



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

January 7, 2021

Dear Siblings in Christ,

The past twenty-four hours in this country have been twenty-four hours never before experienced. Elections in Georgia flipped the Senate, the highest one-day total of deaths in the United States was registered due to the pandemic and lawless rioters, referred to by members of Congress on both sides of the aisle as 'thugs', breached the security of our nation's Capitol building, referred to by some last night as the Senate and Congress reconvened, as the 'Temple of Democracy'. Four people lost their lives due to the acts of a gathering that got out of control which was fueled in part by a speech given by the President of the United States. And, when all was said and done, Democracy stood firm and the Senate confirmed the votes of the electoral college, clearing the way for our next president as it followed constitutional requirements put in place by our founding fathers.

As I considered all of the above I recalled, for some reason, the First Amendment to our constitution. It reads as follows:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

What may have begun yesterday as a peaceful protest too quickly evolved into an uncontrollable riot, perhaps an oxymoron in and of itself. Barriers were breached, our nation's democracy was assaulted and Congress was placed on lock down in the hopes of overturning the results of an election which time and time again has been proven in the courts across this great land and by election officials from both parties to be legitimate and proper.

Some referred to the stunning events of the day as surreal. As I thought about it, given the past number of years, the word that came to mind was inevitable. It was surreal to be sure as no one ever imagined the events of January 6 would ever take place, but they did and we should have seen them coming.

Lying in bed last night considering all that had taken place, portions of Scripture began to move through my consciousness. The words of the prophet Micah to do justice and love kindness resonated. Isaiah's prophecy that swords will be turned into plowshares appeared and offered hope. Baptismal promises, grounded in Scripture and our rich theology to 'work for justice and peace in all the world' held my attention.

What happened yesterday in our nation's capital is not who we are, nor is it who we are called to be. We are better than this. Having said that it did expose even more clearly the deep divide in this nation that cries out for healing and urges hope.

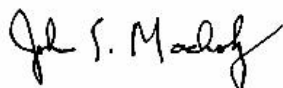
We have always been a people divided, let us make no mistake about that. The majority of our elected officials are either Republicans or Democrats. In the past decade and more, that has become more than apparent as sides have dug in, vitriol has been hurled across the aisle and ideologies have become entrenched. That may be who we are but it is not who we are called to be.

We can certainly have our differences, and we do, but they need not divide us. I believe it is our calling, now more than ever, to find our way forward and be the peace that Isaiah envisions and that the Prince of Peace calls to be. As Presiding Bishop Michael Curry of the ECUSA said so simply yet eloquently during the run up to the elections (paraphrased): we cannot just sit back and expect others to heal the rift. We must step across the aisle, take the hand of those who are there and take them out to lunch. It is time to sit down and talk with them in order to develop a better understanding of who they are and what their hearts hold and why. It's not an opportunity to argue or defend our own position but rather to listen and learn.

Now is that time. In this 'winter of our discontent' it is our calling, baptismal and bold, to be the peace that we seek. It is our calling to enfold the light that led the Magi to the Light of the World and carry it into the present darkness. We are in this together, none of us are innocent, including myself.

It is my fervent prayer that we are at a turning point and perhaps a time of a change of heart in this country, this great democracy that guides and directs our lives and this world. I will be stepping out this day remembering those who mourn the deaths of loved ones because of the events that took place yesterday in Washington, recalling my own complicity in present realities and renewing my commitment to work for justice and peace in all the world, even if it should mean admitting that my own culpability sometimes stands in the way. I invite you to join with me on this journey, living into the forgiveness that is ours because of the death and resurrection of Christ and loving even those we may deem unlovable, recognizing that we are all created in the image of God and thus are siblings in this journey and must work to find our way together.

In the Prince of Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John S. Macholz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

John S. Macholz, Bishop