

A Prayer of Endings and Beginnings

Almighty God, who calls us from death to life, from places of ending to moments of beginning, the great I Am and God With Us who beckons us to come and see... We breathe in your light and your life and your strength and your comfort, and we breathe out to you our trust and our praise and our hope. As we lift our hearts and our arms to you now, this day which we dedicate to the memory of that great social gospel revolutionary, Martin Luther King, Jr., we must also prepare our hearts for a new ending and a new beginning. Hope was the promise that ushered in a new thing nearly eight years ago to the day—a sign that we as a nation had begun to move beyond the shadows of our history as importers and oppressors of black bodies and lives. We are not so naïve as to think that the sins and traumas of slavery, Jim Crow, separate but equal, and the many manifestations of covert racism today were suddenly “over” or reconciled, but the election of our first black president was nonetheless an important milestone in the continuing fight for true equality.

Creator God, we rejoice for the wise, measured, honest, and principled leadership of your son and our President, Barack Hussein Obama. We give thanks for the economic, diplomatic, social, and myriad other improvements that have occurred under his leadership. We reflect on the meaningful relationships he has cultivated and maintained with leaders the world over. We thank you for his beautiful family, for Michelle and Malia and Sasha, and for the many ways in which they too captivated and inspired us. We celebrate his storied partnership with Vice President Joseph R. Biden, another man of principle whose entire life has been dedicated to service: to you, to his family, and to his country. While no administration is perfect, we may also take comfort in the President’s accountability to the nation for his decisions and for his example of what a quality leader should be. As the President and his administration complete their final days of governance, we ask that you continue to guide them. Ease their transitions to private citizenry, and give them sufficient rest to move into the next new thing into which you have called them.

Reconciling God, would that our words and prayers about the incoming administration could be equally exuberant. For many, the beginning of the current session of Congress has ushered in the fulfillment of the far more troubling promises that characterized the 2016 campaign. Already, countless Americans face the dismantling of health insurance programs that, however flawed, has made it possible for them to seek affordable care despite pre-existing conditions or a lack of employer-provided healthcare—healthcare provisions that allowed women to make safe and responsible choices for their bodies. We must also not forget our many fellow Americans who either misunderstood what was at stake or simply did not believe that their own care would be at risk, who will be disproportionately harmed by these very actions of our elected officials. We crave your reassurance in the face of other troubling changes on the horizon.

We look ahead to the next week, when President Obama steps aside for the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as our next President. I have prayed to you, as I imagine have the many gathered here, many times lifting up the fear and anger and uncertainty that faces us as a people and a nation. Today, Redeemer God, I ask that you pour out *your* hope on the hearts gathered here. Move in and through us to release our fear, lean in to

our uncertainty, and channel our anger toward discerning and fulfilling your purpose for us in this time. Let our voices proclaim hope and healing and love for our neighbors—even and especially those who wear a certain red trucker hat—and justice for those most at risk from the plans of the incoming administrations. Guide our hands and our feet to the messy, violent work of speaking truth to power, of defending the marginalized and renewing this land with your radical, unchurched gospel. Let *us* be an unchurch, seeking always to disrupt the structures that try to limit your kin-dom on earth.

And God, I confess that these words are so hard to prepare and even harder to actually say...but make in us hearts that can love President Trump in obedience to your will. Push us to show that love through our ongoing resistance to policies, actions, and statements that violate your will and your plan, and let us never mistake the act of love for complacency or normalization. Convict President Trump and our elected representatives at all levels of government to turn from their inward, self-interested focus to a tenure of service dedicated to the healing and support of those in our world who are most in need. Continue to inspire leaders like Congressman John Lewis, and Congressman Luis Gutierrez, and Senators Sherrod Brown and Elizabeth Warren and Tammy Duckworth, and the many women and men of principle who hold themselves and their colleagues accountable day by day. Remind us that you are bigger than all of our fears, all of our dreams, and all the forces that run counter to your will. Love always wins.

In the words of Dr. King, “O God, we thank you for the lives of great saints and prophets in the past, who have revealed to us that we can stand up amid the problems and difficulties and trials of life and not give in. We thank you for our foreparents, who've given us something in the midst of the darkness of exploitation and oppression to keep going. Grant that we will go on with the proper faith and the proper determination of will, so that we will be able to make a creative contribution to this world. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray,” and we add to these words our voices in the prayer Jesus inspired us to pray:

Our Creator, who art in Heaven,

Hallowed be thy name

Thy kin-dom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us

And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from evil

For thine is the kin-dom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.