January 10, 2021

As I begin to write this sermon I see in the left corner of my screen the headline: Capitol secured, 5 dead after rioters stormed the halls of Congress to block Biden’s win. Epiphany a day that started out in hope soon turned to a day that the world will not forget. At the end of the day the Capitol was secured and the democratic process was able to unfold. For a little while though it looked like the many lies that led to the encouragement of a riot, and the rallying cry of people who persist on spreading false information were going to prevail. One of the woman who died by gunshot while trying to get through a window said on Tuesday: Nothing will stop us....they can try and try and try but the storm is here and it is descending upon DC in less than 24 hours....dark to light! A scary sentiment indeed. She seems to be using religious imagery to support her claims that the election was fraudulent. Today in a few minutes we will renew our baptismal vows. Fitting, as this is the day we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the day my youngest child was baptized 18 years ago. As we renew our vows as adults we hear the preparation needed as we grow as individuals and a community to align ourselves with the ways of Jesus Christ and strive to follow God. The questions that stick out to me today are do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ and will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? Two questions that I previously looked at much differently than I do today. What is this evil I wondered? Do I believe in Satan? I can’t answer fully today but I do feel I have a better grasp of how we as humans become misguided and start following evil ideas until they override anything else, including following Jesus Christ. That is why John’s preparation of repentance and resisting evil is so important. That is why we again and again must turn ourselves around to align ourselves with Jesus Christ. We know we are on the right path when all are actions, thoughts and words are centered around seeking the Truth in God, loving ourselves, our neighbors and especially loving God. We know we are on the right path when our focus is on righting injustices and freeing the oppressed and feeding the poor. While I have been in quarantine I have had a chance to read more than time usually allows, which has been a blessing. One of the books I picked up is called “The World we Knew”. It takes place during WWII. It talks about how many, if not most Jewish families watched as their rights, property, food, shelter were taken away from them and never quite believing that even their very lives would be taken. They just could not grasp that humanities’ evil could extend even to that. They could not believe that other humans could be that hateful, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and that they would actually others believe in a superior race etc…They weren’t alone, the world stood still, disbelieving that millions of Jews were being incinerated. The children, teenagers and young adults in the book often realized what was really going to happen to them first. In the book some of these teenagers became part of the resistance. They lived in remote locations, including outside in the woods, they counted on the kindness of the few supporters left and did covert missions to save as many Jewish people as they could and thwart the Nazi incursion in France. There were in fact resistors of the evil of Nazism everywhere, and eventually this evil was pushed back, but many of the ideals are still around. The evil of racism is still prevalent. The spreading of lies and conspiracy theories with no basis in reality is prevalent. The hatred of immigrants, disabled people, woman, and LGBTQ people still continues by many people. The pandemic and our need to care for one another and keep one another safe when some deny the facts of its existence is another example of evil when our very lives are at stake. The message today of resisting evil sounds very pertinent to my ears. It must be done with the realization that all are made in the image of God. We must always strive to seek relationships based on listening and loving others. John the Baptist was very clear that he was not the Christ but preparing the people for the coming of Jesus. When he baptized Jesus in the Jordon it marked the beginning of Jesus ministry on this earth. Jesus was 30 years old. Jesus too, had been preparing for what was to come, by learning from the rabbi’s and through his relationship with God and before too long giving the message to the people himself. This day of marking Jesus baptism reminds us that we are not alone as we turn around to align ourselves with Jesus. We do it with the help of the Holy Spirit. Like those disciples so long ago who were baptized first in the baptism of John through repentance and then through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We too have been marked as Christ own through the power of the Holy Spirit who continues to work through us as individuals and through our community of believers. Our God who created the cosmos, the earth, and all things in it who shines the light in the darkness brought us Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who makes clear the way of light who is indeed, the Way, the Truth and the Light and continues his work in this world through the Holy Spirit. God shows Jesus and us whom we follow both through the descending of the Holy Spirit like a dove upon Jesus and through his words “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” As we renew our vows today it is with the intention that we are renewing are intention to align ourselves with Christ this day through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are committed to loving ourselves, one another, and most of all our God. We are committed to ending injustices, feeding the poor, and freeing the oppressed. I found this poem written by a pastor in Oakville, Ontario where my great aunt and uncle lived and a place I visited regularly as a child. It’s Andy King’s last poem and although it’s not his poem for this day I think it speaks to our need for renewal.

“O Holy One, come into this,
our self-made wilderness.
Come be with us in the loneliness of
our cell phones and computers,
come be with us in our hunger
for the meaning of our life,
come into the wasteland we
are making of the earth,
this kingdom of our arrogance where
we so often forget the life-giving love of God.

“O Holy One, help us here,
before this wilderness becomes
one we do not
know how to leave.”