

*“We pray for peace O Lord, make plowshares of our swords
Make plowshares of our swords, hear us when we cry to you.”
(Of the Land and Seasons by Stephen Folkemer and Beth Bergeron Folkemer)*

We sung these words this past Friday in our online service for prayer and healing. In light of all that has transpired in our nation’s capital this week, the plea of these words seems rather obvious. The scenes in my head keep playing in an endless loop – An angry lawless lynch mob, some with traitorous confederate flags unfurled, overpowering Capitol police, seeking not only to end 240 years of democracy, but even worse, to harm and kill elected leaders whom they have been told to hate.

Swords being fashioned into plowshares. Not only is that an image for which I yearn, but it is an image that I am having a hard time grasping right now. Guns, pipe bombs and Molotov cocktails were brought into the U.S. Capitol; a noose was displayed on the side of a nearby retaining wall; Pro Nazi death camp sweatshirts were worn by a few rioters inside the very building in which lawmakers on December 11, 1941 made a heroic declaration to stop Hitler and his Nazi minions; a U.S. Capitol Police Officer along with four civilians lost their lives. Where are the plowshares in all of that? And now these seditious bullies are attempting to hold our democracy hostage by promising more terror in the days to come if they don’t get their way with election results. Where are the plowshares?

Can I be honest here? I have been haunted not only by the swords I’ve seen in the news this week, but by the swords that I have found in my heart. At times the anger in my heart is so consuming, my eyes fail to see the image of God in everyone – especially those who are attempting this coup d’etat. At times the anger in my heart is so consuming, my ears fail to hear Jesus’ words of forgiveness uttered for the lawless crowd who lynched him on the hardwood of a cross. I find myself left with this burning question:

“When O God, will the sword of anger in my heart be transformed into a ploughshare of love?”

This is my struggle right now. But in a strange way it is a struggle I welcome. I talk all the time about loving the unlovable and forgiving the enemy and striving for peace and justice. Well, now it’s time for me to put flesh and blood on the bones of these words; to walk the talk.

A long time ago, the prophet Isaiah tried to bring comfort to a community experiencing the pain of exile and of losing everything they had ever known; everything that had ever brought meaning to their lives. Isaiah spoke to a community grieving the loss of peace and fearing an unknown future; a community feeling vulnerable in the midst of the unknown. And Isaiah had the audacity to challenge this broken and hurting community to imagine a different reality – God’s reality – a reality where a lion and a lamb lie down together in peace; a reality where weapons of death are re-purposed into instruments of life.

Mahatma Gandhi once said to a world imprisoned to injustice and blinded by rage, we need to be the change we wish to see. Maybe there’s some prophetic wisdom to be found in these simple words. Perhaps I must be the plowshare I wish to see. Or as Paul once said,

“Rekindle the gift of God that is within you... For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and love and of self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Maybe the plowshares aren't as far off as they seem. I can still insist that those who have committed crimes of sedition this week be held accountable to the laws of our land, without seeking vengeance or retribution. I can still gather weekly with folks from our congregation as we seek to learn about and put an end to racial injustice in our city and in our world; I can still pray for and with those in our midst who are anxious and broken; I can still add my resources to yours as together we seek to alleviate hunger in our city and in our world; I can still seek to embody, the One whom I follow: The Prince of Peace.

I cannot promise that the sword of anger will not from time to time emerge in my heart; It most certainly will. But I can assure you of this, that image of the sword with all the venom and despair that it brings will never appear without its companion: the plowshare – in which hope and love will finally be found.

Peace and Love,
Pastor Doug