we are different, we have different needs, we face different obstacles...but yours are as important as mine, and we're in this life together." As people of faith, we are called to lives that look like this. We are called to serve those less fortunate than ourselves, to recognize that an injury to one is an injury to all, and to seek the reign of God - that blessed reality where love and justice (of God and among us) overwhelm the forces of fear and oppression. It needn't be some elusive dream. It is as real as the God we believe in and as real as the beautiful moments of hope that meet us every day.