

Michael Brown's funeral echoes with cries for justice

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ST. LOUIS (RNS) Justice was a recurring theme as thousands of mourners packed the mammoth Friendly Temple Missionary Baptist Church on Monday (August 25) for the funeral of Michael Brown, a black teen whose fatal shooting following a confrontation with a white police officer set off weeks of sometimes violent protests.

Al Sharpton, among the speakers, called for a “fair and impartial investigation” into the shooting.

“We are not anti-police, we respect police,” Sharpton said. “But those police that are wrong need to be dealt with just like those in our community who are wrong need to be dealt with.”

Benjamin Crump, a lawyer representing Brown's family, alluded to the “three-fifths” clause in the Constitution for counting slaves (which actually was an anti-slavery clause) and demanded that Brown get “full justice, not three-fifths justice.”

Brown's body was being laid to rest, but the controversy surrounding the August 9 shooting was far from over. Prosecutors have not determined whether the Ferguson police officer, 28-year-old Darren Wilson, will face charges in Brown's death.

The service began with energy, including songs from a church choir and scripture readings. The line from Romans 8: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” drew loud applause.

Several family members shared stories of Brown, telling how the 18-year-old had promised to make something of himself.

Michael “stated to the family that one day the world would know his name. He did not know he was offering up a divine prophecy,” Brown's cousin, Eric Davis, told the

crowd. "But we are here today remembering the name of Michael Brown."

Davis encouraged people to express their anger at the polls.

"Every time change has come, it's come through the youth and the young generation," Davis said. "This generation is saying we have had enough of this senseless killing. We have had enough of this."

Michael Brown's step mother, Cal Brown, said Michael shared similar memories. "Mike-Mike," as he was called, had promised to "shake the world."

She said he had been dreaming of death and bloody sheets just days before he died.

Michael Brown Sr. had urged supporters not to protest Monday out of respect for his son. Sharpton also discouraged violent protest, saying anyone involved in such activity must do so in their own name, not Michael Brown's name.

Outside the church members of the New Black Panther Party and Panthers for Justice started brief "Black Power" chants. Bila Mohammad, of Panthers for Justice, said he wished Michael Brown's family hadn't discouraged protests.

"This is the day," he said. "The community needs to come together, in a nonviolent way."

He added: "There will be more protests. . . . In the words of Malcolm X, 'When you tell your people to put their guns down, we'll put ours down, too.'"

Earlier, mourners began lining up under a blistering sun more than three hours before the funeral.

One half hour before the service, police informed visitors that the church had reached its 2,500-person capacity. They directed them to an adjacent auditorium that seats 1,000 people. Soon that room also was overflowing with mourners. A 300-seat annex also filled quickly.

A few hundred visitors unable to get into the service milled around outside cordially, allowing family members to enter and chatting with one another. One woman passed out small green and purple ribbons that people pinned to their shirts. But anger simmered under the surface.

Quincy Harts, 40, of St. Louis, was outside the church wearing a T-shirt with Brown's picture and the words: "No Justice, No Peace."

He said he'll respect the family's wishes of no protests—for now.

"Ain't nobody too happy about this," Harts said. "You're going to see more protests until (Wilson) goes to jail."

Angela Jones-Peaks, 43, of nearby Jennings, asked her supervisor for a few hours off Monday morning to attend the service. Having two sons of her own motivated her to attend, she said.

"It's scary every time they leave home," Jones-Peaks said. "I wanted to support this family, let them know we're here for them."

John Bacon also contributed reporting and writing.