

Set at Liberty, Faith Summit convened by Kaleo Center
Opening remarks by President Barbara A. Holmes

My faith response to mass incarceration is very different than it would have been years ago.

I know that the God that I serve is a God of justice and a God of surprises. I know that *injustice* is never tolerated, but that if I am waiting for the Red/Reed Sea to part again it may not happen as I expect.

I know that the God that I serve hears the cry of the poor and the cries of those who are in prison. I know that Paul and Silas knew all of the things that I know and that while the prison doors swung open for them at midnight; release was not about them and that relief from injustice is never about our righteous indignation.

It is not even about our suffering and the shedding of blood. . .

Yes, the blood of those shot down in the streets cries out.

Yes, the new for-profit prisons grieve the God of Liberation.

But the scope of the plan to liberate the captives far exceeds current issues and insights.

For the God that I serve, it's about the hearts and minds of those who suffer and those who cause the suffering. It's about the reconciliation of the broken and those who do the breaking. God loves both and while we choose sides, God offers the gift of salvation and reconciliation to both.

We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The justice that permeates the Bible that I read requires my action.

It requires that I walk out into the midst of danger and certain death.

It requires that I cross the bridge in Selma offering my blood by faith
to change the oppression and the hearts of the oppressors

it requires: 'hands up don't shoot.'

. . .and the die-ins

. . .and the prayers and the tears

. . .and the willingness to stand at the foot of the cross
erected by those dedicated to destruction

It requires that I, bearing witness as the powers that be seem to triumph over the least.

The school-to-prison pipeline is an offense to the God who says suffer the little children to come to me. I know that the reinstatement of state-sanctioned slavery through the over-policing of minority neighborhoods and the unfair laws like those that punish the use of crack much more severely than the dominant culture's use of cocaine is an offense to

God. I know that the war on drugs is a war on me and I don't do drugs; but the war against my brother and sister is a war against me.

I know by faith that God will not be mocked. Terrorists who storm buildings to avenge Allah do not understand the will and the power of an Almighty who has eternal being beyond our religious categories and can avenge without our help. Avenging and revenge, while within the range of Godly action, is not central to the nature of God.

God is love and weeps at the main reason that we are in this situation--the unwillingness to love neighbor as we love ourselves; the willingness to ignore the obvious. When black children die, people look for reasons that the killing was justified. When white children die, people take action. People died and nothing happened during the 60's. . .the little girls in an Alabama church. . .the voters rights workers in Mississippi and so on and so on. And then they killed the children of the dominant culture at Kent State and everything happened.

I don't want anyone's children to die, but I know that the powers of destruction don't discriminate between your children and mine.

Yes they start the killing with mine, but they end up with yours because children of faith of any color will join the struggle for justice and will sacrifice.

Injustice crushes white children and black, black prisoner or Hispanic, Islamic prisoners in abu ghraib or innocent black men on death row.

But I have hope because the people of faith are of no particular race or color--they are marked by their love. People of every persuasion died in the Civil Rights movement with us. People of every persuasion are walking with their hands up--don't shoot--with us. They are marching around Jericho with us, waiting for God to act; for the walls to fall.

Tears and blood will be shed
. . .for hearts to turn
. . .for the God of justice to show up.

And we are waiting . . .and midnight is coming.
Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

We will not stop until all are free from systems and oppression.
We repent because we *are* those systems,
. . .or have set them in motion.
We rejoice because our God reigns.

Midnight is coming, Empire.
When doors will swing open
--the captives will be freed.

. . .until then

My faith looks up to thee
Oh, lamb of Calvary, Savior Divine.