

A Prayer for Uplifting Human Dignity

“When we build a culture of understanding and uphold human dignity, we build a better world.”

(Ban Ki Moon, former UN Secretary)

Song: All are Welcome, Marty Haugen

Opening Prayer:

Dear God, in our efforts to dismantle racism, we understand that we struggle not merely against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities – those institutions and systems that keep racism alive by perpetuating the lie that some members of the family are inferior and others superior.



Create in us a new mind and heart that will enable us to see brothers and sisters in the faces of those divided by racial categories.

Give us the grace and strength to rid ourselves of racial stereotypes that oppress some of us while providing entitlements to others.

Help us to create a Church and nation that embraces the hopes and fears of oppressed People of Color where we live, as well as those around the world.

Heal your family God, and make us one with you, in union with our brother Jesus, and empowered by your Holy Spirit. Amen. (*Written by the Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team*)

Reading

Bishop Michael Bruce Curry preached on the "redemptive power of love at the royal wedding. His message is universal and timely. Curry, the first African-American presiding bishop of the American Episcopal Church encouraged all receiving his message to discover the power of love to make of "this old world a new world." Select passages of his sermon will serve as a reading. If you cannot read the entire sermon, read the part between the brackets.

"The Power of Love" sermon:

[And now in the name of our loving, liberating and life-giving God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

From the Song of Solomon in the Bible: Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. The late Dr Martin Luther King Jr once said, and I quote: "We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we will make of this old world a new world,

for love is the only way." There's power in love. Don't underestimate it. Don't even over-sentimentalize it. There's power, power in love.]

Oh there's power, power in love. Not just in its romantic forms, but any form, any shape of love. There's a certain sense in which when you are loved, and you know it, when someone cares for you, and you know it, when you love and you show it - it actually feels right. There is something right about it. And there's a reason for it. The reason has to do with the source. We were made by a power of love, and our lives were meant - and are meant - to be lived in that love. That's why we are here. Ultimately, the source of love is God: the source of all of our lives. There's an old medieval poem that says: 'Where true love is found, God is there. The New Testament says it this way: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and those who love are born of God and know God. Those who do not love do not know God. Why? For God is love."

There's power in love. There's power in love to help and heal when nothing else can. There's power in love to lift up and liberate when nothing else will. There's power in love to show us the way to live. Set me as a seal on your heart... a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death.

Jesus of Nazareth on one occasion was asked by a lawyer to sum up the essence of the teachings of Moses, and he went back and he reached back into the Hebrew scriptures, to Deuteronomy and Leviticus, and Jesus said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." And then in Matthew's version, he added, he said: "On these two, love of God and love of neighbor, hang all the law, all the prophets, everything that Moses wrote, everything in the holy prophets, everything in the scriptures, everything that God has been trying to tell the world ... love God, love your neighbors, and while you're at it, love yourself."

Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in human history. A movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world - and a movement mandating people to live that love, and in so doing to change not only their lives but the very life of the world itself.

I'm talking about power. Real power. Power to change the world. If you don't believe me, well, there were some old slaves in America's Antebellum South who explained the dynamic power of love and why it has the power to transform. "They explained it this way. They sang a spiritual, even in the midst of their captivity. It's one that says 'There is a balm in Gilead...' a healing balm, something that can make things right.

"There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole, there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.' "And one of the stanzas actually explains why. They said: 'If you cannot preach like Peter, and you cannot pray like Paul, you just tell the love of Jesus, how he died to save us all.'" Oh, that's the balm in Gilead! This way of love, it is the way of life. They got it. He died to save us all. He didn't die for anything he could get out of it. Jesus did not get an honorary doctorate for dying. He didn't... he wasn't getting anything out of it. He gave up his life, he sacrificed his life, for the good of others, for the good of the other, for the wellbeing of the world... for us.

[That's what love is. Love is not selfish and self-centered. Love can be sacrificial, and in so doing, becomes redemptive. And that way of unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive love changes lives, and it can change this world. If you don't believe me, just stop and imagine. Think and imagine a world where love is the way.]

Imagine our homes and families where love is the way. Imagine neighborhoods and communities where love is the way. Imagine governments and nations where love is the way. Imagine business and commerce where this love is the way. Imagine this tired old world where love is the way. When love is the way - unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive. When love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again. When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook. When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary. When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more. When love is the way, there's plenty good room - plenty good room - for all of God's children. Because when love is the way, we actually treat each other, well... like we are actually family. When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all, and we are brothers and sisters, children of God. My brothers and sisters, that's a new heaven, a new earth, a new world, a new human family.

Dr King was right: we must discover love - the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we will make of this old world, a new world. My brother, my sister, God love you, God bless you, and may God hold us all in those almighty hands of love.]

Quiet Meditation: Please take a few moments to reflect on the scripture passages and words of Bishop Curry.

Prayers of Intercession for the Nation

Gracious God, we thank you for the human family filled with all the peoples of the earth. We are thankful that you have created such an amazing and wonderful diversity of people and cultures. We pray that you will enrich our lives with ever-widening circles of fellowship, so that we may discover your presence in those who differ from us. Deliver us from the bondage of racism that denies the humanity of some people, and deprives all people of the blessings of the diversity you have created; deliver us from assumptions that we make without thinking, and presumptions that we take without asking. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Bless and strengthen each effort we make as individuals when we seek to understand ourselves and others as well as the ways we benefit from personal privilege and power, so that we may be allies who challenge bias and prejudice within ourselves and others. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Bless and strengthen each effort we make to change the systems and structures of our schools and educational institutions; our politics and civic policies; and our economic institutions' methods and models; so that the roots of racism may be recognized and purged from among us. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

O God of unconditional love, look with compassion on our nation. Break down the walls that separate us from one another. Cast out the spirit of violence that afflicts so many. Cleanse us of malicious ideas and ideologies. Unite us in bonds of love like unto your own. And through all our struggle for justice, work within us to accomplish your purpose and establish your kingdom vision. Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

O Lord, open our hearts to respect and uplift the dignity of every person. Open our eyes to see the injustices within church and society. Open our ears to listen and learn from the experiences of people of color. Open our mouths to speak out against prejudice and injustice. We commit ourselves to work for justice and peace, and to pursue a deeper relationship to you, Lord, so that we truly may be the body of Christ on earth, your church for the sake of the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord who has taught us to say when we pray:

Our Father...

("Worship Resources for Sunday, Sept. 6, 2015 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.")

Prayer of Commitment

Left Side:

Lord, you are the Light of the world.
You came into this world to bring true peace and
a right relationship between all people and God,
between individuals,
between nations and between all peoples and the whole creation.
Amidst the confusion of today's world,
empower us to stand firmly on the side of goodness,
justice and lasting truth according to your will.

Right Side:

Help us to identify, expose and confront the
root causes and the structures of injustices at all levels
which exploit and destroy your children and creation.
Help us to commit our lives to a new value system
where life is nurtured and abundant.

All:

Help us develop a new understanding of sharing in which those who have been marginalized by reasons of gender, age, economic and political condition, religion, sexual orientation, ethnic origin and disability take their place at the center of all decisions and actions as equal partners. Help us to be open to one another, as friends on the basis of common commitment, mutual trust, confession and forgiveness. This is our prayer, for the glory of your name and the good of all people and creation. AMEN. (*Archdiocese of Chicago, Office for Racial Justice*)

Closing Prayer

O God, true source of wholeness and peace, in a world bearing fresh wounds of suffering and grief, you call us to be a people of healing. Help us to reach out to neighbors in need, to bear one another's burdens, to weep with those who weep. Give us the grace to share the comfort of Christ with all those who long for his healing touch. Help us to hold in our hearts and show in our lives what we proclaim with our lips: Goodness is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hate; light is stronger than darkness; hope is stronger than despair. (Pax Christie)

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