



*A growing, faithful, inclusive,
and caring community
committed to the ministry
and teachings of Jesus Christ.*

285 South 208 Street 402-289-4058

www.facebook.com/st.augustine.omaha

www.sainta.net/



**First Sunday of Epiphany
Morning Prayer Rite Two
Sunday, January 10, 2021**

PRELUDE*Amazing Grace***Newton**

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
‘Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
Than when we’d first begun.

Stanzas 1-4, John Newton (1725-1807; Stanza 5, Ascr. John Rees, c. 1859
These words are in the public domain.

OPENING SENTENCE

Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. *Luke 2:10, 11*

CONFESSION OF SIN

Let us confess our sins to God.

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through the
grace of Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power
of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. *Amen.*

VERSICLE

Officiant Lord, open our lips.

People And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Officiant and People

Glory to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God: as it was in the
beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.

ANTIPHON

Alleluia. To us a child is born: Come let us adore him. Alleluia.

INVITATORY

Come, let us sing to the Lord; *

let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving *

and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God, *

and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the caverns of the earth, *

and the heights of the hills are his also.

The sea is his, for he made it, *

and his hands have molded the dry land.

Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, *

and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

For he is our God,

and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. *

Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

PSALM: Psalm 29

¹ Ascribe to GOD, you heavenly beings, *
ascribe to GOD glory and strength.

² Ascribe due honor to GOD's holy Name; *
worship the Most High in the beauty of holiness.

³ The voice of GOD is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders; *
GOD is upon the mighty waters.

⁴ The voice of GOD is a powerful voice; *
the voice of GOD is a voice of splendor.

⁵ The voice of GOD breaks the cedar trees; *
GOD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;

⁶ GOD makes Lebanon skip like a calf, *
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.

⁷ The voice of GOD splits the flames of fire;
the voice of GOD shakes the wilderness; *
GOD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

⁸ The voice of GOD makes the oak trees writhe *
and strips the forests bare.

⁹ And in the temple of the HOLY ONE *
all are crying, "Glory!"

¹⁰ GOD sits enthroned above the flood; *
enthroned as Sovereign for evermore.

¹¹ GOD shall give strength to the people; *
the LORD shall give the people the blessing of peace.

Glory to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.

The Lessons

FIRST READING: Genesis 1:1-5

A Reading from the book of Genesis.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a

wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

FIRST CANTICLE

Canticle 15 (EOW): The Song of Mary

Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in you, O God my Savior, *
 for you have looked with favor on your lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed: *
 you, the Almighty, have done great things for me,
 and holy is your name.
You have mercy on those who fear you *
 from generation to generation.
You have shown strength with your arm *
 and scattered the proud in their conceit,
Casting down the mighty from their thrones *
 and lifting up the lowly.
You have filled the hungry with good things *
 and sent the rich away empty.
You have come to the help of your servant Israel, *
 for you have remembered your promise of mercy,
The promise made to our forebears, *
 to Abraham and his children for ever.

SECOND READING: Acts 19:1-7

A Reading from the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—altogether there were about twelve of them.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

SECOND CANTICLE

Canticle 17: The Song of Simeon

Nunc dimittis

Lord, you have set your servant free;
to go in peace as you have promised;
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior,
whom you have prepared for all the world to see:
A Light to enlighten the nations,
and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.

SEQUENCE HYMN*Spirit of the Living God***Iverson**

Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me
Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me
Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me
Spirit of the living God
Fall afresh on me

THIRD READING: Mark 19: 1-7

A Reading from Mark.

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

SERMON

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Officiant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Officiant Let us pray.

The Prayers

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy Name,
 thy kingdom come,
 thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever and ever. Amen.

Officiant Show us your mercy, O Lord;

People And grant us your salvation.

Officiant Clothe your ministers with righteousness;

People Let your people sing with joy.

Officiant Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

People For only in you can we live in safety.

Officiant Lord, keep this nation under your care;

People And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Officiant Let your way be known upon earth;

People Your saving health among all nations.

Officiant Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

People Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

For those in our hearts, especially Connie, Jamie, Kobe, Hayden, Dick, Pat G., Pat S., Amy, Paige, Nancy, Bailey, Norma, Byron, Sharon, JoEY, Helen, Jim, Danielle, Susan, Devon, Bill, Harold, Heather, Amelia, Melissa, David, Karen, Ellie, Tom, Maggie, Sandra, Logan, Jean, Heidi, Mark, Abby, Paul, Carolyn, Ginny, Linda, Joe, Shirley, Sharon, Norm, Joey, Bob, Tom, Massouda, Nazeer and Lorraine. Are there any others who need our prayers?

We ask your prayers for all those who have died in the hope of the resurrection and their families.

Officiant Create in us clean hearts, O God;

People And sustain us with your Holy Spirit.

LITANY

Thank you, Lord for taking care of your children.

O God, our rock in times of trial, thank you for being with us all as we face the difficulties that the coronavirus has brought. We feel your presence and are comforted.

You are there with those who are disappointed at not having the joyful celebrations of weddings, family gatherings, graduations and celebrations of life at birth and death. You provide joy to us in other ways, if we just pay attention.

God, hear our Prayer.

You are there with those of us quarantined at home, when we want to be saying words of comfort to those who are far from us. You take our words and whisper them to our loved ones for us.

God, hear our Prayer.

You are there, holding the hand of the sick or dying when their family cannot be with them.

God, hear our Prayer.

You are there protecting and guiding all on the front lines of medical care, vaccine development, police and firefighters and those in the supply chain to provide us food from farmers to truckers to grocery store workers.

God, hear our Prayer.

You are with our clergy who are doing your work under stressful circumstances and providing them with your words of comfort and caring to share with us.

God, hear our Prayer.

Let us never forget that wherever we are, you are there also with us, every step of the way.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

COLLECTS

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

THE GENERAL THANKSGIVING

Almighty God, Author of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks
for all your goodness and loving-kindness
to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ;
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,
that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to your service,
and by walking before you
in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

Birthdays: Kathy Lake, Michal Twerdochlib, Amy Anderson, Dusten
Crichton, Robert Baynes, Lauren Sash, Sue Atchley, and Maggie
Wellman

Anniversaries:

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your
servants as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom
and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of
their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A PRAYER OF ST. CHRYSOSTOM

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

CONCLUDING VERSICLE

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CONCLUDING SENTENCE

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. *Amen.* 2

Corinthians 13:14

POSTLUDE*Shall we gather at the river***Lowery**

Shall we gather at the river,
Where bright angel feet have trod;
With its crystal tide forever
Flowing by the throne of God?

Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river
That flows by the throne of God.

On the margin of the river,
Washing up its silver spray,
We will walk and walk and worship ever,
All the happy golden day.

Refrain

Ere we reach the shining river,
Lay we ev'ry burden down;
Grace our spirits will deliver,
And provide a robe and crown.

Refrain

Soon we'll reach the shining river,
Soon our pilgrimage will cease,
Soon our happy hearts will quiver
With the melody of peace.

Refrain

Robert Lowry (1826-1899)
This selection is in the public domain.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Birthdays & Anniversaries

Beginning this week and continuing through 2021 we will begin celebrating birthdays and anniversaries for the coming week rather than the previous week as we have been.

Online Coffee Fellowship

Join members of the St. A's family on Zoom **Today at 11:30 am (following this service)** for an interactive online social hour.

Elaine Randall Book Club

January's book is **Love is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Time** by Bishop Michael Curry. Books may be purchased online.

Instructed Eucharist and Drive-Up Communion on Jan 24th!

During the winter months, we won't have outdoor services, so Fr Ben will be repeating the "drive up" distribution of communion on certain Sundays – we'll get a full calendar of these dates out next week!

Our first date will be **Sunday, January 24th**, and Fr Ben will also lead an "instructed Eucharist" on that day. We do these every year or two to help new members and youth hear about how each piece of our worship service fits together. This is a good opportunity for people of all ages who want to know why we do different pieces of the church service, and if you have questions, you are welcome to send them to Fr Ben ahead of time at rector@sainta.net and he'll try to work in answers during the instructed part. You can simply plan to watch online at 10:30 on Sunday, Jan 24th, and then from 11:15 to noon after the service, Fr Ben will be out in front of the church distributing communion in our west parking lot.

Have a Video Drone?

Do you have a video drone that could take occasional videos of our construction project as we go? Please let Fr Ben know, we'd love to connect about getting even more "progress updates" up for people to see!

Music to honor Martin Luther King Jr.

Music at the Morning Prayer Service, January 17, will honor the birthday of the great civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. ***“Precious Lord, Take My Hand”*** was MLK’s favorite gospel song and was the source of inspiration for the civil rights movement. He requested Mahalia Jackson sing it at several civil rights rallies. She also sang it at King’s funeral in 1968. The Rev. Thomas Dorsey wrote the lyrics and tune in response to the tragic death of his wife in childbirth and death of his infant son in 1932.

The hymn ***“What does the Lord Require”*** (Hymnal #605) reflects the theme of Christian responsibility; “Do justly; love mercy; walk humbly with your God.” Verse 1 addresses sacrifices Christians make; Verse 2 asks rulers of earth to show justice.

“Air for Organ” is a solo organ piece written by African American composer, William B. Cooper (1923-1993). He holds a Doctorate of Sacred Music from Christ Theological Seminary in Younkers, New York and has earned many honors for his compositions. He served on faculties of several colleges and also was Minister of Music at historic St. Phillip’s Episcopal Church and St Martin’s Episcopal Church in Harlem. The hymn tune “Doryce” is dedicated to his wife.

Striving for Justice and Peace

The Balancing the Scales of Justice Task Force invites you to participate in a series of Zoom-based encounters focusing on issues of criminal justice reform and the abolition of the death penalty. Every Sunday during Epiphany **(January 10-February 14, 2021) from 4-5 PM**, we will engage with voices from the Episcopal Church and other denominations who speak loudly on these issues. Please see our newsletter for the registration link.

Sister, Brother, Let Us Serve You

We now have many volunteers for parish members who request them for our new service ministry of “Acts of Love”. All we need now is people to sign up for assistance. Do you need tutoring for your school age child, a cooked meal, to be driven to an appointment or ??? Please **[CLICK HERE](#)** to see the full list of possible ways volunteers can assist you.

If you see a few ways we could make your life a little easier, please mark them along with a preferred way to contact you and the best day and time. If there is something you need that is *not* listed, fill it in and we will do our best to find a volunteer with that skill.

If you have questions, email Barb Hall at barbhall_18301@yahoo.com

See Old Friends—Make New Friends Chat

Several members of the parish think we need more conversation to get through the winter! Please join us on Saturday mornings at 10:30 a.m. for an hour to just talk about whatever is on your mind.

We are calling it: See Old Friends—Make New Friends.

Anyone you think might like to get on to chat is eligible—men or women, Episcopalians or not, just come, visit, meet new people, and enjoy an hour of conversation on Zoom. The link can be found [here](#).

Trouble, contact Sandra Squires at sksquires@cox.net or Carol Ott at cdianneott@icloud.com.

Nominations for St A’s Leadership

Each year at our January Annual Meeting, we elect some of our parish officers. In the coming weeks, **Lynette Kautz** (lfkautz1@cox.net) will be serving as our lay chairperson of nominations, and you can e-mail her to nominate yourself or someone else in our parish (if you’ve asked them to consider it!). **The Annual Meeting will take place on Sunday, January 31st, time and venue TBD.** Here are the roles that we will elect:

- **Parish Vestry**, 3 seats. This is our formal parish board. It meets monthly to review large project goals, reports from ministries or

committees, and our monthly financials. This is a three-year term from Jan 2021 to Jan 2024, and represents a steady commitment to leadership. Our Vestry must be formal parish members and givers of record (Fr Ben or our administrator, Jay Hammond, can help with questions around this!). The meetings are on Sunday afternoons for approximately 90 minutes, and this commitment of leadership helps guide much of what we do together! This is a great role for someone who feels called to prayerfully helping make our formal decisions for the parish.

- **Legacy Society Director**, 1 seat. This is a board that practices longer-range financial planning and stewardship. They use our brief planned giving policies to help guide the planning for, receiving of, and disbursement of estate gifts. This is a three-year term with quarterly meetings to review the status of our invested funds and any new gifts or expenditures. The committee is chaired by its senior member, with one seat rotating each year, so our directors are constantly helping train one another. This is a great ministry for someone who wants to put some thoughtful time in every few months to help keep an eye on some long-term goals and hopes for St A's.
- **Annual Council Delegate**, 3 seats. Each year our parish sends a delegation to the Annual Council of the Diocese of Nebraska, where clergy and laypeople gather, pray together, hear from our bishop and often a keynote speaker, and take up some of the business of the diocese. This is a rich time of sharing about ministries, bringing ideas home, and meeting Episcopalians from around the state of Nebraska, and is planned to involve a Friday/Saturday event in October that will take place in Hastings, Nebraska, this coming year. This is a good ministry for someone who loves to learn and share, pray with others, and help our diocese consider and confirm some of its plans for the coming year.
- **Questions? Please feel free to reach out to Fr Ben** (rector@sainta.net) or **Lynette Kautz** (lfkautz1@cox.net), and we can talk more about these parish roles!

Annual Meeting January 31 at Noon

Our St. Augustine's Annual Meeting will take place online this year over zoom. Because the format is a bit limiting, our meeting will be a bit more basic than in other years and will focus largely on our parish "business" as well as comments from Fr. Ben, which will include an update about our Capital Campaign project and build.

If you have questions regarding this format, please contact Fr. Ben or Kate Kielion, our director of ministries. This [link](#) will take you directly to the meeting on Sunday, January 31 at Noon. We anticipate the meeting will take about 1 hour, but have blocked on open ended session in case our work takes a bit longer.

Office Hours

We are now without water and the restrooms are blocked off for construction. Due to this, we are not able to hold gatherings in the church any longer and office staff will be mostly remote.

Please email Jay at parish@sainta.net before you head to church for any reason to be sure she will be there. As always, if you need anything from Fr. Ben or Kate, feel free to email or call.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Construction Continues!

Well, we got a lot of snow this past week! The good news is that it came at a great time, since the week between Christmas and New Years was going to be fairly low-activity time anyway as our contractors and subs had a lot of planned vacation. Even so, they've been working to get things cleared off to be ready to go right away again.

Things that HAVE been completed include a lot more component purchasing, site planning, and an initial test of the strength of our first concrete pour. All of that is good "working ahead" that should prevent us from hitting hold-ups down the road, as I understand it. Some of our under-floor plumbing has also been laid-in, which is exciting, and they're preparing to do the big work of updating our septic system.

Our contractors are fairly confident we'll need to use the "build in a box" strategy they had outlined for us in November as a way to control costs and calendars if we got a high snowfall. Essentially, it means that we might see walls go up earlier so they can control inside conditions, and then pour the indoor concrete under more controlled conditions. It's an uncommon but not new strategy, and we've been aware of it as an option for some months now, which has also been good planning ahead to help us keep efficiency up as we go.

More next week!

Stay tuned! And please feel free to send on any questions to Father Ben at rector@sainta.net!

Rector's Reflection

Thursday, January 7, 2021

I woke up tired today. I'm sure many of you did, too. Some of it is the real fatigue of spending long hours yesterday sifting through news from both traditional sources and social media re-posting to try to get real time information about the attack on the United States Capitol Building.

I'm not interested, today, in assigning the blame or debunking the mistakes and outright lies that have already been circulating: others will have that responsibility over the coming days and weeks, and they and their difficult work are in my prayers. I will be calling my senators and representative today both to voice gratitude for their safety in the face of violence and threats yesterday, and to ask them to treat this matter with serious consequences for those involved, as well as to urge them to recognize by this that the threat of more such events in the future must be taken seriously and prevented. On the count of blame games and misinformation, let my role as your pastor, in this e-mail, suffice to say: there are people out there already who are courting your unbelief and wish to lie to you; be careful and investigate, especially before you re-post or share information on social media.

What I AM interested in saying today, as a priest of God and your pastor, is that we have suffered a traumatic event and injury together.

I have to admit – my go-to way of trying to rebuild a sense of control and safety after something chaotic and violent is to learn and to teach. I spent hours reading everything I could find yesterday, and I typed out paragraphs this morning, for this reflection, in notes to friends, in corrections to strangers online. Knowledge helps me feel prepared, and it's easy for me to work with what we know, and how we know it.

The harder thing for me to do is to pay attention to how we're feeling, and admit that we were harmed. All of us, together, were attacked yesterday. I can actually hold quite a bit of empathy about why and how this happened. I have spent enough time as a Christian that my gut reaction is a really deep lamentation and not a hatred about how sin has warped the hearts and minds of those who can do something like this. Part of the most dangerous shape of

evil is how close at hand it is when sin finds someone hurting enough or lied to enough that they can be pulled across the line into violence.

But I also know that I'm hurting because of it, and I'm sure you are, too.

This moment that we're now in has within it a really difficult set of spiritual challenges.

One of them is to not let hate teach us to hate. If there is a literal devil or a true face of evil, it would like nothing more than for everyone who is ever hated to learn to be hateful in their turn, so that hatred can overwhelm love more and more, and neighbors can be turned against one another. It's harder to sit in pain than to feel powerful by hating right back.

Another spiritual challenge is to let the legal consequences be our only response. That is to say, to look at this event in isolation and not in context, and simply punish those who have committed crimes and violence with the consequences of our legal system. This should happen, surely. But if we stop there, and refuse to acknowledge the serious forces and tensions that boiled over into this attack, we will have failed to acknowledge the depth of the problem, or to prevent it from happening again.

But perhaps the greatest spiritual challenge of this moment is that it wants to persuade us that Jesus is wrong and that we should not love our neighbor as we love ourselves. It wants us to think that we have to war on one another in violence forever. It wants us to believe that there can be no peace.

So.

Let me offer this balm.

What we do when we follow Jesus is commit to walking towards a different kind of world. On some days it's simple and joyous: a celebration of life's milestones; a chance to share food and fellowship and hear about the small joys and concerns of a neighbor's week; a Sunday School class that teaches ancient and beautiful lessons and parables to children so they have tools to understand their world; or just time in a church family in which we meet people we wouldn't otherwise and learn to love each other, often across differences. The life of the Gospel is often a joy.

On some days we take on challenging work: we discuss and confront the logs in our own eyes; we learn history that can make us uncomfortable; and we

reflect on how sin and error tempt us in our complacency. We repent and ask forgiveness. We pray in the hope of transformation and conversion. We look to God to reform our lives. This work is hard, but deeply meaningful, and it rises to meet the harder moments when they come.

Other days we practice holy vigils: we sit with the sick; we visit those in prison; we hold one another in prayer; we bless the dying; we shield the joyous. Every small act of prayer and comfort and lament teaches us larger ones. Over a lifetime, we come to see the world in its brokenness, and our eyes draw nearer to the gaze of God's eyes, which beholds this broken world and loves it dearly. We learn to love dearly, too, and that love makes the joy richer, the challenging work more necessary, and the vigils deeper.

And the deepest reality is that the life of our world is in each of these places constantly, all swirled together in ways that cannot be unbound from one another. Our hearts know this. And the life of a Christian community is absolutely large enough and broad enough and strong enough to hold this world in loving care as we commit to a journey with our loving God that is transforming this world day by day and generation by generation.

What that means as we wake up tired and hurting today is that our healing, and the healing of our country, and the healing of our world, will all take time. But God has not left us, and the community we make together as followers of Jesus remains one of the most powerful foundations for the real safety and change that we need, which can be found in loving one another as God has loved us. We can learn that together. We can live that together. And the world needs us to, just as dearly as we need to for ourselves.

Let me finally say that if you need to talk, I've got my phone on. You can reach me at 402-378-5690, even if you just want to say how you're feeling. We can talk together, and we can pray together, and we can hold hope together for a better day today, and tomorrow.

In Christ,

Ben +

