

Pastoral Prayer after the Baltimore Riots, 5.3.15

We've done it again, Lord.

As Eric Liu pointed out this week, the word "we" is one of the great American words. "We" the People. Yes "we" can. "We" are family. "We" won the Second World War, "we" put a man on the moon, "we" invented the Internet, "we" gave the world jazz.

And if "we" get to claim those aspects of American history, then surely "we" have to claim the unsavory aspects of our common life, too. "We" cuts both ways.

"We" enslaved Africans. "We" cut Reconstruction short and made a mockery of equal citizenship. "We" supported Jim Crow, then redlined, subordinated, and ghettoized African-Americans. "We" cut blacks out of the New Deal. "We" created a polity in which racial inequity and economic inequality magnify each other unrelentingly. "We" tried to put a lid on it with heavy policing and a War on Drugs. "We" failed.

"We" are the authors of every page of Baltimore's story, Lord. "We" are the authors of the longstanding structural racism and the personal irresponsibility that have been on display this week. "We" have both a history of police brutality and a present crisis of street violence. "We" have both an inherited, multigenerational lack of opportunity and a dearth of leaders willing to address it.

"We" can't judge looters for their antisocial behavior without judging a color-caste structure and a school-to-prison pipeline that flushes them away like so much refuse. "We" can't keep opining about root causes without also supporting the parents and pastors and neighbors who, in their own small ways, are organizing each other to break the cycle of brokenness.

Whatever our political perspective, Lord, "we" need to open our eyes to what is actually happening in Baltimore and other cities in these United States in the second decade of the 21st century. It is an abomination. "We" should all be able to say that.

It's time to push each other out of our ideological comfort zones and build unlikely coalitions to create more opportunity for all. It's time to act like "we" are all in charge. Because "we" are.

And with Your help, Father, we can build a better world. To this end "we" recommit ourselves this day, through the redeeming power and love of Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.

Much of this prayer comes from an op-ed by Eric Liu on April 28, 2015.
<http://www.wbaltv.com/national/liu-how-we-burned-baltimore/32620692>