



A TIME FOR JUDGEMENT AND HOPE

A Statement of the Wisconsin Council of Churches

The events of January 6, 2021 were like nothing else in our country's recent history: a mob stormed and invaded the U.S. Capitol, threatening violence and disrupting Congress in an effort to overturn an election, and committing theft and vandalism. The event left five persons dead and a nation badly shaken. Similar groups demonstrated at or besieged capitol buildings in other states. What is God revealing to us in these events, and how is God calling and empowering us to respond?

It is not enough to condemn the assault on the Capitol building, or to demand that those who participated in it be held to account. The assault was the bitter fruit of repeated and blatant violations of the commandment, "You shall not bear false witness *against* your neighbor" – not merely false statements, but lies intended to hurt and oppress others whom God calls us to love.

The mob was incited by a steady stream of lies about the election from holders of the highest offices in the land, spread through social media. It is no coincidence that the lies were focused on overturning election results in urban areas with large populations of Black and Brown voters. The lies and the assault were ultimately rooted in the pervasive and longstanding lies of white supremacy – lies that have protected the power and privilege of one part of the community at the expense of persons of a different race or national origin.

Those besieging the U.S. Capitol could be seen erecting crosses, carrying flags with Christian symbols and "Jesus saves" banners – one more example of the ways that the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ has been twisted to support racial and other forms of social and political oppression. The assault, and the lies that fueled it, are attacks not only on our democracy, but also on the way of Jesus and on all who long and work for the realization of God's beloved community of love and justice.

In this moment, when anxiety, anger and even despair over our nation threaten to overwhelm us, the church year points us to wellsprings of Christian imagination, courage, and hope.

The assault on the Capitol happened on Epiphany, the day we recall the manifestation of God's true life-giving purpose for *all* people and all creation. Next Sunday commemorates Jesus' baptism. Our own baptism calls us to die to sin and repent, as individuals and as a church, of all the ways we have betrayed God's purpose by speech or silence. But baptism also gives us new life in the Spirit which "renews the face of the earth" (Ps. 104), empowering us for the work of repairing our fragmented nation with the courage to tell painful truths. Above all, we know that we are not alone or abandoned, for in the Christmas season just past we again celebrated the gift of Immanuel, "God with us," incarnate in the midst of this sinful and unjust world, the light of grace and truth which the darkness has not, and will not, overcome. (John 1:5, 14)

Approved by the Board of Directors January 8, 2021