

Ferguson October: Moral Monday

Their voices are still in my head. Their chants echo in my mind. No justice, no peace! Their faces are committed to my memory for eternity. I never really saw them before, I mean really saw them. Until August 2014, I had not considered going to their part of town, a mere ten miles from my own, or to make friends there. Once I did, so much became more clear. Each new experience involving myself with the Ferguson protestors has affected me in profound ways. At least I'm trying to see now, and am putting my words into action. It feels great, and exhilarating and daunting. My eyes are open, and I can't close them any longer or ever again. This is what democracy looks like!

The morning of Moral Monday, I drove to Wellspring Church in Ferguson. I joined hundreds of clergy and others of many denominations, both local and national, to prepare to get arrested. We filled out jail support forms, and exchanged nervous smiles.

Rev. Osagyefo Sekou led us in prayer. We mindlessly drank coffee and watched mock arrest scenarios. I wondered briefly how to explain a political arrest to a potential employer, but felt selfish. I thought about my children and looked forward to telling them about my day. Participants, including activist Cornel West, assembled in the rain for the short march to the Ferguson police department.

They were expecting us, clad in bright yellow rain gear yielding riot shields and batons. Police and protesters alike had on their best poker face, ready to see who would fold first. Some officers peered out of the smoked windows of the police station, as if waiting for the lightening. You could cut the tension in the air with a knife. One officer was perched on the roof of the building next door. Just in case. The people united will never be defeated!

I was in Ferguson as a peacekeeper/de-escalator volunteer for Jobs With Justice. We held hands separating those willing to be arrested from those who weren't ready to make that sacrifice. We stood in the deluge of rain for four and a half hours, symbolizing the time Mike Brown's body lay lifeless on Canfield Drive. I helped protesters cover themselves with garbage bags. I poured rain-drenched peanuts into a pastor's mouth on the front line. We warned eager protesters that they risked arrest if they moved closer. I was energized when black youth leaders led chants. We are Mike Brown. I chanted and stared into the eyes of police behind their plastic shields a few feet from me trying to understand what was in their hearts.

One protester from New York asked an officer, "Why do you hate us?"

"I don't hate you."

"Then why are you killing us?"

"We don't want to kill you."

“I’d rather give you a hug.”

“Then give me a hug.”

Perhaps there is hope for us yet.