



## When Did We See You?

**Velda Love**  
Minister of Racial Justice

*Some of the church folks in the crowd were confused, looked around and asked Jesus, "When did we see you hungry, thirsty, and imprisoned? And you say you were beaten, shot, and hung? When did we see you treated like an animal, and less than human?"*  
Matthew 22:35-40 (The RSVP Remix)

"I will never forget the violence of the white mob when we left our home. I still see Black men being shot, Black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire. I still see Black businesses being burned. I still hear airplanes flying overhead. I hear the screams," [Viola Fletcher testified](#) before a House Judiciary Subcommittee last week, commemorating 100 years since the tragedy occurred on May 31, 1921. She was 7 years old when her town was burned to the ground and over 300 black residents were killed without mercy over a period of two days. "I have lived through the massacre every day. Our country may forget this history, but I cannot."

*Jesus speaks, "Church folks, come and listen to what I have to say. Some of you believe and practice the great commandment to love God, and to love and welcome neighbors and strangers. The rest of you love your nation more than you love God. You serve idols and worship yourselves. You ignore my commandment to love. Your hatred unleashes genocide, ethnic cleansing, and ruthlessly kills my sacred family members."*

The remixed Matthew 22:35-40 text incorporates a contemporary feel so that our lived realities can be seen and felt while many of us know that justice will not prevail in our lifetime. Viola, her brother Hughes Van Ellis, and Lessie Benningfield Randall spoke with clarity as they recounted to lawmakers the day white anger was unleashed in Greenwood. Their testimony included a demand for reparations for the survivors.

*"Some of you looked at me without judgment, fear, and hatred. You saw me! Yes, you saw me hungry, thirsty, naked, and imprisoned. You fed me, gave me clean water and clothes, and came to see about me while I was incarcerated. I had health concerns and pre-existing conditions, and you provided free healthcare and medicine. I was*

*a stranger, separated from my family, and caged like an animal and you came to advocate for my release.”*

Racism is alive. Racism and racists never stop professing their love for country, guns, wealth, and a small white god. Racism killed George Floyd. It was May 25, 2020, that a human being with hatred in his heart murdered Floyd by kneeling on his neck until he stopped breathing. Not everyone wept and felt a sigh of relief when the verdict in favor of sending George Floyd’s murderer to prison was read.

Many Christians are horrified when justice and reparations are preached from the pulpit. Yet the visual horror of 300 black people murdered then and George Floyd’s murder a year ago ignited a flame around the world that had people shouting, marching, and protesting police brutality and demanding justice for black lives. Jesus’s justice and the Gospel was embodied in protestors who marched in Germany, France, Palestine, London, Australia, and North American cities.

*Jesus replied, “You practiced love of neighbor to those who were oppressed and marginalized, stereotyped and hated, enslaved and put into cages. You stood in solidarity with those who suffered under apartheid conditions, lost their land, and experienced genocide. You provided safe passage to freedom for your siblings. You stood at gravesites with mothers and fathers whose children had been murdered by the state. You cared for grandmothers when hatred attacked them on the streets. These are members of my family. Just as you did it for them, you did for me.”*

Who were the 300 people killed in Greenwood, OK? Are their names remembered and written in churches across the country? Will they be forgotten after May 31st? Will George Floyd be forgotten? Will he remain a symbol that marked his public execution and a global uprising? Will those who claim to love Jesus remember that black lives are under attack?

*Will Jesus continue to be denied justice? When Jesus is killed while protesting, will you care? When Jesus walks down the street and is shot dead by a white supremacist, will you advocate for stricter gun laws? When Jesus is arrested, forced to the ground and has a knee on his neck until he stops breathing, will you remain silent when neighbors blame Jesus for his death?*

*Will you see Jesus when he’s of African, Asian, Native and indigenous, or Latinx descent?*

*“Just as you did it to them, you did it to me.”*

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Velda Love is Minister of Racial Justice and member of the Education for Faithful Action Plus (EFA+) Team in Justice and Local Church Ministries for the United Church of Christ.



*The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.*