



inspire

change

together

Dear ASPC family and friends,

This is not the missive that I had in mind for the start of the year, but yesterday, our nation witnessed in real time, the storming of the Capitol building by angry American citizens. Many of these same citizens proudly misused the name of Jesus and their understanding of Christianity to defend their actions. What we witnessed yesterday was not the work of the good news of the gospel but a result of poor theology and the worst of partisan politics. In his remarks, President-Elect, Joe Biden said, "At their best, the words of a president can inspire, at their worst, they can incite." I would offer that the same is true for the words of a pastor, so today, I am choosing my words with great care because I understand that responsibility.

We, at ASPC, have agreed to be a welcoming congregation that is committed to celebrating the diversity in our community. The diversity which is one of our greatest assets is also that which makes us most vulnerable at this moment in our nation's history. We are a community that does not reflect one set of values, life experiences, or cultural norms. We are, however, a community that recognizes itself as one body in Christ. I would remind us of the work to which we, members of the Body of Christ, are called. Micah 6:8b makes it plain: "and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Over the next 14 days, we may see worse than what we witnessed yesterday and there is a possibility that we may not see anything at all and be lulled into a false sense of security. Our work is the work of doing justice. When we speak, are we speaking words of anger or words that will inspire the work of justice? When we engage with those who disagree with us, are we able to do so with kindness or are we seduced by the siren song of violent hateful speech? When we pray, do we find ourselves open to hearing the voice of the Spirit or are we using God as a sounding board for our own opinions and deeply held beliefs? Our work as people of faith is to be salt and light in the world. That may call us to do more listening and less talking. It may call us to find the courage to call out indisputable evil when we see it.

Last night, we opened our prayer time with the words from the 46th division of the Psalms, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Our nation is in serious trouble. God is still very present. Our nation is in need of truth-tellers and breach-repairers. God remains our refuge. Our congregation rests on a strong foundation of the life and witness of Christ Jesus and we are invited to live into that witness daily.

As we live into that witness, we do so with prayers for the safety of our elected officials. We do so with prayers for the safety of the citizens in the District and surrounding areas. We do so with tender hearts that attend to the hurt and outrage of our friends and neighbors. We do so with the reminder that we must take care of ourselves and each other because we cannot pour from an empty cup. Our true selves are not made in times of struggle; rather we are revealed. I pray that this moment finds us to be a community of great faith in the one who offers peace that passes all understanding. May your faith in God be strengthened and not shaken. May the peace of Christ enfold you and keep you centered today. May the comfort of the Holy Spirit strengthen you to live as evidence of a more excellent way. May this community always be a place of respite and inspiration for you.

Peace be with you,
Pastor Carla