

A JOINT PASTORAL STATEMENT ON THE CIVIL UNREST IN THE NATION'S CAPITOL

Together we witnessed some extraordinary events in the last week, events that most likely none of us ever expected to see. The uprising in Washington D.C. is numbered with all the many other events of the last year that none of us ever expected to see. In some ways though, the violence in our nation's capital is even more threatening and disruptive to our way of life in the United States than the pandemic has been. The question is, what is our Christian response to the ugly mob attack on the Capitol building on, of all days, Epiphany (January 6)? This is a question that we as Christians and citizens of the United States of America must consider carefully. How should we as Christian Americans appropriately protest an action by our government?

In the first place, it seems to us that we need to be very clear where our final loyalty and allegiance rests, and it is not with any president or political leader. Political allegiances rise to the level of religious fervor for far too many Americans; even some who call themselves Christian. Yet, the Apostle Paul is very clear in his letter to the Philippians that **“our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20)**. The scripture also warns against placing too much faith in human leaders and not enough faith in God. **“Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help” (Psalm 146:3)**.

As troubled as we were by the images we saw on television last week of the mob storming the capital building and occupying the offices of congressional leaders and the president's desk on the senate floor, we were perhaps more struck by seeing, in the midst of the sea of TRUMP 2020 banners, protestors carrying JESUS 2020 banners. It is our position that anyone who believed they were carrying out the will of God or Jesus Christ by storming the Capitol building last week knows very little about Jesus and certainly does not know him personally.

We Americans revere our forefathers and mothers who rebelled against tyranny over 200 years ago, and won freedom and built this nation into the democracy we celebrate today. Jesus, too, was a rebel in his own way. But his radical ideas were not expressed through acts of violence. In fact, when confronted with the hostility of others his reaction was just the opposite. He responded in love and forgiveness, the cross being the greatest expression of that. We cannot consider those who took part in the assault in Washington, destroyed property, beat law enforcement officers causing serious injury and death, as Patriots and we cannot condone the actions of leaders who urged this activity. This is neither the American way, nor the way of Jesus!

What we witnessed, was contrary to the Gospel of our Lord. We acknowledge many have feelings of indignation, anger, uncertainty, fear, and sadness. As your Pastors, we invite your prayers for justice and accountability, for hard truths to be spoken and heard, for peace in our nation.

Our collective efforts also call us to respond individually, to be the followers of Jesus we are called to be through our baptism. The words of the baptismal promises include: “so that [we] may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.”

So as we process the realities in which we are living and turn to God, we invite you to join us in the Peace Prayer (Prayer of St. Francis):

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me bring love;
Where there is injury, let me bring pardon;
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith;
Where there is despair, let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light;
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

In Christ's Peace,

Pastor Justin Eller and Pastor Mike