

Sermon by The Rev. Lucy D. LaRocca

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This week rioters stormed the United States Capitol building to prevent the ratification of the election of our next president. The violent scenes from the attempted coup witnessed around the world triggered horror and shock that Americans would desecrate the seat of their government and pledge their allegiance not to the values of democracy upon which this nation was founded, but to a man upset over his loss of power.

The terrorists who attacked our capitol are for the most part White supremacists and Christian nationalists who are neither truly patriotic nor Christian. Confederate flags waving amongst the Trump flags in the halls of the Capitol saddened me but came as no surprise given the racism in our country. It was truly startling to spot a processional cross and flags imprinted with the words 'Jesus 2020.'

The ideology and behavior displayed Thursday by those who would (as described in the Jesuits' American magazine this week) "rather live in a white dictatorship than in a multiracial democracy" makes a stark contrast with the public life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus.

In today's Gospel, we hear about Jesus joining a crowd of those making a public commitment to a way of life in line with God's will for humanity before the start of his public ministry. The account of Jesus' baptism is very short, just a few short powerful verses. It is notable that Jesus didn't make his public commitment to the ways of God in the Temple, which was the seat of both religious and governmental authority.

Instead, Jesus went outside the temple walls to the river Jordan. From the very start of his ministry, Jesus identified not with the powerful, but with those on the margins. From there, Jesus was immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness, to face the temptation to gain power, influence and wealth if he would bow down and worship Satan.

It was only after rebuking these temptations that Jesus invited people to become his disciples and join him in his work of healing a broken world and reconciling all with God. In his life and teaching, Jesus again and again rebuked those who used their power, wealth and influence for their own gain.

Instead, he called people back to the basics of the law and the prophets; love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. And he taught this not just with his words but with his actions as he cared for outcasts, lepers, women, foreigners, and those of other faiths. It was his resistance to the status quo led to his arrest, torture, and crucifixion.

Instead of grabbing power, Jesus humbled himself again and again, even submitting to John's Baptism of repentance, which means to turn again to God. When he came up out of the water, a voice was heard to say, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Though he did not sin, Jesus, by his example, showed us the way to find new life after falling for temptations. When we turn again to God, we are once more 'God's Beloved.'

In a little while we will renew our baptismal vows, as we do a few times per year. I want to be very clear about what we will be doing. Like those who joined John the Baptist by the banks of the Jordan River, we too, are making a public commitment to a way of life in line with God's will for humanity.

And make no mistake, our baptismal vows are just as radical today as Jesus' were two thousand years ago. Discipleship is an act of resistance to the evil and sin—in the world and in our own hearts. And just as Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, we too, will be tempted to break our vows.

We will be tempted to acquiesce to the powers and principalities of our day. We will be tempted to put self interest ahead of the common good, and to respond in kind to fear and hate.

We will be tempted to turn a blind eye to prejudice, injustice, and abuse. As we go forth in our lives, may we always remember our vows and our belovedness, and the belovedness of everyone we meet. And let us continue to pray for our country, that we might heal the divisions that beset us and may unite for the common good.

*O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred and bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, page 824.)*

Amen