

My friends:

For myself, there is no way to prepare a sermon for today without talking about the events of this past week. Repercussions still reverberate throughout the country. The implications are immense for all of us as Christians. We need to ask ourselves, Who are we and Who shall we be? Who Must we be?

--as Episcopalians

--as Christians

--as a nation

I am reminded of a favorite Bible verse of mine: Joshua said to the Israelites:

“But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15

As I was writing the sermon on Friday, I started to watch Bishop Curry’s message/sermon from January 7th. I quickly realized that he was saying exactly what I was trying to say, and he did it a whole lot better. And he is the Presiding Bishop after all. So, I am going to play his message for you today.

January 7, 2021

“And now in the name of our loving, liberating, and life-giving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In another time of national crisis, another time of danger for our nation, in 1865 on March the fourth, Abraham Lincoln concluded his second inaugural address with these words: 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.

Lincoln knew in that moment, in the moment of a national crisis, a moment of great danger, that such a moment was a moment of decision, when a nation, when a people must decide who shall we be? What kind of nation, what kind of people shall we be? A hundred years

later, Martin Luther King faced the same reality. Who shall we be? The civil rights movement was waning. The great victories that had been won had been won. And yet now questions of poverty and economic despair and disparities raised an awesome specter on the nation. We were at war.

We were at war in another country, but there was war on our streets. The nation was deeply divided. Cities burned. There were riots. Riots at national conventions of political parties. The future of the nation was in question, and it was at that time that Dr. King realized that in moments of danger, a decision must be made. And he titled his last book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*. I believe as he believed, as Abraham Lincoln believed, as I believe you believe, that we must choose community. Chaos is not an option. Community is our only hope.

The truth is Dr. King spoke often of all that he did and labored for was for the purpose of realizing as much of the Beloved Community of God as it is possible on this earth. He spoke of Beloved Community, the Bible, the New Testament, Jesus spoke of the kingdom or the reign of God. Jesus taught us to pray, and to work, and to labor for that Beloved Community, that reign of God's love in our time and in our world, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth just as it is in heaven. Those are our marching orders from Jesus himself.

I am a follower of Jesus of Nazareth because I believe that his way of love and his way of life is the way of life for us all. I believe that unselfish, sacrificial love, love that seeks the good and the welfare and the well-being of others, as well as the self, that this is the way that can lead us and guide us to do what is just, to do what is right, to do what is merciful. It is the way that can lead us beyond the chaos to community.

Now, I know full well that this may to some sound naive, to others, idealistic, and I understand that. And yet, I want to submit that the way of love that leads to beloved community is the only way of hope for humanity. Consider the alternative. The alternative is chaos, not community. The alternative is the abyss of anarchy, of chaos, of hatred, of bigotry, of violence, and that alternative is unthinkable. We have seen nightmarish visions of that alternative. We saw it in Charlottesville just a few years ago when neo-Nazis marched through the streets of an American city, chanting, "Jews will not replace us." That alternative is unthinkable. We saw it in Minneapolis-St. Paul, where a public safety officer

knelt with his knee on the neck of another human being. A child of God, just like he was, and snuffed out the breath of life that God gave him. The alternative is unthinkable.

And we have seen it this past Wednesday, when a monument to democracy, the Capitol of the United States of America was desecrated and violated with violence by vandals. Lives were lost. A nation was wounded. Democracy itself was threatened. My brothers and sisters, this way of love that Jesus taught us when he said, "Love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself." This way of love that Moses taught even before Jesus. This way of unselfish, sacrificial love, it is the way to redeem a nation, to save a world. It is the way of hope for us all. But do not make the mistake of thinking that I speak of a sentimental and emotional love.

Jesus spoke of love most consistently the closer he got to the cross. This way of love is the way of sacrifice, the way of unselfishness, the way of selflessness, that seeks the good of the other as well as the self. And that is the way of the cross, which is the way of life. And if you don't believe me, ask another apostle of love. Not Dr. King, not Abraham Lincoln, ask Archbishop Tutu. Ask one who has given his life for the cause of God's love in the way of Jesus. Ask him; ask Nelson Mandela in your mind. Ask them what love looks like. They knew that the way of love was the only way that could guide South Africa from what could have become a bloody nightmare and civil war to the way that could build a nation.

And it was not sentimental. Remember truth and reconciliation. They had to face painful truths. They had to do what was just and what was merciful. They had to do what the prophet Micah said, that the motivation and the guide was love. Archbishop Tutu said this: Love, forgiving, and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones is not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back or turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness of the abuse, the hurt, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse for a while. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring forth real healing. Superficial reconciliation only brings superficial healing.

This is the way of love that can heal our hurts, that can heal our land, that can help us to become one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all. So, I would ask you to do two things. I'm asking you to make a commitment, a renewed commitment, to live

the way of love as Jesus has taught us and to do it by making a commitment to go out and bless somebody. Bless somebody you disagree with. Bless somebody you agree with. But to go out and bless somebody by helping somebody along the way. Go out and bless somebody by listening to their story and their life. To go out and be an instrument of God's peace, an agent of God's love.

And then I would ask you to pray. Pray for this nation but pray with some specificity. Pray that we may have the wisdom and the courage to love.

God of grace and God of glory,  
on thy people pour thy pow'r.

Crown thine ancient church's story,  
bring her bud to glorious flow'r.

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,  
for the facing of this hour

– Harry Emerson Fosdick, God of Grace and God of Glory

With malice toward none, with charity toward all. With firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right. Let us strive to finish the work, the work that 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 lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

God love you. God bless you. And may God hold us all in those almighty hands of love.”

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry

Episcopal Church