

St. Stephen Lutheran Church



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A Pastoral letter in response to the events at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 by the Rev. Matthew Best

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Dear members, friends, and faithful disciples at St. Stephen Lutheran Church,

Psalm 6:2-3 states:

“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
My soul also is struck with terror,
While you, O Lord – how long?”

Psalm 6 is a Psalm for recovery from grave illness. We face a literal grave illness in the form of a virus that has taken the lives of over 350,000 of our fellow citizens since the beginning of the pandemic.

We face other grave illnesses in this nation as well – deep, bitter divides in our nation that have been building up for decades and have only now risen to an emotional boiling point that we saw erupt in our nation’s Capital yesterday.

Violence and taking over the Capitol Building are wrong and are dangerous for our nation. Such actions destabilize the nation and rip apart trust between citizens and those who govern. More than that, such actions are not in alignment with the way of Jesus.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, said this about violence in his Nobel Lecture on December 11, 1964 entitled, “The Quest for Peace and Justice” - “...violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones. Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding: it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.”

Violence takes on many forms – not just physical violence. And in each case, the violence used is wrong and immoral. And it leads to the same end – hatred, destruction of trust and community, bitterness, and brutality. It blinds us from seeing the Image of God in others and even ourselves. It builds a wall of separation that prevents us from experiencing God’s Shalom wholeness. It pushes us away from living in holy community with God and others. Make no mistake, advancing conspiracy theories, disregarding or manipulating the truth, scapegoating

other groups of people, blind loyalty, and declaring that political opponents are enemies that endanger the nation are forms of violence and are just as destructive as physical violence.

We do not have to continue down this path as a nation. We have a choice as to what we do with the grave illnesses that we face. We can move towards healing as a nation or towards a terminal diagnosis if these grave illnesses are not treated.

Healing is a long process that never really ends. Healing is often not easy. Healing takes patience. But healing is the only thing that leads to a thriving life, healthy relationships, and trust. Without trust, there is no community, no shared values, and no nation. While I don't have the answers to how we heal, I do know that we must. I call on all of us to spend time in prayer over the next several days asking for God's guidance.

This is a tragic moment in our nation's history. One that we don't know the full extent of or the full effect of the events that happened yesterday. But I do know this. That Jesus is very present in the midst of such tragedy. We worship a God who took on human flesh in a difficult time in human history – a time of deep divide and immense violence. And it was in the midst of this environment that God decided this would be a good time and place to be manifest in creation, to walk amongst the human beings that God loves in an irrational way, and to present the reality of the inbreaking kingdom of God. It was in that time that Jesus presented a different way to live – individually and as a community.

A way marked by peace that contrasted with the abhorrent violence committed on many. A way marked by mercy that contrasted with shows of strength. A way marked by forgiveness that contrasted with blame and hard heartedness. A way marked by love that contrasted with fear and anger.

A great tragedy occurred yesterday. One that leaves us speechless. As the psalmist says – “for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror. My soul is struck with terror.”

Jesus hears our cry. And he comes to us, as he always has. He comes in the midst of great tragedy and suffering. Jesus knows about grave illness. He has healed many grave illnesses before. The time is now for our grave illness to be acknowledged, repented of, and to be healed.

Please pray with me. Healing God, we cry out to you. We face a grave illness in our land. Something that terrifies us. Over and over you sent messengers to us with the same message – “Do not be afraid.” You can say that because at the core of your message is this reality – we are not in charge. We are not in control. You are. Heal this nation. Release those in bondage to the many grave illnesses we face. Soften hearts. Open ears to hear. Clear eyes to see your image in others – especially those that we deem as enemies. Extend our hands to offer healing touch and invitations to community and trust. We pray this in your precious name. Amen.

Blessings,

Pr. Matthew