

People Who Look Just Like Us  
Funeral for Justin Amis  
John 20:19-20  
June 20, 2008

The family remembers Justin as a loving son, nephew, a dedicated daddy to his daughter and faithful friend. Justin consistently checked in on his cousin “Aja” to make sure she was “doing the right thing.” A few months ago I had the honor of baptizing Justin and Melanie’s beautiful baby girl-Laelah. Most of us-if not all of us have some special memories-times that we shared with Justin. And the perplexing point about what brings us together today is that we should have had so much more time to share- experience with Justin. I’m hoping that while we are all here together we can become more conscious of and more committed to the cause to stop short changing our selves out of meaningful relationships... In our text-the “A” part of verse nineteen of John 20:19 reads “the same day in the evening of the first day of the week when the

doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews.”

Let me give you the context of the text...Jesus had just been executed by crucifixion. His friends-disciples were all huddled together in a upper room apartment-the doors were closed and locked the windows shut-shades drawn; lights out-no body was talking to give the appearance that no one there. The reason why the disciples were scared is because they were afraid that a group...NO actually a gang of Jews were going to do to them what they had just done to Jesus a few days earlier. This is understandable, but at the same time strange because they were afraid of people who were from the same city and who quite possibly lived with them in the same community. For our benefit-let me make twenty-first century sense of this text...The disciples, who are Jews, are in the upper room apartment, in the city of Jerusalem. The Jewish disciples were afraid for their lives of some Jewish gang bangers who were from the same city-same community; people they probably knew on a first name bases.

The Jewish disciples were hiding out from other Jewish people-people of the same culture same community as them... Are you feeling it yet!? The disciples were afraid of being attacked-jacked; jumped; beat down by people who just like them... ... In this city of Baltimore, in communities from east to the west, from the north to the south, some of us if not most of us rush to get into our homes, and lock ourselves in-out of fear of people who look just like us. We are “DISSED” disrespected, disregarded-robbed, homes broken into, our daughters gang rapped, our son’s gang banged, we deal drugs to people who look just like us... By in large it ain’t the “white man” doing us around here...It’s us doing us... White folk, Asian folk, Korean folk all seem to place high value on the life of their people-their culture; value unity, safety in the community-everybody but us...

### WHAT IN HELL IS OUR PROBLEM!? ...

- One of our Black mothers has had her only son-her only child taken from her

- One of our Black sistah's has had future husband taken from her
- One of Black babies has had her daddy taken from her.
- One Black man who was just beginning to experience life-gone all at the hands of PEOPLE who look just like us. ...

How has Black life become so unimportant, so insignificant-  
so devalued that we can shoot each down like a damn dog!?

It's a terrible thing to take anybody's life-BUT it doesn't get any worse than take out somebody that is a part of us, looks LIKE us..... Somebody:

- We grew up with
- We went to school with
- Played ball with
- Whose house we have eaten at
- Somebody whose mother we speak too...

...Why can't we get it in our minds to hurt, steal, kill from somebody who's struggling to make it just like us is like stealing,

killing your self! What has messed-up our minds, who has bamboozled, hood winked-led us astray from the dignity, divinity, the unity that our ancestors, that Martin, Medger, and Malcolm fought, bled and died for!?! Some of us need to understand something for the first time this evening ... We are not each others enemy... It doesn't matter what street you represent, what "set" you roll with-what colors you wear-we all bleed red blood! We are not each others enemy

- Ignorance is the enemy- While we Black folk are fighting and killing to control a corner-others races continue to take control of companies-corporations where the real money-the real power is. And as quiet as it's kept-many of the brother's and sisters in the street game are smart enough to do the same. Ignorance is the enemy- While some of us think we get man hood-bragging rights for getting locked-up other folk are getting rich off of it. As quiet as its kept the penal system has become a lucrative investment commodity. Investors are glad to see us go to jail. They encourage judges to keep us there.

They assessed to know by third grade which of our sons and daughters will be next in line to be locked-up.

Quiet as it's kept, most hustlers are earning minimum wage. After you pay is made to the one you get the product from-or after you sell the stuff you stole-There is only enough money left for a few fitted's and long tee's.

- Mis-education, no education is the enemy- Even hustlers got to retire-and around age thirty you start getting fat, getting slow-you get fired. What you gonna do after that!?

Money is the enemy- Understand this wanting to have money IS NOT evil...It's the love of it that's evil, that's what the scripture says. Willing to do anything for it-stick-up, sell your body, sell your soul, put your family in danger.

The biggest enemy of all is the lack of self love and self respect.

Listen-up... The way we think of your self, treat your self-respect your self will be the way you value, treat and respect others...

- If you find yourself always doing things to make people respect you-maybe you don't respect yourself

- If we de-value your life-think living past twenty five won't happen-ain't worth doing-maybe you really don't love yourself as much as you say
- All the time dressing-up and putting other people down is a clear sign of a "front" of a self hatter

But instead of being self hatters we should be joyful because our Creator has fearfully and wonderfully made us-we are made in the image of God. Running through our veins is gold and diamond dust, from the Holy African dirt that God created humans. We are priceless, precious; power-filled. (Let me say that AGAIN.) It's time we start acting like it. CIGAW!? ... Most of us are here this evening because want to say good bye to Justin-we want to say "Rest in Peace"...

But with my consecrated imagination I can hear Justin asking us why his earthly life ended at age twenty one? Justin is asking WHY in the prime, promise, the power of my life has it been reduced to memorial of empty bottles of Hennessy, Jack Daniels, and malt liquor and helium balloons.

In my Spirit I can hear Justin saying, “How can I rest in peace when people who look like us don’t live in peace?”

PEACE P-E-A-C-E it’s a word we use too loosely these days.

The African Hebrew meaning of the word peace is a greeting of highest respect, and honor to the one we speak to-say it to. When we say peace to someone-what is happening is we are blessing them. But some of us-if not most of us may not realize that there are two kinds of peace, one is P-E-A-C-E and the other is P-I-E-C-E.

- P-E-A-C-E means unbroken, contentment, all together
- P-I-E-C-E means broken, to break apart

Justin’s spirit is saying to us that too many of us have been saying-emphasizing the WRONG PIECE!

- P-I-E-C-E is causing us to destroy people who look just like us!

How do we do it preacher...How do we stop hatin’, How do we stop hurting, How do we stop disrespecting How do we stop destroying the lives of people who look just like us!? I’m so glad



you asked that question. We have got to pull ourselves together. We have to take back the pieces of life that we have allowed to be taken from us. Take back self respect-take back dignity, take destiny-take back divinity. We have to protect the most valuable-important part of us I'm not talking about money-I'm talking about our MIND. I'm not talking about clothes-I'm talking about your consciousness. I'm not talking about what the gang gives to you-...I'm talking about what the Almighty God gives you. ... Let me let the cat out the bag... If people give you something-people can ask for it- take it back. If people say they are giving you something for free-for nothing, how many of you know it ain't for free!? BUT God gives freely with no hidden agenda. The Word says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him shall not DIE but have everlasting life." I can hear somebody thinking, "Reverend I'm my own man-I run my own life, I'm the "baller shot caller." That might be true-but hear this, if that's the case when your life breaks down-you get to fix. I don't know about you, but growing up in Harlem Park,

they call it “E-A” now; back then and even now there are things in my life that I’ve been trying to fix for years, and all I do is break it down and mess it up worse. And when I think of the mess I’ve made, I think about family and friends I know who have been trying to fix up there lives with a good relationship, good job, good high, rings and things; but nothing seems to lift them and keep them at the level they really desire; really need. What I’m trying to say is we can’t fix ourselves all by our selves no matter how hard we try. There will always be heartache here, a disappointment there... But hear this-if God owns your life, God gets to fix it! HIGAW!? And when God fixes your life it, God does it through the power, grace and love. HIGAW!?.

When somebody takes a relationship with God seriously they get restored, renew and respect from God...Someone left a saying at the “makeshift side walk cemetery” for Justin and Brian that reads, “God Salutes Soldiers?” That’s a powerful saying, and a true saying...But God doesn’t salute soldiers who die without a

purpose. Think about it-there is no divine honor what happened to Justin or Brian...

- His daughter doesn't benefit from it
- His mother isn't happy about it
- Melanie isn't celebrating
- The family isn't bragging
- The angels in heaven aren't rejoicing

God doesn't salute soldiers that die without a purpose... But we can change that today-right now... If you are tired of guns, gangs; games-if you are tired of being in "the game" the Lord says come unto me all who are burden and tired and I will give you rest.....  
(go fishing!)