

GOING DEEPER

July 6th to July 11th

Scripture Reading(s) for the week: I Timothy 2:1-7; Jeremiah 29:7; Ezra 6:9-10; Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17

I love the 4th of July! One of the reasons is that it sparks wonderful family memories within me. In my grade-school, middle school, and early high school years, our family all gathered at the farm in Butler. We would have fun shooting off fireworks. While my great grandfather was alive, he would build a bonfire, and we would roast hot dogs and marshmallows on long hand-sharpened sticks. Sometimes we would venture down to the fair in Rich Hill, ride the rides and then watch the community fireworks show which always began and ended with one of those mortars that simply made a loud boom with a flash of light. Even though the decades have passed, the images in my mind are still vivid and clear enough to make me smile.

I also appreciate this day because of the freedom that we have fought and bled for but for which we have yet to reach the pinnacle of their expression. We cling to the vision of our forefathers as we strive to create a more perfect union that will one day enshrine and celebrate the full inclusion of all our citizens in the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. But until that day, we have a choice.

Father Richard Rohr recently wrote about people who stand up and work towards deconstruction – tear it all down; burn down the system. He goes on to point out that while you can promote deconstruction you must also have a vision for reconstruction. It cannot simply be the elimination of the “contaminated element” in our society – that is not an answer to regaining a “just, peaceful, and right . . .” world again. Somehow, we must get our hands dirty in the struggle to form this union. Amanda Gorman in her inaugural poem for Joe Biden said it simply “There is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it, if only we are brave enough to be it.” It does not take brave action to survive chaos and turmoil. It takes brave action to fight against chaos and turmoil in the pursuit of peace and quiet.

The Apostle Paul understood what it meant for these early church communities to exist in chaos and turmoil. They lived under the thumb of imperial Rome and even though it was a republic, the common citizen and foreigner did not participate in government. They did not have town halls or polling stations to vote. There were limits to the power of their voice in the exercise of government. But there was one thing the state could not control – how they prayed. The state could not diminish or dissuade the early church from praying and giving thanks for their government. It was their means to a quiet and peaceful life. I think it is still the means to such a life for us.

Voting, campaigning, standing on the corner with a sign, and more are certainly within our rights. They may even make you feel like you are doing something but is it something that is bringing harmony, unity, peace, or quiet? If our goal is to truly participate in the transformation of the

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world then we cannot do it by pure deconstruction. We must build and rebuild, which I am suggesting starts with prayer.

I invite you to take time and read each of the scriptures above followed by reflection on the questions below. Determine to pause each day and pray for our elected leaders. Lastly, I pray that God bless the reading of God's Word and the meditations of your heart.

Questions to Consider this week:

- **Monday:** Are you prone to join the movement to burn down the system as it is? Why?
- **Tuesday:** What are your grievances that drive your desire to deconstruct?
- **Wednesday:** Why do you believe Paul instructed the church in Rome to pray for their government?
- **Thursday:** What is your political goal? Peace, unity, change, or deconstruction?
- **Friday:** Try starting each day with a short prayer for your elected leaders.
- **Saturday:** How are you striving to "be" the light for others?

Actions for the Week:

- **Head:** Contemplate the emotional root to your need for chaos and peace.
- **Heart:** Determine if your heart is ruled by anger or compassion.
- **Hand:** Start each day with a short prayer for our elected leaders.

Prayer: Merciful God. You have placed upon each of us the mantle of a faithful witness for your kingdom. Most of the time we struggle to visualize what that means or looks like in action. Maybe that is why it is easy for us to blend our political bias and our faith. We may think that what we are doing is serving your vision but really, it serves our own. We are driven by our anxiety, and we don't know how to resolve it except for tearing down the source. But is that really the answer? Maybe or maybe not. As your people we are seeking a different response. The legitimate answer is one that we should already be deploying – prayer. May your Spirit take hold of us and bring us to an attitude and posture of prayer each day and may our prayer be for our elected leaders. Whether we like their agenda or not, we can ask you to lead and guide believing you have the power to influence all for the purposes of peace and unity. Use us as your instruments of peace through our prayers and prayer-filled actions. Amen.

If you have thoughts, comments, or questions about today's service or this week's devotional, please e-mail them to jimh@stjohnsumc.org.