

So many momentous things going on, and just minutes to reflect on holy scriptures and our Christian faith. When in doubt, think many preachers, just go with the common lectionary readings. Usually a “safe” choice, except for the fact that one key line in the gospel reading has Jesus saying: “Here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” ... or in “The Message” translation, a “real Israelite, with no false bone in his body.” Jesus is often said to have known what was in someone’s mind or heart. (And Psalm 139 says God knows our thoughts “even before a word is on our tongues”). Jesus reads Nathanael’s heart as he sees him sitting under a tree, before they even speak. As followers of Jesus, while we will never have this kind of clarity, and may be fooled by people, we too are supposed to attempt to see the deeper truths in people and situations. Sometimes we can discern well the truth about another’s mind and heart even with a very brief encounter.

And what are we faced with? Unfortunately, our country has had much “disinformation,” deceit and lies for so long that “fact checking” news sites have sprung up everywhere. And it seems necessary to consult many sources to sort out lies and truths, to see if there is any consensus. One current consensus seems to be that the claims of election fraud have been dismissed by both state and federal courts... by judges appointed by both political party leaders. Or said more generously, Bill Barr, appointed by President Trump himself, concluded fraudulent activity was minimal, and in no way could have changed results of the election. So we had a protest, turned riotous, about an election being stolen, based on no solid evidence.

James Russell Lowell, poet and Harvard Professor in the mid 1800’s, said it well in a hymn: “Once to Every Man and Nation” comes the moment to decide, in the strife of truth and falsehood, for the good or evil side. Though the cause of evil prosper, Yet tis truth alone is strong. Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne. Yet that scaffold sways the future...” Sounds like Martin Luther King’s famous line: The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” Truth may

be mocked, or news called fake, but TRUTH, even on a scaffold, does sway the future!

So research goes on, and more things come to the light over time; we recall Jesus stating that everything eventually comes to the light. Right now, we have many FBI researching the faces and words of those who stormed the Capitol building. Yes, it takes time, but the moral arc will bend toward justice.... And the FBI does not even need to discern thoughts or intentions, as so many of those arrested and charged stated violent intentions right on social media sites. Nor do we have to guess intentions of a rally when words from the speakers include words like “combat” and “fight like hell,” and people show up to the rally with weapons. What are in their minds and hearts? It seems fairly obvious. Any words about peaceful change were said with lip service, or too late, after the fact. The intent to use force was obvious.

This being Martin Luther King holiday weekend, I researched Malcolm X versus MLKJr, in regards to forceful or nonviolent change. I have read much of MLK writings over the years, so I am thoroughly convinced about his nonviolent approach to change, following Jesus’ and Ghandi’s words and example. And I confirmed that Malcolm X did indeed condone violence, if needed; he said “Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery.” So MLKJr. became the clear leader in the civil rights movement, Christians would say, because he followed the nobler truths of Jesus to make change in nonviolent ways, to “put away the sword,” even at great cost, even when truth is on the scaffold, when truth is persecuted.

Back to the present situation... did the use of weapons and violence after the Trump rally have anything to do with self-defense, using violence as a last resort? I think not! It appeared to be an intentional offensive, an intentional premeditated attack on the Capitol to stop election certification by Congress. Courts of law may determine that words were not literally violent or legally treasonous yet, people of faith, people of the spirit, will always do our best to discern the spirit behind the words, the intentions of

the words, and the “truth that sets us free.” We must do so humbly of course, with the possibility of being wrong, since our faith cautions us about judging. We ascribe only to God or Jesus the ability to see the heart with full clarity. With, Paul, we admit that we see as through a glass dimly.

But fact check we must; Watch and listen closely we must. The prophets and Jesus always warned that we have “eyes but do not see, and ears but do not hear.” The implication was that we are to open our eyes and ears more, to look and listen more deeply. One of the things that often help us understand the truth within hearts is a person’s family background, the childhood imprints, and who is the child still within. I discovered that when Malcolm was young, his father was shot by a white supremacist. Fatherless Malcom soon turned to crime, wound up in jail, 10 year sentence, and studied many books while in jail. That kind of background could easily fuel an anger in him that would later champion black power and black nationalism, and could say: “if someone puts a hand on you, send him to the cemetery.” On the other hand, MLKJr. grew up in a more privileged black family; he knew relative security and safety at least in his home environment and neighborhood. In his boyhood years, he knew the strength of a loving father, a Christian minister. Later, he earned a doctorate in Christian studies, and thus preached that Love is the “most durable force in the universe.”

So what kind of childhood imprint do we see in our outgoing president? In a Frontline special called Choice 2020, we learned that President Trump, sadly, had a very demanding father, who was nearly impossible to please, who sent Donald off to military school to shape him up. From his father and from military school, young Donald did not experience much grace or love. He learned more about power, punishment, and bullying tactics. Hence he had a constant need to prove himself, and to “win” at all costs. We remember he told us that under his leadership we would get “tired of winning.” The flip side of that coin, what many psychologists did see in our outgoing president, was an inability to admit mistakes or losing, an inability to apologize, and an inability to feel

the sufferings of self and others, which is lack of empathy and compassion. My heart and prayers do go out to President Trump. How sad that he cannot feel the reality of being human... the reality of mistakes, suffering, even failing at times. May the truth eventually set him free. We remember that Paul told his followers that he would boast of weaknesses... so that the grace and power of God in his life could be made known. But sometimes people have to get to the bottom of the bottom before they recognize the reality of weak times and the need for help, for a loving and connected community. I pray that President Trump finds loving supportive community, after so many close to him have abandoned him.

The Christian Gospel tells us it is the humble who are lifted up, and it is arrogant ones who think they are all powerful who will be brought down from thrones. We honor and praise Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is worth repeating that nowhere does Jesus advocate physical violence, or taking back anything by force; he does teach his disciples to put away their swords, even though his people were oppressed by Roman occupation at that time. His emphasis on peacemaking and loving neighbor speaks to us of interdependence and connection with all others, to see hearts more clearly, and admit mistakes and forgive one another, yes, even love and pray for enemies. Yes, we hear protesters are angry about not being heard by the government. But the way of life and change, we trust, is most effective as nonviolent change, change by speaking with and praying for senators and representatives! How many involved in mob violence have made any effort to write or call their representatives???

Again, to quote MLK, "we must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools." We CAN know one another's hearts; we CAN know and be known, we CAN show love and grace. We CAN rebuild community in families, neighborhood, and even in representative government. Let us continue to pray for all our civil servants in transition, and specifically for a nonviolent inauguration day for the new president and his team. Amen.