

REFLECTION
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
January 10, 2021
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The events this week, which we have all watched—perhaps with some trepidation and fear—have unfolded in such a way that what we understood to be was a polarized, divided, struggling nation, now looks like a nation in the throes of genuine schism. Call it insurrection? See it as mob-violence? We saw the walls and interior of the Capitol building breeched as if it were a medieval castle to be stormed and looted. What happened, was an attempt to tear apart our national union--a schism, the first in our lifetimes. The word schism comes from the Greek word, “schizo” as in schizophrenic or schismatic. It means “to tear. In psychological terms, *schism* or *schizo*— is perhaps the most difficult of psychological maladies to be treated. The treatment usually is a maintenance protocol, not a full cure. In political terms? We are waiting to see what it means. “Schizo” is a word that means torn, not just “opened” but torn in such a way that it is not easy to put back together in the same way. Maybe, just maybe, it’s not always — a completely bad thing. It can also mean that the situation is finally clear enough for all to see and therefore, clear enough to be confronted, or dealt with.

The events this week caused me to do something I’ve never done before. I woke up the next morning, realizing that I had been praying in my sleep all night. Praying in my sleep. Like in a dream. Repeating the same phrases over and over while I slept. Bits and pieces of prayers we’ve been praying together from the Book of Common Prayer—for me as a priest— for over four decades. There they were, the words of recited prayers, buried deep inside my heart and mind and helping me to live with difficult and confusing events. One prayer in particular kept repeating like a refrain:

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord....

Over and over again. *Author of peace. Lover of concord.* So this is what we are taught about God. This is how we describe God, God's character. Even God's purpose for the world and our lives. *Peace and concord.* This is what we hope and pray for in our lives. This is what we have been taught. These prayers, prayers we perhaps take for granted, are what shape our lives, our expectations, our reality, what we expect from ourselves and others. I felt as if I had never really heard these words before.

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord....

When I awoke I opened the Book of Common Prayer to find this prayer—to read the rest of it:

*O God, the author of peace and lover of concord,
to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom;
Defend us, your humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies;
that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power
of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Prayer. Prayer returns us to what we have been taught and what we know to be true. It re-centers us to a place of balance and sure-footedness. It restores us to a wisdom beyond the circumstances of our lives.

Today's Gospel Lesson which is from the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark also gives us a place to return, recenter, and be restored. Mark doesn't use the Christmas imagery that Matthew and Luke use. There are no angels eternally announcing the grace of God in Christ or wise men taking the message to the far corners of the earth. In Mark, the story begins with the Baptism of Jesus. Sounds a lot less dramatic until you look at the words and know the history. John was preparing the way, calling people to stop and listen, but the way Mark describes Jesus' baptism—Well, he uses the words: *Sciso-menous tous oupavous*. Schism.

And the Heavens were torn a part.

Only Mark uses these words to describe the beginning of Jesus' ministry. And Mark uses these words again, ONLY at the end, when Jesus hangs on the cross and the veil of heaven is ripped in two. Schism. There is a before and an after. And nothing is the same again. The heavens are opened, and God is there! God is there in the midst of the pain and struggle. And our faith declares, that God is with us: *to return us to our right minds, to recenter us in Christ, and restore us in love.*

Here comes another prayer, from Morning Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer. I'd like to end today's reflection with this prayer with includes these words:

For only in you, can we live in safety.

Let us pray.

Show us your mercy, O Lord;

And grant us your salvation.

....

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

For only in you can we live in safety.

Lord, keep this nation under your care;

And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Let your way be known upon earth;

Your saving health among all nations.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And sustain us with your Holy Spirit.

For only in you, can we live in safety. Amen.

Almighty God, who has given us this good land for our heritage,
And has bound us together in a common life;

Save us from violence, discord and confusion;
from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way;
Help us confront one another without hatred or bitterness;
And to work together with mutual forbearance and respect.

Fashion into one united people the multitude brought here
out of many kindreds and tongues;
Endue with the spirit of wisdom
those to whom we entrust the authority of government,
that there may be justice and peace at home;
and that we may show forth your glory amongst the nations of the earth.

In the time prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness;
And in the day of trouble, let us not lose our trust in you;

All which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.