

**Dispatch from the Pandemic #6:
Eight Minutes and Forty-Six Seconds
by Barbara Lyghtel Rohrer**

JUNE 12, 2020 — The call to action came via an email. At 5:00 PM on Monday, June 8, people were invited into eight minutes and forty-six seconds of silent reflection, the same amount of time that the knee of a police officer was pressed on the neck of George Floyd, cutting off his breath until there was no more breath. The invitation to step into this period of reverent silence came from the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for a Moral Revival (<https://www.facebook.com/anewppc>).

I had been working in recent years to understand systemic racism and white privilege, in which I am so steeped, so this call seemed to be one I needed to answer. At 5:00 I set the timer on my phone for eight minutes and forty-six seconds and stepped outside on my deck.

Eight minutes and forty-six seconds is a long time.

In eight minutes and forty-six seconds, I can make my bed and walk into the kitchen and pour cereal and milk to a bowl.

I can take a shower.

I can separate a week's worth of laundry and throw a load into the washer.

I can reply to two emails.

I can call a co-worker to confirm the next steps on the project we are working on.

I can go to the library to drop off books I borrowed in March.

I can run down to the post office.

I can swing by the health food store and order a refill of my supplements.

I can do my supper dishes.

I can chat with a neighbor about her visit to the doctor earlier that day.

I can water the flowers I planted in pots along my front walk and porch.

I can call my brother-in-law, an electrician, to talk to him about doing some work for a church friend a few of us are trying to help.

I can read a short chapter in a novel.

In the same time George Floyd was robbed of his breath, I can live a life of moments. I can breathe in and out dozens of times.

My “reflection” during that time of silence on my deck was my usual jumble of thoughts and twitchiness. My eyes were open. My ears were open. My palms were open as my arms hung down by the side. I saw trees descending into the little valley where a creek meanders along the edge of my property, but I wanted to see beyond the lies of institutional racism. I heard the song of birds, but I wanted to hear the cries of my brothers and sisters of color. I kept my palms open to bless those in pain and to receive the wise counsel of angels of how I am to act in the face of so much indifference and ignorance.

A thought came to mind. It was a line I heard during a discussion on National Public Radio—I don’t even remember what the program was. Whoever was speaking said, we have changed our laws, but not our hearts. And that is the mantra that I began to breathe in and out: change my heart.

This is where I start.

I am now incorporating that line into my daily prayer. Change my heart.

Benjamin Franklin once said that justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.

Change my heart.

Prayer is something we speak of frequently, but I am not sure that we truly understand what prayer means or can be. Most people, when speaking of prayer, are referring to what they need or want, which is certainly valid. And I am no different with my prayers. I have my own list of requests. The things I ask for are usually things external to me, things that I want brought into my life. Certain conditions or opportunities. I pray as well for my loved ones, particularly now, that they remain safe from COVID-19. I do not pray that they be kept safe because of the color of their skin.

But I think the prayer that is needed, at least the prayer I need to pray, is change my heart—that I may see, may hear, be open to learn, to understand, to bless, to heal. Surely, it starts within.

I do not dare speak for God, but I can’t help but think when I come to God with my list of wants, a monotonous repetition of desires, God wants to scream: *I heard you the first time!*

Then God turns to me with all my wants and says, *what are you going to do about it?*

Oh.

Change my heart.