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### Praying for Our President

The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Since we confess our sins almost every time we gather to worship, it would be good remind ourselves what we mean by sin. One the more common ways of understanding sin is "missing the mark." It is like shooting an arrow at a target and coming up short.

The Apostle Paul puts it another way and expands the project: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

It should be reassuring that we all miss the mark of being and doing what God would desire. And we are met not with judgment or scolding, but with forgiveness and an invitation to start again.

In that vein, I think there are some things that some get wrong again and again as individuals, societies and as communities of faith. We miss the mark and go down the same familiar road.

For example: people at the beginning of a relationship can start believing that they can and will change the other person, especially those traits and habits that one finds annoying or concerning. If it is your belief that you are going to radically change the other person, get ready for some disappointing years ahead. My experience with many couples for example is that each might move to the middle on some things of importance, but real turn-around personality makeovers are hard to come by.

I think of Isaiah's words. (Isaiah 49) The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. The Lord formed me in the womb to be his servant. That I believe is the Bible's way to say that we some things are imprinted upon us from every early on – an ancient version of nature over nurture perhaps.

Another revealing story from Genesis is twin brothers Jacob and Esau struggling with one another in the womb of Rebekah. Esau was born first, and as he was born Jacob was gripping Esau's heel. Their fighting continued throughout their lives – even their parents chose sides: Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. (Genesis 25)

We miss the mark sometimes.

We encounter someone who is short with us, distant, cranky, rude, put off, or can barely enter into a meaningful conversation with us. We, far too often, conclude that the reason for their mood or attitude must be something we have said or done. "What have I done?" We ask ourselves, convinced that it must be us. "What did I do to make the other driver so angry when he passed me and glared and saluted?" Maybe nothing.

Without prompting or proof, it is tempting to locate ourselves in the middle of another's very bad day. Why do we/I do this? I can't say really. But it happens I believe to all of us. We are probably not listening enough.

Another example of how we can miss the mark. Respecting another person's privacy and space to the point that we have widened the gap between them and us. I know what people say: they just want to be left alone. They don't want the world to know about their problems and hardships, and I get that. Many are reluctant to tell others when we are hurting or feeling particularly gloomy. This is especially true as we semi-hibernate through the winter months waiting for spring here in New England. It is far too easy to wall ourselves off from others today out of outsized respect for privacy.

Remember though that as Christians we are called to "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." Romans 12:15

Another thing I think we get wrong usually gets revealed with the church starts talking about money, and we're doing a lot of that right now.

We are doing the work of community by communicating as best as we can why we believe improving our space will help us carry our mission more fully.

A carryover from the older, more traditional language in our Prayer Book is said at the 8:00 service at the moment when the gifts of bread, wine and money collected in the wooden plates come forward and are presented and rested on the altar. "All things come of Thee O Lord. And of Thine own have we given Thee." Beautiful old churchy language: let me translate. God, everything comes from you, so we're offering back to you what you've already given to us.

What we are hoping for is that you will join us in giving back some of what we have been given. It is not mine what I contribute, though my bank account indicates that it is, it is ultimately the result of our abilities, hard work, and good fortune of living when and where we do.

My last example is probably less about missing the mark than it is about the risk of making assumptions and predictions.

When it comes to elections, many believed, that Donald J. Trump would never be elected President of the United States. I count myself among them. I cited polls,

demographics, and controversies and then discounted the possibility. Let me clear: this is not; I believe a partisan or judgment statement. Many from both sides of the aisle did not expect the final results. I was as surprised as many others living conformably in my bubble on the Seacoast of New Hampshire.

But here we are. The week of the inauguration of a new President, the most powerful person in the world today. I have not spoken out on the election directly, because I want to honor the tradition and law that churches and preachers should not get into the direct support of political candidates. I want to honor other peoples' political views, especially from the pulpit meant to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ.

And I want to honor the particularly American form of democracy and our church's support of it. We, in our Book of Common Prayer, pray for the President of the United States and other national and state leaders. Pray that our leaders make right decision, uphold our laws and be defenders of justice.

At the same time, I want to acknowledge the real anxiety, fear, and concern that many people feel – especially those who have opened up to me. We are in uncharted waters.

We need prayer, which is at its core, our openness to the presence of God in our lives. We need God to help us now and always.

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has written this week: “We can and, indeed, I believe we must pray for all who lead in our civic order, nationally and internationally. I pray for the president in part because Jesus Christ is my Savior and Lord. If Jesus is my Lord and the model and guide for my life, his way must be my way, however difficult. And the way of prayer for others is a part of how I follow the way of Jesus.”

The Apostle Paul, in his opening words to the church in Corinth, wrote: “God will strengthen you to the end.” (1 Corinthians 1) We need strength in our daily lives. Strength to get up on the morning, embrace a new day, confront challenges in our work and in our studies, cope with illness, and strength to care for those we love. Strength to be people of light and hope in a broken world.

And, perhaps most importantly, Paul adds: God is faithful.

We think of faith as something we possess. Being faithful is the object of religion after all. We have faith, belief, in God. It is our part of the covenant and the creed. We believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty.

Paul turns this around and reminds us that God is faithful. God believed in us long before we believed in God. Yes, beginning when we were in our mother's womb.

God is faithful, which allows us get cultivate, feel, test and increase our faith.

So get ready: we will and should pray for Donald our President, just as we prayed for Barack, and George, Bill, Ronald and Jimmy. Not the President, but our President, as the Book of Common Prayer suggests. At least that is the commitment we make to one another living in community.

Will that be hard for some? I'm sure it will, just as it was for those with different political views to pray for whoever was President at the time. And remember: God is faithful.

And in the days ahead some may conclude that prayer is good and solid starting point, but not enough and the only thing we can do. Christians are called to live out their prayers in faith and action. To feed the hungry, visit the sick, cloth the naked, visit the sick and those who have lost their freedom, and much more.

There are moments when following Christ means we are called to act, speak out and organize. The point of honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with a national holiday tomorrow is to commemorate a man who did not believe that his faith stopped at the walls of the church he led. He is after all the only ordained preacher to be honored with a holiday. King was enraged by racial discrimination and segregation in this country. He cared about the lives of every day workers, which brought him to Memphis on the fateful day in 1968. And lest we forget, he spoke out against the Viet Nam War to the chagrin of some supporters who had hoped that he would stay in his lane.

What have we heard today?

I hope we have heard that we are all in this together.

We are known and loved by God more than we can imagine.

Keep parts of our lives open to others so that they can be Christ to us.

All have is from God, so let us be generous with what we have.

Pray for others -- those who lead. Pray for our nation and our world. Now and always.