



Opening Reflection—Sunday, August 13th, 2017

Matthew Wilcoxon

Good evening and welcome to the Church of the Resurrection. My name is Matt, and I am one of the pastors here.

It is with heavy hearts that we come together for worship tonight, having witnessed yesterday the sickening spectacle that occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia, and all that it says about our country's racial past and present.

- We sigh because we know that the racism on display yesterday comes down to us as part of a cultural heritage of sin from our fathers, grandfathers, and, yes, our founding fathers.
- We wince when we think of the fact that our evangelical forebears, for the most part, turned the other way during the Jim Crow era in the south.
- We are ashamed to remember that when blacks fled from the rural south for cities in the west and north, they were often met with a cold reception from the churches in these cities.
- We are tempted to avoid, or explain away, the fact that the median income for whites is \$71,300 while for blacks it is only \$43,300, or the harsh reality that black men are incarcerated at five times the rate of white men.
- We are frustrated that we seem powerless to do something meaningful to overcome both our past and the present.

The reality is that we cannot atone for our own sins, and certainly not for the sins of our forefathers. We cannot just fix the destruction wrought by slavery and segregation and less formal structures of racism. We cannot even banish bias and hatred and fear from our own hearts or the hearts of our countrymen.

However, as God's people, we do not need to give in to despair, nor to resign ourselves to defeat and inaction. Why? Because "Our God is able". I was reminded today of a sermon by that title given by Martin Luther King, Jr. He said:

"Let this affirmation [--"our God is able"--] be our ringing cry...When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a great benign power in the universe whose name is God, and he is able to make a way out of no way, and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. This [--the fact that "our God is able"--] is our hope for becoming better people. This is our mandate for seeking to make a better world."¹

It is only because "Our God is Able" that we can hope for peace and reconciliation, and the changed hearts and social healing that needs to occur. It is only because our God is able that we can act meaningfully in the hope that it will make a difference.

So, because God is able, we start with prayer today. It's a prayer for our nation, for the church, and for ourselves.

Will you join me in responding at the end of each prayer offered with:

"Oh Lord, only you can make all things new."?

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), p. 117.

Prayer²:

Leader: Lord Jesus, your Kingdom is good news for a world caught in racial hostility. We ask that you would give us grace for the deep challenges facing our country.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Leader: Lord, we confess our anger, our deep sadness, and our collective sense of weakness to see this world healed through our own strength.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Leader: Lord, we honestly confess that our country has a long history of racial oppression, that racism has been a strategy of evil powers and principalities.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Leader: Lord, we confess that the gospel is good news for the oppressed and the oppressor. Both are raised up. Both are liberated, but in different ways. The oppressed are raised up from the harsh burden of inferiority. The oppressor from the destructive illusion of superiority.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Leader: Lord, we confess that the gospel is your power to form a new people not identified by dominance and superiority, but by unity in the Spirit.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Leader: Lord, we ask that you would help us name our part in this country's story of racial oppression and hostility. Whether we have sinned against others by

² This prayer was written by Rich Villodas. It is available online at <http://www.missioalliance.org/congregational-prayer-churches-charlottesville/>. Accessed August 13th, 2017.

seeing them as inferior, or whether we have been silent in the face of evil.
Forgive us of our sin.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Leader: Lord we pray for our enemies. For those who have allowed Satanic powers to work through them. Grant them deliverance through your mighty power.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Leader: Lord, we ask that you would form us to be us peacemakers. May we be people who speak the truth in love as we work for a reconciled world.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Leader: Lord we commit our lives to you, believing that you are working in the world in spite of destructive powers and principalities. Bring healing to those who are hurt, peace to those who are anxious, and love to those who are fearful. We wait for you, O Lord. Make haste to help us.

Congregation: *Oh Lord, only you can make all things new.*

Amen.