

The Bethel Pulpit

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BETHEL

LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the web at www.bethel-madison.org
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Text: Psalm 46, Luke 12:32-40

Walking through Grief to Hope: Our Nation

We all grieve in different ways and certainly over different things. You may have come here today feeling some particular loss in your life be that of a person or ability. While we do not want to stay stuck in our grief it is good for us to grieve. Grieving is acknowledging that there are voids in our lives that we would like to have filled, or if they cannot be filled that we would be given grace to know how to live with them so that they do not rob us of meaning and contentment in life. I believe that 80% of our moving toward meaning and contentment in our lives centers on our awareness of what is holding us captive, what from yesterday is robbing us of today and tomorrow. This awareness then paves the way for the remaining 20% which is the tough work we actually need to do to become comfortable enough with our past to be free to live less encumbered lives. Grieving is our soul breathing. Good grieving does not mean we forget, good grieving gives vent to the fretting that can steal our joy and our hope. Today we focus on our nation asking what it is that we might want to let go of in order for our nation's soul to breathe more easily and fully.

People from different parts of the world are praying for our nation.

Ismael Moreno a Jesuit priest from Honduras prays....*I pray for us to grow in our faith and to proclaim that success, money, private property, consumerism, and individualism must never take the place of true values which have been marginalized in the United State and in our small countries.*

Bother Emile from France*I pray that you will dig deep, and find resources that will increase in you the desire to take [risks to change what needs to be changed]. As you do you may well find that your life will then take on new meaning.*

Frank Chikane, from Johannesburg South Africa...*we pray that God will raise more prophetic voices from the church in the United States to take a stand against the odds—against the overwhelming darkness the world is facing now.*

What are the “true values” Ismael is praying that we do not overlook, what are the risks that brother Emile is encouraging us to take, or the prophetic voice that Pastor Chikane is praying that we have?

As simple as it may sound, they, each in their own way, are encouraging us to make significant changes in how we as a nation treat each other and relate to the world around us. Their encouragement is similar: **let God be God in our lives and in our country.** Fear is running rampant in our country today and fear is the major enemy of trust and hope. Today both the Psalmist and the Gospel writer Luke join in encouraging us to come to grips with fear. In Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says after having encouraged the disciples not to worry, “Do not be afraid my friends, God wants all things good for you”. The psalmist says “therefore we will not fear though the earth should change and though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.” And a bit later, “God is in the midst of the city (or we can add nation) it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.” Fear can be immobilizing, it turns us in on ourselves, and leads us

to live lives suspicious of each other. Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his first inaugural address at the depth of the Depression said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

The antidote to fear is hope. The Psalmist and Jesus point to that hope—it is in the God who has created our world and our nation, and who still daily provides for it. Our friends from other countries are warning us that healing hope will not come from turning in on ourselves, or from our accumulated successes, the amount of money we can amass, private property we may accumulate, or our own individualism. It certainly does not come from blaming others. Healing hope, pulling us through our grief as a nation or individually, comes in our willingness and ability to see ourselves as God sees us and then to see God in each other. It is our disconnecting from God and then from one another that breeds sadness and isolation within us and within our nation. This sadness and isolation can have disastrous, life threatening results and consequences as we have again experienced in the mass shootings this past weekend.

It is hard to argue against those who describe our nation as being divided today. This is not the first time nor will it be the last. Left to ourselves by nature we always tend toward division rather than unity. However, becoming steeped in letting God be our God, trusting in what He wants for us, and relying on His providing what we need, gives us the hope that walks us through our grief. In Christ we are **all** children of God. St. Paul in Galatians reminds us because we are all children of God and the devastating divisions that might otherwise rise up and hurt us are destroyed. As God's children we are equal whether male or female, employer, employee or unemployed, rich or poor, American or South African, Honduran, or French, Republican, Democrat, or Libertarian, young, old or in-between—we are equal regardless of our culture, sexual orientation or language or whatever. In each and every one of

these categories there are differences to be sure, but these differences do not need to divide us. God loves what he has created; God loves all people and all things that he has created.

What is your prayer for your nation? What is your prayer for yourself as you are part of that nation? Beginning today I encourage you—challenge if needs be—to join me in writing your prayer for your country. On Monday write your prayer for our national leaders, on Tuesday your prayer for our state (or the state you are a resident of if not Wisconsin). On Wednesday, what specific need in our country are you raising, on Thursday your prayer for our flag, and on Friday your prayer as to how our nation relates with other nations. And finally, and most importantly, on Saturday, write out your prayer indicating your commitment and promise for what you will give and do for your country.

Remember, "God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble," and Jesus' words "do not fear, it is the Father's wish to give you all things good." Lord, teach us to pray and teach us how to live.

Amen