

Reverend Sally's Sermon January 10, 2021

“We the People, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

These are the words of the preamble of the U.S. Constitution. I first memorized them in my 8th grade history class in Anderson, S.C. I still remember standing before my teacher and reciting them. And I have never forgotten them. I hold the words of Holy Scripture and the faith on which they're based, as my ultimate good in life. But the words of the constitution are a close second for me. They are the foundation of our nation. You may have noticed that when people swear allegiance to this nation, it's not loyalty to a person but to the constitution. I say all this because I believe that this past week, our constitution was threatened. Fortunately, our nation is strong and stood against those who sought to overturn it.

These may seem like strange words from a preacher. Right now, I'm sounding more like a civics professor. But I do believe that, though our constitution isn't perfect, it's about as close as you can get in this world. Some see our nation as the “city built on a hill”, the example to which all others aspire. And though this idealized vision can sometimes lead us to assume a pride that we don't deserve, I do believe that our form of government does allow us to do the work of seeking God's kingdom in this world. This is what Jesus did.

Today is the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. Today we celebrate the beginning of Jesus' ministry on earth. When he went to the River Jordan and was baptized by John the Baptist, the heavens were torn apart and the Holy Spirit descended upon him, empowering him to do the work of His Father, to share God's kingdom with God's people.

As his followers today, we are also empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry on Jesus' ministry in the world. We receive this Holy Spirit in our Baptism. At each Baptism, I mark the person's forehead with oil in the shape of a cross and say, “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.” This mark should remind us who we belong to. We belong to Christ. And this knowledge should shape how we live each day.

I know I have said it many times and I will say it again. We are called to love and serve all people, showing dignity and respect to all God's children. We don't have

to agree with everyone. We never will. But we do have to offer them the respect due a child of God. And this includes listening to them, truly hearing them. We may not agree with them, but before we can be reconciled with those we disagree with, we need to understand where they're coming from, their hopes and fears. This starts with listening.

This week I have heard several references to Abraham Lincoln's "Braver angels" quote. Though I've heard reference to it in the past, I didn't know exactly what Lincoln had said. So, I Googled it. Thanks Google. In his first inaugural address Lincoln appealed for unity in the country. "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory ... will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the braver angels of our nature."

Our "Braver angels" are fueled by God's Holy Spirit among us. It is the Holy Spirit that produces the fruits needed for unity – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control. St. Paul reminds us of these in his letter to the Christians in Galatia when they were also facing division.

As January 20th approaches, remember to pray for our nation. Pray for wisdom for our leaders, justice in our courts and humility for all our people. I would like to conclude today with the collect for our nation found on page 258 of the Book of Common Prayer:

Let us Pray:

Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*