



MOURNING INTO UNITY

Vigil

November 2, 2020

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

INTRODUCTION / WELCOME

The Rev. Ed Bacon:

On behalf of all of us here, we welcome you. We are all united in a common purpose, one in mind and one in heart. We have gathered to lament, to pray, to hope, and to receive support from one another and from The Holy One. We encourage everyone to participate fully in both word and action. Please have a candle available for lighting later in the litany.

Among us tonight are representatives from many communities including: Rabbi Peter Berg (The Temple), Jeronia Blue (representing the medical community), Lucia Fernandez (representing youth), Soumaya Khalifa, (Islamic Speakers Bureau), John Vaughn (Senior Pastor, Ebenezer Baptist Church), Rabbi Loren Ladipus (The Temple), Imam Muhammad Sajid (Al-Farooq Masjid Mosque), Reverend Jasmine Smothers (Atlanta First UMC).

What other communities and groups are represented here this evening? Please speak the names of the communities in which you find spiritual meaning.

Now the death toll from the coronavirus pandemic in the United States has surpassed the 230,000 mark. We continue to mourn the loss of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and a disproportionate number of Black lives killed in officer involved shootings, most recently 27-year-old Walter Wallace Jr., a married father of nine, killed in Philadelphia in the midst of a mental health crisis. The amount of grief we have to process seems insurmountable.

We mourn the loss of trust in science.

We mourn the deaths from COVID-19 of every race and ethnicity, age and background; for medical professionals and first responders who have died from COVID-19 while working to save lives from COVID-19.

We mourn the deaths from hurricanes and wildfires.

We mourn for our democracy.

We mourn for all those who live in a world that sees the color of their skin as a threat.

We mourn for the victims of violence, not only on the streets and for many in our homes, but also in the halls of our government.

We mourn the death of businesses that provided livelihoods to many people.

We mourn for our mental well-being under the trauma of multiple simultaneous pandemics.

We mourn because so much of what we called normal is gone.

In the midst of so much loss and pain, we have gathered to declare our hope for something better and our commitment to making it possible. Yet, hope does not lessen the need to grieve — to sob, yell, throw up our hands, and fall to our knees in grief.

Tonight we have come together to grieve, to lament, to pray, and to hope. In our grief, we are not alone. We mourn in solidarity with others of faith, and we rejoice that, as different as our traditions

may be, we are yet one.

OPENING PRAYER

The Rev. John Vaughn, Executive Pastor, Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA:

Our tradition invites us to mourn and through mourning, to find our strength in community. That is the nature of comfort – strength in community with one another and with God.

The Beatitudes of Jesus:

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Please pray with me inspired by the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his eulogy for the martyred children of Birmingham in 1963:

Now I say to you in conclusion,
life is hard,
at times as hard as crucible steel.
It has its bleak and difficult moments.
Like the ever-flowing waters of the river,
life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood.
Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons,
life has the soothing warmth of its summers
and the piercing chill of its winters.
But if we will hold on,
we will discover that God walks with us,
and that God is able to lift us from the fatigue of despair
to the buoyancy of hope
and transform dark and desolate valleys
into sunlit paths of inner peace.

READING AND PRAYER

Rabbi Peter Berg, Senior Rabbi, The Temple

Let us recall the promises of Lamentations:

My soul is bereft of peace;
I have forgotten what happiness is;
so I say, "Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord."
The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."

Let us pray:

Let the rain come and wash away
the ancient grudges, the bitter hatreds
held and nurtured over generations.
Let the rain wash away the memory
of the hurt, the neglect.
Then let the sun come out and
fill the sky with rainbows.
Let the warmth of the sun heal us
wherever we are broken.
Let it burn away the fog so that
we can see each other clearly.
So that we can see beyond labels,
beyond accents, gender or skin color.
Let the warmth and brightness
of the sun melt our selfishness.
So that we can share the joys and
feel the sorrows of our neighbors.
And let the light of the sun
be so strong that we will see all
people as our neighbors.
Let the earth, nourished by rain,
bring forth flowers
to surround us with beauty.
And let the mountains teach our hearts
to reach upward to heaven.
Amen.

READING AND PRAYER

The Rev. Jasmine Smothers, Senior Pastor, Atlanta First United Methodist Church, Atlanta, GA

“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

(Romans 8:26–27)

O God, we pray for all those in our world
who are suffering from injustice:
For those who are discriminated against
because of their race, color or religion;
For those imprisoned
for working for the relief of oppression;
For those who are hounded
for speaking the inconvenient truth;
For those tempted to violence
as a cry against overwhelming hardship;
For those deprived of reasonable health and education;
For those suffering from hunger and famine;
For those too weak to help themselves
and who have no one else to help them;
For the unemployed who cry out
for work but do not find it.
We pray for anyone of our acquaintance
who is personally affected by injustice.
Forgive us, Lord, if we unwittingly share in the conditions
or in a system that perpetuates injustice.
Show us how we can serve your children
and make your love practical by washing their feet.

**Prayer attributed to Mother Teresa*

A SELECTION FROM THE HOLY QURAN

Imam Muhammad Sajid, Al-Farooq Masjid Mosque, Atlanta, GA

These words come to us from the Holy Quran

“Oh you who believe! Stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fairness, and let not the hatred of others make you swerve to do wrong and depart from justice. Be just, that is closest to piety; and heed God, for (don’t you know) that God is Well Aware with all that you do.” *Quran (5:8)*

“And among God’s beautiful signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and colors. Truly in that are divine signs for those who think.” *Quran (30:22)*

In the Name of God, The Source of All Mercy, The Dispenser of Grace

We pray for healing in our fractured and polarized country and world. We pray for compassionate and humble hearts, the strength to forgive, the patience to understand, and the inspiration to do what is right. We pray for the power of good to overcome evil and the power of love to overcome hate.

We pray for a new world where fear shall no longer lead men to commit injustice, nor selfishness and ego make them bring suffering to others. We pray for the realization that we are inheritors of a shared wisdom and brethren of a common humanity. We pray that we can appreciate each other's gifts and uphold the dignity of every human being. We pray for a life dedicated to the task of peace, justice and harmony.

**Janan Najeeb, a founder and president of the Milwaukee Muslim Women's Coalition and publisher of the Wisconsin Muslim Journal*

CANDLE LIGHTING

Soumaya Khalifa - Executive Director of the Islamic Speakers Bureau of Atlanta

It is said that it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

Tonight, we who are gathered online light many candles against the darkness. Let us light a candle now and trust that even in the midst of the darkest grief, there is light.

While I recite the Mourning Into Unity Candle-Lighting Blessing, hold your candles outstretched for all to see and connect your eyes with others in this space.

By lighting our candles in this time of pandemic, we mourn the dead we know and those we don't, the ones killed by racism, and the ones who died alone, held in their last minutes only by God. Even as we mourn the dead, we honor and pledge our unity with the living: our country, our planet, and all of us, still here.

REMEMBRANCES AND PRAYERS

The Rev. Elizabeth Shows Caffey, Senior Associate Rector, St. Luke's Episcopal Church

We are deeply aware of the tragic cycle of continuing violence around the world. As we each find our own way through the complex maze of inner feelings, it is useful to know that we are not alone in our struggles or in our hopes. Even as tragedy and suffering have occurred to so many people now and throughout history, there have also been passionate insightful voices calling for peace and healing.

We meet you in prayer this day, asking for hope and guidance during these times of great uncertainty.

Let us now call to mind all we grieve, all we mourn, and name it. Let us speak its name. Let us speak their names.

Please type into the chat all that rises in your mind and heart so that we may join you in prayer.

- In silence, let us remember the darkest days thus far of the COVID crisis. Let us remember our fear, and our isolation, and our pain. *(A period of silence is kept.)*

Let us now speak aloud what those days have been like by typing it into the chat. *(A period of*

silence is kept.)

And let us all say: **We remember, and we mourn.**

- In silence, let us remember the people who suffered the ravages of the virus. First, let us remember those who suffered under Covid-19 and survived.. Let us call them to mind and name them aloud or type them into the chat. *(A period of silence is kept.)*
- In silence, we ask for Your calm, in place of our anxiety: We pray for the world during this global pandemic as countries contemplate fresh lockdowns amid the surge of Covid-19 deaths. Many of us feel completely discouraged. We pray for France, where there's a record number of new cases. And we pray especially for refugee camps in Syria, where the cases have risen tenfold.

In silence, let us remember the people who have died from Covid-19: the people we knew and loved, and the people we did not know but are our neighbors still. Let us call them to mind and name them in the chat. *(A period of silence is kept.)*

For all those named and those who remain unnamed:

Upon your first breath we counted you among the souls who reached the earth. Whatever your path had been we pray in reverence for your precious time once here. Your soul released from our sight, now free to journey on. Upon your last breath we counted you in our hearts forever. And let us all say: **We remember, and we mourn.**

Jeronia Blue, RN, a parishioner at St. Luke's who has cared for patients at Grady Hospital for more than 50 years

We lift our hearts in prayer for all those protesting police brutality:

- In Philadelphia, PA, U.S., where Walter Wallace, Jr., a black man experiencing a mental health crisis, was shot and killed by police.
- In Nigeria amid the #EndSARS weeks-long protests, where dozens of unarmed demonstrators were killed this week at two different demonstrations.

And let us all say: **We remember, and we mourn.**

Let us remember all of the Black people who have died at the hands of those entrusted with protecting them. Speak their names or type them into the chat. *(A period of silence is kept.)*

And let us all say: **We remember, and we mourn.**

We ask for Your love, in place of our hatred. O God of all people, grant us open eyes, minds, and hearts: for all that we can learn during this uncertain time, for new understanding, for abundant generosity, and for more love, that we may learn to truly be Your beloved community.

- In silence, in our minds eye, let us remember all the businesses that have closed, all the workers who are without income, all the people who struggle to support their families and even themselves. Let the images of the places and the people rise in our minds and in our hearts, and

let us name them aloud, or type them into the chat. *(A period of silence is kept.)*

And let us all say: **We remember, and we mourn.**

Lucia Fernandez, member of St. Luke's

- In silence, let us remember all of the children and youth who have died from CoVid 19. We give thanks for the gift they were in our world and grieve for the loss of them and what they could have been; For their parents, relatives, friends and classmates who miss their presence at home, school, play and the dinner table. O God of Grace and Glory rekindle in our hearts a spirit of steadfast love for all so that we do what it takes to protect our fellow human beings.

In silence, let us be mindful of all the cracks in our democracy, all the threats to the American experiment. Let us especially be mindful of the ways the upcoming election is in peril, the ways our voting is being undermined.

Gracious God, we are blessed to live in a democracy where each citizen has the opportunity and the responsibility to participate in our decision-making processes. **Our faith belongs in the voting booth as well as in the sanctuary!**

Justice-Seeking God, we know that our policymakers impact our lives: they have power to ensure that all your children are equally part of this society; they can require that taxes are just and that our nation's income goes to benefit the many; they can help to make all jobs good jobs that pay living wages; they can send us to war or foster peace. **Our faith belongs in the voting booth as well as in the sanctuary!**

Community-Building God we know that questions of public policy are also matters of faith, for they help us to give substance to the Beloved Community which you have called us to shape. You desire each of us to live a life of wholeness; to have the opportunities to fulfill our potential and become the persons you have created us to be; to live secure in the knowledge that if we fall on hard times, a strong, public safety net will be there to support us. **Our faith belongs in the voting booth as well as in the sanctuary!**

But Holy One, this election season has gone on too long! We are turned off by a circus which obscures critical issues, reduces complicated choices to sound bites and encourages personal attacks. We want this election season to be over! Help us to find a way to cut through the confusion and the spin. Give us patience to consider and make wise choices that will lead ever closer to your vision of the Beloved Community. **Our faith belongs in the voting booth as well as in the sanctuary!**

**Seeds for Election Season Prayers was written by Edith Rasell, Ph.D, Minister for Economic Justice*

We ask for Your peace, in place of our violence. On this night before Election Day in the United States, many of us are nervously praying for a just election and for all who are able to make their voice heard at the polls.

During this election season may we work towards finding humanity in our neighbors, in our family members, in our friends. Let us not lock ourselves inside a bubble of agreement, rather let us push ourselves to reach out and break down the barriers of hatred. This is a lot to ask but we know that without coming together we will continue along this path of divisiveness. A path that leads to hurt not healing. We need healing Eternal One, healing of the body and the soul. The soul you breathed into us needs healing, needs guidance, needs the hope only You can provide. The body you formed for us needs healing, needs nourishment, needs love. We pray for healing Eternal One, for ourselves, our neighbors, our families and our friends. We especially pray for healing for our country, which is pulling itself apart at the seams.

**Rabbi Simone Schicker, Temple B'nai Israel, Kalamazoo*

Heal our nation.
Heal our hearts.
Heal our nation. Amen.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Rabbi Loren Lapidus, Associate Rabbi, The Temple

O God of the struggle, we are exhausted.

We are tired of the isolation and fear of COVID and the ways in which a lack of safety brings more uncertainty to this election.

We are tired of difficult conversations with friends and family members who don't see COVID or politics as we do.

We are tired of disinformation and voter suppression and politicians who put party and personal wealth over the greater good of the nation.

We are tired of a Constitution ignored and political norms in tatters.

We feel like we are in a month-long struggle not unlike Jacob's long night of contest with a messenger of God.

May we have the tenacity of Jacob--to not end this fight without demanding a blessing.

May we open our eyes and hearts, expecting blessings that we can scarcely imagine: a heightened commitment to our spiritual wellness, a broadened inclusion of those previously marginalized, a deeper understanding of systemic racism, a democracy strengthened because we have been awakened to its current fragility.

Thank you for coming alongside us---all of us---even when we are not awake to your presence. Amen.

** The Rev. Nancy E. Brink, a Christian Minister (Disciples of Christ)*

We pray for our nation that we be united as a people tied to a single garment of destiny. We pray for those who we elect to serve all citizens that they may be guided not by ego, politics or money, but by compassion for all people. Guide us as families, as a community of faith, as a nation to follow the path of love. Amen

The Rev. Ed Bacon:

Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You.
Great and wonderful are Your works, wondrous are your ways.
Thank You for the many-splendored diversity of Your creation.

Thank You for the many ways we affirm Your presence and purpose, and the freedom to do so.

Forgive our violation of Your creation.
Forgive our violence toward each other.

We stand in awe and gratitude for Your persistent love
for each and all of Your children: Christian, Jew, Muslim,
as well as those with other faiths.

Grant to all and our leaders attributes of the strong:
mutual respect in words and deed,
restraint in the exercise of power, and
the will for peace with justice, for all.

Eternal God, Creator of the universe, there is no God but You. Amen.

** authored by Christian, Jewish and Muslim clergy. Excerpted from Current Dialogue 24/93, p.36.*

The people depart in silence.