



Just so you know, today is actually Thursday, as we are recording in advance: meaning yesterday is when the most disgusting embarrassment happened to our country, to us, to humanity. I honestly went back and forth on whether to say anything at all about it, because I wondered if not mentioning what happened would prove that the horrible actions did not deserve the dignity of a response from a Gospel centered on peace and wholeness and love. I wondered if giving the despicable behavior any attention at all,

would be exactly what they were hoping for: that they craved to be on some patriotic pedestal of honor and glory. I wondered if not saying anything would, in fact, be the best approach to move on to better acts of basic human decency amongst our collective humanity. However, throughout the ages, the Gospel has a way of not staying silent in the face of any kind of evil.

Except, we pastors are told that we only have so many hands to play in our stays at respective congregations. We must be so incredibly careful where we choose to speak up, lest the reaction lead to any sense of troubling discomfort. Anything even slightly bordering on politics, social justice, basic human rights, is to be outright avoided at all possible costs. Our spiritual comfort and security must be our ultimate goal as a family in Christ. And yet, the Gospel, our newborn and Risen Savior, our God of us all, has a way of not staying silent in the face of any kind of evil.

I did not know anything was going on until after 5pm yesterday, when I was finishing up an appointment. The nurse there had immigrated with her family to this supposed land of tranquility (immigrated legally, by the way), and as she was walking away from the waiting area tv updating the terror ensuing in our nation's capital; she asked, "Is this normal here? I wonder if I need to return to my home country!" That was pulverizing enough to hear as an American. But what was even worse was to consider how many of the pathetic invaders on the Capitol building would insist she return back where she came from, even if she was a supposedly cherished front-line worker in these pandemic times: that somehow those supposedly upstanding citizens breaking through law enforcement and barricades exuded the perfect, pure way of being an American, even of a basic human being.

As the evening progressed yesterday, and I moved on from my embarrassing cowardice attitude of even dare considering not saying anything at all today; I, then, looked over the readings for this Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, again. And there were these words that I thought I would never understand; and, quite honestly, I deeply hoped I would never understand. Nevertheless, there they were: "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep." Maybe it was un-American of me, maybe I don't have enough honor or patriotic pride, but honestly, thinking back to that nurse, and seeing the absolutely gut-wrenching, most heart-penetrating images: it truly felt as if our nation descended into a completely formless void, and darkness covered the face of our collective soul.

That made me think of my deceased grandfather, who served in World War II with the Army, including helping with the disarmament of Japan. He hardly ever spoke about his time in the military, but in his own way, throughout the time I knew him, he always showed his own sense of pride in the nation he served. As the years went by, I started to notice more and more how he treated hostesses and waiters at restaurants with his most uplifting caring attitude. I started to wonder if, decades before, that he was willing to risk his life not just for my grandmother, his future children, his family as a whole, but for complete strangers, including that nurse from yesterday. *That* was the America he fought for, not just his own corner of it. Towards the end of his life, I was caught off-guard how he seemed to get so emotional over what I thought, at the time, were the most random things: just being around us, his family; just seeing pictures of us would set him off.

And I think back to those most beautiful, precious tears of a man, who many Americans believe was part of the greatest generation; many Americans who would have thought he was supposed to be too strong, too masculine, too tough of an Army veteran to cry over anything at all. So, I wonder how many tears he would have shed down upon his rugged face if he saw the country he fought for, the place he called home, utterly descend into an absolutely formless void of any beauty and hope whatsoever. I wonder how much he would have felt darkness thoroughly cover the rugged face of his veteran, even his basic humanity, heart. The Gospel has a way of not staying silent in the face of any kind of evil, and sometimes those devastating tears reveal the rush of a most violent spiritual wind thrashing through our soul in such fearful moments.

And since that Gospel insists on not keeping silence, the music that accompanies it cannot either. I extend my appreciation to Robin, for going along with my wrestling last night in changing what we had planned for the Hymn of the Day. So, what you will hear, and are invited to boldly sing soon enough is the song, “When Long before Time,” which has the setting of the Creation story. It speaks of that time of the formless void, when our Creator God had a dream not just for the land, but for us, too. And yet, what happened yesterday was not God’s dream for our country, for us, for our collective humanity. What happened yesterday was a most epic embarrassment for our country, for us, for our collective humanity. God does not dream of fear being unleashed upon us. God does not desire any form of terror. God does not want to make us feel as if the world that God still loves is nothing more than a formless void, void of any hope or beauty whatsoever.

We are not supposed to experience any sense of a formless void in this life. When it does happen to us personally, or on a national scale, God insists on restoration and peace and compassion and love, on outright Resurrection to new life: those basic tenets of the Gospel that insists on not keeping silence in the face of any kind of evil. Thankfully, we have far, far more in our midst who reveal the true honor and respect, not just as Americans, but as children of God: those who may only shed tears when the spiritual wind rushes through them; who vow to work for building each of us up, instead of tearing each other down one by one until those others’ lust for power is satisfied. And thankfully, we are still in the midst of even more precious baptismal waters unleashed from the God who will insist on showing us true grace and mercy and love, not limited to a certain corner, to a certain us, but for this whole world that God still claims is more than worthy of a holy dream beyond our wildest imagination. So, together we say from the depths of our collective heart this day: “Amen (so let it be, O God; please, let it be.)”