

THE  
*Episcopal*  
CHURCH



Office of Public Affairs

**Jan. 6, 2022: Presiding Bishop Michael Curry’s address to the nation**

A Moment of Peril and Promise

The nightmare of last January 6th was not just an event. It was a revelation. It was a revelation of deeply dangerous divisions in our nation—some political, some ideological, some racial, and some disguised as religious.

But it was also a revelation that there are forces intentionally seeking and working to divide us. Left unchecked, unaddressed, and unhealed, this can lead to the decline and deconstruction of our nation and make it impossible for us to strive to be “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

The nightmare of January 6th was not just an event; it was a revelation. But it was a revelation in another sense. That day, and our response to it, contain potential for both peril and promise.

The peril is the possibility of the decline, deconstruction, and even destruction of our nation and its most cherished values. But that peril is only an inevitability if, as William Butler Yeats said in another context, “the best lack all conviction while the worst are filled with passionate intensity.”

But the promise is the revival and renewal of the United States as the multiracial, multiethnic, pluralistic, democracy that our founders envisioned when they began this experiment. That promise becomes a real and greater possibility if enough of us will summon the spiritual courage necessary to claim it.

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It is not an exaggeration to say that we are living in a moral moment of spiritual peril and promise.

Such a moment demands moral vision that sees beyond mere self-interest and beholds the common good—a spiritual strength stronger than any sword.

Let me suggest three spiritual keys to this.

### **1. Renew our relationship with God**

First, we must renew our relationship with the God who the Bible says, “is love.” With the God who is the Creator of us all.

We must each find our path to connect with God in ways that are loving, liberating, and life-giving. I do so as one who strives to follow Jesus Christ and his way of love. We must each find the path that is authentic to us.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, prepared a set of moral and spiritual principles in the 1950s, which he invited those committed to the nonviolent way of change to study and to live by.

They included such principles as these:

- Remember the nonviolent movement seeks justice and reconciliation, not victory
- Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love
- Pray daily to be used by God that all men and women might be free
- Sacrifice personal wishes that all might be free
- Observe with friend and foes the ordinary rules of courtesy
- Refrain from violence of fist, tongue and heart

I would dare say that we could use those principles today. But his first principle was:

- Before you march, meditate on the life and teachings of Jesus

The wisdom behind this was that to truly be an instrument of unselfish, sacrificial love—to truly seek justice and not mere revenge—to truly labor for the realization of God’s Beloved Community for all of us and not just some of us, here on earth as it is in heaven, to truly be an instrument of love, we need the very energies of love from the source of all love to help us become instruments and vessels of that love.

To truly love, to truly do justice, to truly love mercy, as the prophet Micah said, we must humbly walk with God. To truly live by love, we need connection to the very energy of love itself. However you do it, whatever your path, find a way to a loving, liberating, and life-giving relationship with God.

### **2. Revive our relationship with each other**

Second, we must revive our relationship with each other as children of the God who made us all, and therefore as brothers, sisters, siblings, as the human family of God. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, “If you want peace, you don’t talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.” How we both treat and relate to others is a decision.

In the last century Martin Buber taught us that we can either relate to each other and the world itself as I-It or I-Thou. If other people and indeed the created world itself are seen and treated as IT, then they are dealt with as things, as objects to be used and even abused. They exist for our whims. But if the other person and the created world itself are seen and treated as THOU, as holy, as sacred, then they are loved, honored, respected, cherished and cared for. How different would our politics be, how different would our relationships with each other be, how different would our nation be if we would work at getting to know and cultivate relationships with our brother, or sister, or siblings.

### **3. Resurrect our commitment to the ideals we share**

Third, we must resurrect our commitment to the ideals and values that we share. We do have some generally accepted ideals and values.

Flawed as he was, Thomas Jefferson gave voice to one of those ideals when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Abraham Lincoln gave voice to these values when he said in the Gettysburg Address: “Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

Every one of us was taught these words of a lofty ideal as children in school.

I pledge allegiance to the flag  
of the United States of America  
And to the republic for which it stands  
One nation, under God, indivisible  
With liberty and justice for all

We may and will disagree on many things. We may and will strive and fail and wound one another and beg forgiveness along the way. But we do have some ideals and values that we share. And one of those ideals, I believe, is our experiment in democracy itself, our representative form of government, based on the promise of liberty and justice for all, which itself is based on the hope that we may be one nation, even with our many differences.

To be sure, no form of human government attains perfection. Only God is perfect. The Preamble to the Constitution wisely reminds us that each generation must continue the work of forming “a more perfect union.” No, our democracy is not perfect, but it offers the best hope yet devised for government that fosters human freedom, equal justice under law, the dignity and the equality of every human being made, as the Bible says, in the image of God.

Reinhold Niebuhr said it well: "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." Democracy itself is a shared ideal and value that we must uphold and labor to defend.

A near-sacred cornerstone of this ideal of democracy is the vote. The individual's right to vote, and our respect for the collective will of the people expressed in their votes, are foundational to the temple that is democracy. The vote and the collective will of the people must be upheld as sacred and inviolate; it must be respected and protected, "that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth." Let us be people of conviction and choose the promise that is before us.

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We don't think of it this way very often, but unselfish, sacrificial love for each other may well be the supreme value on which democracy depends. On the Great Seal of the United States, above the bald eagle, are banners on which the Latin words, "e pluribus unum" are written. Those words mean, "from many, one." One nation from many diverse people.

But do you know where those words come from? They come from the writings of Cicero, who lived during the time of the Roman Republic. Cicero said, "When each person loves the other as much as himself, it makes one out of many." In other words, when each person loves the other as much as he loves himself, it makes one out of many possible. That's what Cicero wrote about democracy. Moses and Jesus identified love as the supreme law of God for life.

This is indeed a moment of both peril and promise. But if love is indeed the supreme law of God for life, as I believe it is, then God's way of unselfish, sacrificial love for each other could well be the key to the life of a nation, and the world itself. That way of love could well be the key to our truly becoming "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Therein is the promise!

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