

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
January 10, 2021
The Rev. Rick Veit

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Where do we even begin? What a week.

There was a Far Side comic that showed a person jumping from a burning building that was labeled 2020. The firemen were below with a catcher. The person accidentally bounced off of the catcher and up into another burning building that was labeled 2021.

Where do we even begin? I suppose meditation and prayer with all our hearts is a good place to start. As Julie Andrews sang in *The Sound of Music*: "Let's start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start." And so we pray, "O Lord, our strength and our redeemer."

Another wonderful prayer that dawned on our worship planning team this week is entitled, *The Work of Christmas*, by author and theologian, Howard Thurman. Let us pray:

The Work of Christmas

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.*

—Howard Thurman, author and theologian

Profound, huh? And timely.

I am curious. What was your prayer this week? Who or what did you pray for?

Have you ever noticed all the flags surrounding this sanctuary? They are a good reminder as to who we should be praying for and serving.

- Cheyenne
- Flag of St. Mark's – pray for and serve the people of St. Mark's, visitors, guests, members, non-members, all of us, whoever walks through these doors.
- Anglican Flag worldwide

- Scottish Flag – they helped us found our church when we were at war with Great Britain in the 18th Century
- Episcopal Flag
- Wyoming
- British Jack

And then there is that one (American Flag). Our wounded American Flag. This week was a reminder to me that we are in many ways a wounded people of America. One nation under God? Are we? It feels that way in Wyoming, but I think we are, in many ways, in a bubble here. America seems to be a mess, at least politically. We should be raising up our hands in prayer, repenting or turning to the Lord. We pray especially for those who died and were injured at the Capitol this week (silence). Bless them Lord. We pray and give thanks for our first responders who tried to stop the perpetrators and who helped those in need. Pray for the perpetrators and those wreaking havoc within our country. We raise up our hands in prayer for our president, for our government and for all in authority. That is what we are doing here today. We are praying, and we are praying for America. In fact, here is a specific Collect from the Book of Common Prayer for our country, p. 820.

Prayer for our Country

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are a nation that is suffering, suffering from vitriolic and violent behavior, suffering from division, suffering from a pandemic that isolates us and wreaks havoc on our lives.

And then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.” When we raise up our hands to the Lord, pleading for help, pleading for unity and love and compassion, pleading for the lost, the fearful and tearful, and for those who are furious, when we raise up our hands to the Lord in prayer, God offers us light, and the light shines in the darkness and helps us to see. I think many in our nation are squinting right now because when we have been in the darkness for so long, light can seem blinding. And yet, in the light, we can see again. And we follow the light that is Christ. That is why we still have the Creche out this week. We remember Epiphany, January 6, the day of the riots, ironically. The wise men, or magi, visit the Christ Child, then go share that light with the world. We are called to be wise women and men, sharing the light of Christ, the good news, taking action in America and throughout the world.

Our presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, gave us good words of wisdom this week. He reflected on Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address to the nation on March

4, 1865, another time when our nation needed help. The President said: “With malice toward none, with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.” Bishop Curry said that President Lincoln knew this was a moment of danger and a moment of decision, when a nation, when a people, must decide...who shall we be. Curry then reflected on MLKJr’s book, written 100 years later, when our nation was faced with the same reality: Who shall we be? It was titled, Where Do We Go From Here? Chaos or Community? The nation was deeply divided. Cities burned. There were riots, even at national conventions of political parties. The future of the nation was in question. It was at that time, in moments of danger, that a decision had to be made: Community or Chaos. And chaos was and is not an option, chaos being a product of fear and control. Community, he proclaimed, is our only hope. Bishop Curry said that we believe, as the Bible teaches, of a beloved community, a community of sacrificial love, not just a sentimental love, for all in the entire world. Jesus taught us to pray and to work and belabor for that community of love. We pray to God and we are to take necessary action to build that community, not chaos, in America.

I close this sermon today with appropriate words from author, L.R. Knost, who wrote, “Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.” Amen.

In this season of light, Epiphany, and on this day, when we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, let us now stand and renew our own baptismal vows.