Remember when you were a kid and you were playing a game with friends and something went wrong? Like maybe a dog ran off with the ball or a car came by and interfered with the action. _Do-over_, someone might say. _Let’s have a do-over._

Wouldn’t it be great if we could have some do-overs in real life? Where we could go back to the beginning and start fresh?

If we could, I would call a do-over on COVID-19? I mean, our preparation for it. Our supply of masks and ventilators. Our coordinating of agencies and science laboratories and funding of research and development for a vaccine. _Let’s have a do-over._

And how about a do-over on George Floyd and the countless other African American victims of police brutality? Wouldn’t we want a do-over on the police training that led to his murder? Or a do-over on how to discipline the officer who had 17 complaints on his record but was still on the force using deadly force. Or the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow and redlining and the basic criminalization of blackness in our society that have created one obstacle after another that makes success and prosperity among black people something heroic instead of normal. And yes, let’s have a do-over on the destruction of property and the looting of businesses that only serves to undermine the legitimate rage of protestors who feel that the only way to be heard is to take to the streets because their voices are otherwise ignored or silenced in the channels of ordinary life.

We can’t change the past, but we can change the future. We can’t go back, but we can go forward. And one way to do that is to return to our founding stories from our sacred texts. _Genesis means beginnings._

_Genesis 1 is a creation story, an account of origins. It doesn’t so much tell us the what of things as the what for. It’s more a sociology textbook than a science one. It’s a study of power. It tells us about the_
nature and purpose of God’s use of power with and for the world.

The temptation is to go back to Genesis 1 and lament how far we have fallen as a human race from the time of perfect tranquility. But that wasn’t the reason God inspired the priestly caste of Israel to write this passage during their time of captivity in Babylon. It was instead to render an alternative view of the world in the face of the one they were experiencing under their powerful pagan rulers.

The point is not how things once were but how things should be. The writers of Genesis 1 explain who their God is and what their God expects of us. Genesis is not a longing for what is lost; it’s a vision for what may yet be.

I’m going to focus today on two underlying claims of this passage: peace and parity. Peace, first.

God created the world as a free act of love. Over the welter and waste and darkness of primordial nothingness, God’s breath hovered. God said, Let there be light. And there was light. Let that sink in. God acted without a partner. God acted without self-interest. God acted by breathing upon the chaos and bringing order.

Let there be. The word choice is extraordinary. Let could be a command or a demand. Like when Moses went to Pharaoh and said, Let my people go! But it could also mean to allow or permit. When Mary hears that she is to be with child by the Holy Spirit, she replies, Let it be with me according to your word. “I consent,” in other words. There’s a strong but gentle notion of power in this statement, Let there be light. And each day of creation brings about the same result. Each day let there be turns into the consent and there was. And it was good.

The contrast is hard to overstate between this account of creation and the one the Babylonians claimed to undergird their empire and reinforce their superiority over the Hebrews. In their account, called the Enuma Elish, the god Marduk defeated the sea goddess, Tiamat, in a battle for who would be the high ruler of the gods. Marduk then cut the body of Tiamat in half, stretching part of it to create the canopy of the heavens and part to create the dry land of the earth. Then, from the blood of
Tiamat’s lover and battle commander, he made human beings. Marduk built the city of Babylon to be a home for the gods and the center of this religion. Of course, all of this would be presided over by the King and his military forces.

When creation is an act of original violence by the gods, creatures emulate them because violence is the very nature of reality. Genesis 1 is a point by point rebuke of the Marduk account. It claims the world was made in peace and for peace. And whatever flourishing we can expect comes not from the use of power as the shedding of blood, but from the cooperation of all things with their generous and nonviolent Creator.

Now ask yourself this: which account of creation do empires most closely resemble when their leaders use force to dominate the streets and defeat anyone who opposes them? Which view of creation undergirds both the will to commit violence and looting by some protestors this past week and also the use of tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets by law enforcement to quell the uprisings?

Imagine how different our world would be if when our leaders held up the Bible to demonstrate their loyalty to God as leaders that they actually understood what it says about who God is and how we are to act in God’s name. Violence begets violence. Peace is rooted in respect for all created beings and things. It requires a commitment to the wellbeing of all, not the victory of some over others.

Next, parity. *Let us make humankind in our own image, and according to our likeness. Male and female, God created them.*

Once more, note that humans were not created out of the blood of the vanquished. They were created to be a reflection of the God who is so relational to begin with that the only way to reflect that is through male and female who together make up the image of God. Not male over female. Male next to female, side by side. The male is not more godlike than the female, nor the female more godlike than the male. It’s both together, implying the relational character of God, which constitutes the divine image.

Now, I could follow this course
today and talk more about
gender equality. But I want to
suggest that this text of the
creation of humanity as male
and female also suggests that all
humans are equals. Not just the
equality and mutuality of the
sexes, but also the equality of all
people generally. The Marduk
account of creation was filled
with hierarchies. And human
society has always tried to
organize itself that way, as if
there is a caste system in which
some are destined to rule and
others to serve. You can’t find
that in Genesis 1. The vision of
humanity put forward by the
Hebrew priests is a radical
alternative to any attempt to
declare some humans superior
and others inferior.

You know where I’m going with
this. The image of a white police
officer in Minneapolis with his
knee on the neck of George Floyd
is seared into our collective
memory now. The words of
deference from the black man on
the ground made it only more
painful: Sir, he said. Sir. That’s
what black slaves and then black
men and women in the Jim Crow
era were taught to call white
people—Sir and Ma’am. When
we white people say Sir, it’s
simply a sign of respect for
authority. When black people
say Sir, it’s also a survival
technique. It’s playing into the
terrible history of white
supremacy where whites needed
blacks to show them deference
as their betters.

Sir, I can’t breathe. And eight
minutes and 46 seconds later,
George Floyd stopped breathing
for good.

The protests in the wake of this
murder are about more than
George Floyd. They are about the
whole history of black
Americans being told to stay in
their place and being
systematically and legally denied
equality in the eyes of their
white neighbors and in the eyes
of the law.

The earliest creed of the church
may just be something Paul
quoted in Galatians 3:28. There
is no Jew or Greek, no slave or
free, no male or female. All are
one. No ethnic, class or gender
hierarchies. The original vision
of the Jesus movement was a
return to Genesis 1.

The early church understood
that when you are in Christ, you
are part of a do-over movement.
Something called Sin—
understood as domination—has
interfered with the level playing
field of the game. We need a new beginning, a new humanity rooted in peace and parity.

Many things will remain with me from this week. The protests, the meetings and conversations and social media posts over how to bring lasting change. But the one imprinted on my heart is a photo of my three granddaughters with their parents in San Antonio, all clad in masks and walking through downtown with black and Latinx neighbors. Each is carrying a homemade sign with a different message that amounts to the same thing. *Love one another*, one reads. *Be kind.* Finally, and fittingly: *We are all children of God.*

The spirit that lives in those three little white girls is the product of your work, Wilshire. You helped shape the faith vision of both their parents, who are shaping the faith vision of their children. It’s a vision of peace and parity rooted in Genesis 1 and the gospel itself. It’s a do-over vision that is changing the world from what it has been to what it will be.

Don't give up. It's happening. And you are part of it. Amen.