

Evening Prayer for Grace-Filled Civic Engagement

This evening prayer service was prepared by the Just Love team of the Florida Bahamas Synod (FBS) for the 2024 FBS Conference on Ministry. We intentionally chose music common for outdoor ministries to help attendees reconnect with the triune God many knew so intimately, and with abandon, in their youth. If you do not have a guitarist available to play these songs from outdoor ministries, you may substitute with songs from our hymnals. You will find some suggestions below.

Opening Songs:

Be Thou My Vision ELW 793

You are Holy ELW 525

Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling ELW 608

Will You Come and Follow Me ELW 798

Christ Be Our Light ELW 715

Sending Song:

Canticle of the Turning ELW 723

This Little Light of Mine ELW 677

God of Tempest, God of Whirlwind ELW 400

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Opening Songs

Sanctuary ~ Dance with Me ~ Light the Fire ~ Micah 6:8

Opening Prayer & Kyrie

The prophet Isaiah invited God's people to "Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows." And yet too often we are silent when we should speak and we speak when we should be silent.

For speaking out for the sake of showing off, **Lord, have mercy**

For speaking out for the sake of control, **Christ, have mercy,**

For speaking out for the sake of judgement, **Lord, have mercy**

For not speaking up out of politeness, **Lord, have mercy**

For not speaking up out of fear, **Christ have mercy**

For not speaking up out of indifference, **Lord, have mercy**

Welcome

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

In the bible, the Hebrew word shalom, "depicts God's goal for creation and points *to the nature of God's ongoing active engagement with it*. God's power and love seeks shalom, the fullness of peace, well-being, goodness, truth, beauty, justice, freedom, wholesomeness, and love woven together for all." ¹ As people made in God's image, we are invited to follow Paul's advice to the Romans (12:18) where "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" and be emissaries of this shalom. Tonight, you are invited to return to the waters of baptism, to put to death the ways you have forgotten or turned from the invitation to shalom, and to emerge from the waters, evangelists, messengers of shalom, salt of the earth, light to the world.

Invitation to Baptismal Waters (participants are invited to return to the waters accompanied by contemplative music)

Word

As we live, lead, and witness through a contentious election season, let us reflect on our nation's history. In 1776, our forebears declared independence from England, claiming dignity, equality and the right to self-governance. In 1787, our forebears signed the constitution enshrining a government of the people, by the people and for the people and putting in place a set of checks and balances to prevent tyranny.

A Reading from Romans, the thirteenth chapter.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval, ⁴ for it is God's agent for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the agent of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. ⁶ For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's agents, busy with this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is due them: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

This letter to the Romans reminds us that government remains God's gift because it is intended to do what churches, families, individuals, and businesses cannot do on their own: protect and coordinate the well-being of individuals, communities, and creation.²

Yet these words from the letter to the Romans have also been used to encourage quietism in the face of unjust governance. This was true in Nazi Germany and it continues to be true today. Our church teaches that "civil government at all levels can be a force for good or for evil— or, most accurately, *both* in some combination."² Robust, faithful civic participation includes participating and supporting just governance and the prophetic task of raising our voices and votes against unjust governance.

Martin Luther sometimes defines the roles of the two kingdoms in the following way: "It is the work and glory of the ministry (right) to make real saints out of sinners, living souls out of the dead, saved souls out of the damned, children of God out of servants of the devil. Just as it is the work and the glory of the temporal government (left) to make human beings out of wild beasts and to keep human beings from turning into wild beasts."³ Luther states that both have their place and proper influence upon our lives.

However, while Luther sometimes uses the phrase "Two Kingdoms" to refer to church and state, in truth it has a much wider scope. The two dimensions of God's domain or reign in the world concern the ministry of the Gospel through faith and the ministry of loving justice toward our neighbor through action. Luther writes, "This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits. . . We set forth two worlds, as it were, one of them heavenly and the other earthly" (Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, LW 26:7-8)⁴.

The two hands or dimensions of God's kingdom, in other words, aren't merely church and state, but the entire scope of heavenly grace and earthly justice, of being before God by faith and before our neighbor in Just Love. On this basis, Luther teaches that the church must always be non-violent and never take up arms (LW 8:264; LW 20:288), that governments should err on the side of too little force rather than too much because of the risk of abusing the innocent (LW

45:105), that governments should be secular (LW 13:194-5), that love and the natural law written on our hearts should take precedence over the laws on the books (LW 13:369; LW 45:127-8; see also *Table Talk*, LW 54:325), that we should accept injustice toward ourselves in taking up our cross but that we should tolerate no injustice toward our neighbor (LW 45:101), and that following the example of Joseph in Genesis, governments are to provide for the hungry poor (*Lectures on Genesis*, LW 7:158, see also *Large Catechism*, LW 13:42-72).

How, then, can we as Christians remain silent if government abuses the people or goes astray from justice? We cannot. Luther states we are to honor both left and right, but also are to hold them accountable to justice. Luther writes, “We should accord each one its honor and due their honor, both being ordinances and works of God, and we should not consider it if, in both kingdoms those whom office has been committed are not pious and misuse their office...and berate and persecute us as disobedient and seditious folk. This we should and must bear, though we reserve the right of rebuking them by word of mouth and telling the truth and letting the imputed guilt lie on us.”⁴ When the conscience is spoken to, and awakened by the Gospel, as persons of faith we are to speak, to call leaders, government and church, into just love and beloved community.

Silence/reflection

The Gospel according to Matthew

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. ²¹ And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” ²² But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”^[a] They said to him, “We are able.” ²³ He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

²⁴ When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ²⁶ It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”

In this country, like James and John, and the ancient Israelites before them, we sometimes get confused about God’s vision for the world and our own vision for national success. We confuse military might and success with God’s desire and blessing. We confuse God’s invitation to servant leadership with corporate and military models of leadership. We confuse the promise of prestige and glory with Jesus’ witness to risk, service, and sacrifice. This confusion permeates our country, our history, and humanity.

Silence/Reflection

Our forebears wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident.”

Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." He says, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Silence/Reflection

Our forebears wrote that "all men are created equal."

Our scriptures say that "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." They say that "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Silence/Reflection

Our forebears wrote that men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights."

Our scriptures add, "But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."

Silence/Reflection

Our forebears wrote that we have an unalienable right to "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

But, just after he says, "I came that they may have life and have abundantly," Jesus says, "and I lay down my life for the sheep." He teaches, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

Silence/Reflection

Our forebears wrote that "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Our scriptures say that "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us," that "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son," and, for that reason, that we are now "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Silence/Reflection

A reading from Paul to the Galatians

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.

Silence/Reflection

Let us pray.

God of love, of justice, and of truth, in these times when love of country is being twisted toward a love of power for its own sake, remind us of your self-sacrificing love for all of creation; remind us that, although we were not founded as a Christian nation, each of us enjoys the freedom to love our neighbor as ourselves and to love our enemies with Christ-like love. Help us to reject the violent and untruthful rhetoric of Christian nationalism, and guide us by your values of humble service and respect for all persons; we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son and our Redeemer. **Amen.**

Prayers & Lord's Prayer

Drawn together in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Lord God, you call your people to honor those in authority. Help us elect trustworthy leaders, participate in wise decisions for our common life, and serve our neighbors as we serve ourselves. Merciful God...Receive our Prayer.

God of Justice, we lift before you all who govern. May those who hold power understand that it is a trust from you to be used, not for personal glory or profit, but for the service of the people. Drive from us cynicism, selfishness, and corruption; grant in your mercy just and honest government; and give us grace to live together in unity and peace. Merciful God...Receive our Prayer.

God of all Righteousness, you have declared what is right: to seek justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you. Bless judges and courts, juries and law officers throughout our land. Guard them from retribution and from corruption. Give them the spirit of wisdom, that they may perceive the truth and administer the law impartially as instruments of your divine will. Merciful God...Receive our Prayer.

God of reconciliation, you sent your son to reconcile us to you and one another. Rekindle among us the gift of your Spirit that we might live as one new humanity in Christ, dismantling the walls that divide, ending the hostility between us, and proclaiming peace to those who are near and far away. Merciful God... Receive our Prayer

God of healing, we pray for all those who suffer in mind, body or spirit from the fear, anxiety and violence of this world. Surround us all with your peace that surpasses all understanding and free us to love our neighbors and work together in your love for the common good. Merciful God... Receive our Prayer.

God of Peace, send your Spirit where hate and violence festers, and seeks release. May life-giving rhetoric prevail in this election season. Move us to be pockets of healing, life-giving

speech. For darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. And hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Merciful God...Receive our Prayer.

We pray all this and those prayers still bubbling in the recesses of our heart with the prayer Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Sending Blessing & Dismissal

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. **Amen.**

May you each go on the way as emissaries of peace and sacrificial love. Indeed you are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. You are invited to light a candle as you leave this evening as a reminder of who you are called to be.

Go in peace. You are the body of Christ in and for the sake of the world. **Thanks be to God.**

Participants are invited to light a candle as they leave. We used a large wooden cross filled with sand where people could place their lit candle as they left. Please adapt to your context.

Sending Song “The Days of Elijah”

¹ Draft Statement, Faith in Civic Life

² *Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy*, Social Message

³ *What Luther Says, Volume 1*, p.292, 858; *Concordia Publishing House, 1959.*

⁴ *What Luther Says, Volume 1*, p.292-292, 858-59; *Concordia Publishing House, 1959.*

⁵ *Luther’s Works, the American Edition*, see citations for exact volume; *Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955-1986.*

Songs

Sanctuary

Lord, prepare me
To be a sanctuary
Pure and holy
Tried and true
With thanksgiving
I'll be a living
Sanctuary For You

Dance with me

This is holy time.
We're gathered together to worship You,
To love one another.
And as we pray, and as we sing, and as we
dance, and as we dream,
Oh, Lord I beg of You Just this one thing...
Won't you dance with me
Throughout the heavens
And below the sea
And up on the mountain tops.
Roll with the breeze, Come carry me Lord,
won't you dance, with me?

Light the Fire

Chorus:

So, light the fire, In my soul
Fan the flame, Make me whole
Lord you know, Where I've been
So, light the fire in my heart again

I stand to praise you, but I fall on my knees
My spirit is willing, but my flesh is so weak

I feel your arms around me as the power of
your healing begins
Your spirit moves right through me like a
mighty rushing wind

Micah 6:8

He has shown you (echo) dear friends (echo)
(together) what is good and what the Lord
requires of you
But to do justice (echo) and to love mercy
(echo)
(together) and to walk humbly with our God

Days of Elijah

Verse 1

These are the days of Elijah,
Declaring the word of the Lord:
And these are the days of Your servant Moses,
Righteousness being restored.
And though these are days of great trial,
Of famine and darkness and sword,
Still, we are the voice in the desert crying
'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!'

Chorus

Behold He comes, riding on the clouds
Shining like the sun, at the trumpet call!
Lift your voice, it's the year of jubilee
And out of Zion's hill salvation comes!

Verse 2

These are the days of Ezekiel,
The dry bones becoming as flesh.
And these are the days of Your servant David,
Rebuilding a temple of praise.
These are the days of the harvest,
The fields are as white in Your world!
And we are the laborers in Your vineyard,
Declaring the word of the Lord!

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For not speaking up out of fear, **Christ have mercy**

For not speaking up out of indifference, **Lord, have mercy**

Welcome & Invitation to Baptismal Waters

Word

Romans 13:1-7

Matthew 20:20-28

Galatians 5:13

Prayers

Please respond... **Receive our Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Sending Blessing & Dismissal

Sending Song: Days of Elijah