Meditation by **Mike Kinman** from the virtual New Year’s Eve Eucharist at 7:30 p.m., Thursday, December 31, 2020, when we bid adieu to 2020 together.

**It’s a journey … that I propose**

*It's a journey . . . that I propose . . . I am not the guide . . . nor technical assistant . . . I will be your fellow passenger . . .*

*I have heard . . . from previous visitors . . . the road washes out sometimes . . . and passengers are compelled . . . to continue groping . . . or turn back . . . I am not afraid . . .*

*I promise you nothing . . . I accept your promise . . . of the same we are simply riding . . . a wave . . . that may carry . . . or crash . . .*

*It's a journey . . . and I want . . . to go . . .*

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Tonight, we watch … we wait … we hope.

Tomorrow, the journey begins anew.

There is a history to this night. In the early 178th century, Moravian Christians began the tradition of gathering this night to reflect on the year that had past and to look forward to the year to come.

And then came December 31, 1862 … what was known as “Freedom’s Eve.” Enslaved black people in the South and free blacks in the North gathered in churches and homes to watch … and wait … and hope as midnight brought news that the Emancipation Proclamation was law.

158 years have passed since that night … and the journey to freedom for all God’s children is still in process.

158 years have passed since that night … and still we watch … we wait … we hope.

There is nothing magical about New Year’s Eve … and we know it. I live with a high school senior and college junior who regularly remind me that pretty much everything I can talk about is a social construct, Dad! Race. Gender. Sexuality. Money. None of these exist apart from human beings developing shared assumptions about their reality.

I guess we should add New Year’s to that list.

There really is nothing special about this night. Different cultures have chosen different random points in the earth’s journey around the sun as the moment when one year ends and the next begins. The Jewish New Year celebration is behind us. The Chinese New Year celebration is still to come. Our own liturgical new year began at the end of November. Either way, it is an evening followed by a morning.

As Bono sings … nothing changes on New Year’s Day.

Even that first Freedom’s Eve didn’t lead to a Freedom’s Day. The Emancipation Proclamation didn’t free one enslaved person. Northern blacks were already free. Southern blacks were still enslaved and the Union-leaning border states were exempt from the proclamation. It wouldn’t be until the passage of the 13th amendment nearly three years later that slavery was abolished in the United States.

And even then, slavery was changed, not ended. Convict leasing, Jim Crow, Mass criminalization, mass incarceration and mass inequity in medical care during a pandemic are but a few of the new faces we have put on this peculiar institution, which is so foundational to our systems of economic and political power that the espoused values of this nation shrink before it.

Langston Hughes knew it … in words that could have been written this morning but are in fact 85 years old, we hear him cry out this night “Let America be America Again” because America was never America to him.

*“Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?”* Hughes beckons  
*And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

*I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,  
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.  
I am the red man driven from the land,  
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—  
And finding only the same old stupid plan  
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.*

*I am the young man, full of strength and hope,  
Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!  
Of work the men! Of take the pay!  
Of owning everything for one's own greed!*

And yet through the years this night still they gathered …

…and this year this night still we gather … to watch … and wait … and hope.

We know that nothing magical will happen at midnight when 2020 clicks over to 2021. We will still be deep in this pandemic. We will still be a nation of liberty for some but not for all. We will still carry the griefs on our heart from all those we have lost this year and the fear for those who lie dying even as we gather in our homes this night to watch … and wait … and hope.

And yet as we watch and wait for midnight and the chance finally to put 2020 behind us, it is Hope that is the real watchword of this night. Because we are people of hope. Not the hopefulness of a lottery ticket holder but people who clutch after the sure and certain hope of God’s presence and love in our life. That God is present in every moment of every year, luring all creation forward, bending that arc of history toward justice, equity and love. That the journey of which Nikki Giovani writes … the journey that we know from our own experience that “the road washes out sometimes . . . and passengers are compelled . . . to continue groping . . . or turn back.” is a journey where God is at once guide, companion and glorious destination.

That is our hope. The hope that lifts our eyes to the clock inching toward midnight. The hope that will greet the new dawn without fear, even though truly nothing changes on New Year’s Day.

It is the hope of what can be, in God, through us.

As we watch, and wait, and hope this night, George Regas, our rector emeritus who has embodied so much of what All Saints has become in the last half century, is in hospice care at home with Mary at his side. It seems a pain almost too much to bear that after all we have been through this year, we may soon be parted from George, as well … and yet as Lin-Manuel Miranda reminds us

*Death doesn't discriminate  
Between the sinners and the saints  
It takes and it takes and it takes  
And we keep living anyway  
We rise and we fall and we break  
And we make our mistakes*

*And if there's a reason we’re still alive  
When so many who loved us have died  
Tonight, we watch … and hope … and wait for it.*

There is a reason we are still alive while so many who loved us have died. That reason is the hope that George spent his whole life preaching and living.

It’s hard to think of George without thinking of a sermon he preached that attracted the notice of the Internal Revenue Service and put All Saints Church in the eye of a hurricane for a time. We remember that sermon for the Gospel George imagined Jesus preaching to candidates Kerry and Bush … but what has always struck me about that sermon is the penultimate paragraphs. I want to share those with you as we watch and wait together. Because it is about the hope in which we gather this night.

The hope of which Langston Hughes wrote.

The hope of Nikki Giovanni’s journey.

The hope of God in Christ that lightens our bleakest hour

George preaches:

*“We are humbled by the challenge of being faithful to God amid all the complexities and demands that are placed before us.  Some of you will say, “I have so little to offer against the hugeness of the issues confronting us.”  Feeling that way myself sometimes, I go back to some words spoken by Senator Bobby Kennedy in South Africa in 1966.  They have always inspired me.*

*‘Let no one be discouraged by the belief there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world’s ills, against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence…. Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of our generation.’*

*Hold on to hope that your life and witness count.  Hope will make a tremendous difference in the tasks you assume for yourself.  Cynicism and despair are deathblows to any movement for national renewal and world peace, or just your trying to survive the challenges of daily life.  Teilhard de Chardin said, ‘The world of tomorrow belongs to those who gave it the greatest hope.’  I believe that passionately.*

*Many of us have been working on all of this for a long time.  It is a terrible day when we let our defeats and failures beat us down into hopelessness and despair. Dante knew the destruction of the loss of hope, for he placed over the gates of hell the words, “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.”  Despair is the deathblow to a new and better and more just future.  It is unmistakably clear that when we lose our capacity to hope, we lose our capacity to shape our future.*

*Do you remember those days when your heart was full of hope that life could be different, that life could be transformed and healed, that life could be better and more wonderful?  Remember the energy that brought to your life.  Those dreams you have for your children and grandchildren, those dreams for your marriage or close relationships, those dreams for your job—they are powerful engines for change in your life.  Don’t let anyone take them from you.  Nor take from you your dreams for a new America and a peaceful world.”*

Tonight, we watch … we wait … and yes, we hope.

Tomorrow, the journey begins anew.

*O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath—  
America will be!*

*Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain—  
All, all the stretch of these great green states—  
And make America again!*

The path is before us, illuminated by the light of those that have preceded us. Illuminated by the lovelight of God who creates us, inspires us and holds us to her heart.

It's a journey . . . that I propose . . . I am not the guide . . . nor technical assistant . . . I will be your fellow passenger . . .

I have heard . . . from previous visitors . . . the road washes out sometimes . . . and passengers are compelled . . . to continue groping . . . or turn back . . . I am not afraid . . .

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Tonight, we watch, and wait … and hope.

Tomorrow, we begin the journey anew. Together. Amen.