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Will you pray with me. Let the words of my heart and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

WOW.... It has been a week. Perhaps you feel numb, angry, shell shocked? It has been hard to process so much of what is going on in our world, country, state, community and yes our church family. We have felt the pain of COVID, Political unrest and leadership questions and loss.

After taking a deep breath, getting a good nights rest and support of colleagues here is the message. God is in control. God is here. Hold onto to that.

There was a meme going around on social media this week: I'd like to cancel my subscription to 2021. I've experienced the free 7 day trial and I'm not interested. It is funny and yet a reality. Life is definitely challenging. However, we are not alone. We have hope. Remember Immanuel, God with us.

This Sunday in our liturgical year we recognize the Baptism of our Lord. Our readings for this week are powerful, comforting and challenging.

Our Psalm reading from today is vivid and powerful. The phrase the voice of the Lord is used 7 times in 9 verses. Each of these 7 times the phrase is a reference to the action of our Lord. These words include: powerful, breaks, flashes, shakes, causes. Our Lord is not Passive or sitting by. The last two verses claim that the Lord is King and the Lord gives strength to his people!

Strength. What a gift. What comfort. It is a statement that we can claim. We have strength that comes from the Lord. Strength to endure, strength to persevere, strength to witness, strength to be bold, strength to work for justice. It all comes from God. Do you claim that the Lord is your King and gives you strength? We can claim it and name it and take refuge in it. What comfort these words bring me and I hope to you!

Our God is not passive, our God is not sitting watching. Our God is a part of life. These words are a reminder to be present, be active, pray and when you feel you can't lean into God.

In looking at today's gospel reading we hear the familiar story of John the Baptist. What a vivid picture Mark gives us. The scene is set John appeared in the wilderness. He was baptizing people in the river. There were people coming from all over Jerusalem and the entire Judean countryside. It was an event! Then we hear what he was wearing, a garment of camels hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey..... What a sight that must have been. He then states I will baptize you with water but the one following me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

We read that Jesus was baptized by John. Do you wonder why? I mean Jesus was the son of God. Did he have to be baptized? It is an example of Jesus living with a servant heart, living in obedience and living as an example for us. Jesus humbles himself by being baptized by John the Baptist. It is one of many things that Jesus shows us how to live in that spirit. Remember when Jesus washed the disciples feet? Jesus served. Jesus never flaunted his place or power. We are to serve in the same spirit that Jesus did.

When we are baptized we are given new life. We are connected to God. Baptism is a communal event. It is of course about the person being baptized, parents, family, sponsors and the congregation.

Listen to these words that are a part of the Baptism Liturgy:

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight.

Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family. Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom. At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit. By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons, making us heirs of your promise and servants of all.

We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life, and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ. Shower us with your Spirit, and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace, and love.

To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. The baptism will take place; water, oil, and candle.

Now the presider with turn to the congregation and ask them to

Affirm their Baptism

I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?

Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God?

Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?

Response: I renounce them.

By saying this we acknowledge the sinful broken world in which we live.

Our Lutheran Faith celebrates baptism. It is one of the two sacraments recognized in our denomination. Putting the baptismal font in a prominent place is not an accident. It is a reminder of how important baptism is to us as Lutherans. Have you ever visited a place of worship where the baptismal font is in the corner somewhere? Here we have the gift of our beautiful font as we come through the door. It is a deliberate reminder that we are called to live those questions everyday. And we are not meant to do it alone. It is with the Holy Spirit.

There were some hard things we are struggling with. COVID is still here, challenges of distributing the vaccine, the assault on our country this week in Washington DC. The death of loved ones. It has been hard to witness the evil and injustice.

Where is God? How do we make sense of it??

God is here, we are here and we need to speak out regarding all that is happening. We need to renounce the evil, we need to tell Satan to get behind us. How do we do that? We do what is right. We acknowledge the sin for what it is sinful behavior. Take the actions and hold them up to the ten commandments. Are the actions in line with them? If not they are sinful and need to be told as such. Truth seems to be hard to find. People want to justify their actions seeking what they want or what they feel they deserve. Who are we serving? Are we serving and honoring God or are we putting our loyalties and faith in earthly leaders? Who are we following? Are we doing all we can to live that life of being a beloved child of God? On Wednesday when people were desecrating the building in Washington. I could not believe my eyes. I could not believe the vile and evil things that we done. Do you remember the scene in the garden from the gospel of John? The crowd came with all riled up and Simon Peter, one of the disciples, raised his sword and cut off the ear of a slave, Malchus. Jesus told him to stop. Jesus would not let the disciples engage in behavior that would escalate the crowd.

We need to stop the evil with truth. FACTS and the love of God. The darkness will not overcome.

As I have been processing these things I try to find what can come from this, what can we learn, what can we find that we can be better from this horrifying experience. I thought of Mister Rogers would say find the helpers. There were helpers who brought hope and light to the evil. There were some aides who had the wherewithal to take the chests containing the electoral ballots with them when they were evacuated from the chamber. They carried them out to protect them. Then there was NJ representative Andy Kim on his hands and knees picking up trash and helping clean up the mess from the assault. When asked why he did that his response was: "It really broke my heart and I just felt compelled to do something. ... What else could I do?" Then there was Chaplain Margaret Kibben, on her third day of her job, walked the halls of Congress praying and asking for God's hand of cover. These examples represent the very best of being the hands and feet of Jesus. WE need to be the helpers. We are called to serve selflessly. Actions have consequences. When you say your prayers at the end of the day and you review your actions are they actions that you are proud to share with God? Can you say to God look at what I did? I fulfilled your commandments in the following ways? This my brothers and sisters is what we are called to do. Live our call, our baptismal call.

In the closing verse of our Gospel lesson we hear and a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased. Can you picture that? The heavens opened up and the Spirit descended like a dove..... and Jesus hears "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased. I get goose bumps when I hear those words. Do you claim those words as yours? God telling you, you are his beloved. When I am visiting with patients or staff and we talk and share I remind them that they are a beloved child of God. So I invite you to say I am a beloved child of God. Say that as often as you need to remind yourself you are not alone. What a joy and a gift and freedom we get from being that beloved child of God. As a beloved child we are called to be the light and love in a hurting world as we say in our mission statement. In a world that so desperately needs to hear and see the love of God, may you be that light. May we be strong and stand up for peace and justice. The challenge is real, the challenge is hard. We don't go alone. May we lean God and each other for the journey. Thanks be to God, May it be so. Amen.