

Two-Part Homily—Healing (from) Our Democracy

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Opening Words

Our service today consists of many short parts, which you got a sense of if you joined early and heard the seven different versions of “I Woke Up This Morning.” I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom. Many, many people this morning feel that a vote for freedom and decency has won. That John Lewis’s idea of “good trouble” has prevailed. That change for a more equitable country is on the way. We might, indeed, feel reason to celebrate this morning. So, if you feel like celebrating this morning, go ahead. Don’t unmute, but show us on your screen that you are feeling it is a happy day.

Personally, I feel joyful. And, I don’t yet feel like celebrating. Possibly because I feel poised at a juncture, one what asks me for more attention and more sacrifice than ever as a way to resist a return to a version of “normal,” a normal that left so many Americans behind. One way calls me back to comfort and security. The other way calls me on to co-creating a world where we face our limitations with compassion, grow in our knowledge and understanding of what justice truly requires of us, embrace work with others to mend a broken world.

You all know about the crack in the Liberty Bell, right? There are many stories about the cracks in this bell, and the large crack we see is actually a repair to stop further cracking. But what we do know is that this bell was cracked from its beginning, from 1752 when it was commissioned as the bell for the Pennsylvania Assembly. In the 1830s, abolitionists took up the bell as a symbol in their battle against the institution of slavery. Its iconic lettering “Proclaim LIBERTY Throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants Thereof,” is a Biblical reference from the Book of Leviticus (25:10). Before the Declaration of Independence and after, this notion of Liberty for All was painfully incomplete. This we know. From our beginnings as a nation, our liberty and justice have been cracked, broken, unfinished. Yet the words call us to expansion and healing and unity.

Today, we are poised at a juncture, where we might yet choose to be agents in healing the world, as we heal ourselves in company with each other.

Closing Words

Personally, I feel joyful this morning. We elected to Congressional offices more trans and non-binary people, more indigenous and Muslim people than ever before. And, I don’t yet feel like celebrating. Possibly because I feel poised at a juncture, one what asks me for more attention and more sacrifice than ever as a way to resist a return to a version of “normal,” a normal that left so many Americans behind. Black and Brown Americans. Immigrant Americans. Indigenous Americans. Trans and LGBTQ Americans. Americans with insecure housing, insecure incomes, insecure health insurance. Americans addicted. Americans unjustly incarcerated. Americans with little access to the circuits of power, where lasting change can happen. Poised at this juncture, one way calls me back to comfort and security. The other way calls me on to co-creating a world where we face our limitations with compassion, grow in

our knowledge and understanding of what justice truly requires of us, embrace work with others to mend a broken world.

Our American democratic system holds much promise for equality and justice for all, yet we know that it has never functioned in an entirely inclusive and equitable way. We will have to bind wounds that we may never have before acknowledged, in partnership with those we may never have served alongside before. Brokenness is not the problem. The problem is in pretending that something was never broken. By acknowledging what is broken, we move more fully toward understanding the reality of this world and what it takes for it to be more beautiful for all of us. A place where we are all accepted and where we all belong, where no one is put on the margins because of features of our bodies or our experiences, conditions over which we have no control but which do in fact create the possibilities and limits of our lives.

As John Lewis said, Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and we each must do our part to build the Beloved Community in our own hearts, in our community, in our country, and in our world. Our hands are capable of so much. The strength, the love, the power. But we must *will* it. We can be a weapon or a curse, a balm or a blessing. If we *will* it. After you poise, after you rest, what will you *will* your hands to do? Do you hear the call, will you heed the call to act to make more good in this world, a world where we speak up so that our silence renders us not inadvertently complicit? Where we wait not for change by and by but know that our morals and our principles call us to make the world of freedom and equity for which we long, to bend the arc of the universe toward the justice of which we dream.

None of us can do this alone. None of us is expected to. We just need to pick up our own piece and seek the glue to bind us with beauty into wholeness. But, for a little while, we can rest, and even celebrate. May you remember all of this—the joy, the celebration, the rest, the work—today and every day, as you remember, too, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so. May it be so, and may the people say “Amen.”