

Liturgy for Japanese American Remembrance Sunday

Background:

A “Day of Remembrance” is observed annually in February for the Japanese American community and for all Americans. This is a time to remember the pain and deprivations arising from the US Government’s wartime mass exile and imprisonment of Japanese Americans living on the West Coast of our nation, and related actions against persons of Japanese ancestry living in Hawaii and other regions of our nation. It is a time for all of us to reflect on the damage done to our nation when we treat people differently based on their race, ethnicity or religion. Most of all, it is a time for all Americans to learn from our errors and to renew our commitment to love and protect the equality and dignity of all persons.

February 19, 2017, is the 75th Anniversary of Executive Order 9066, signed by President Franklin Roosevelt, that resulted in the mass exile and imprisonment of over 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry, solely because of their race. In 1942, the US military exiled every man, woman and child of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast, two-thirds of them American citizens, and put them in prison camps, without a single criminal charge against them and no trials to establish any wrongdoing on their part. This action is widely viewed as one of the darkest moments in our nation’s history, when we failed to uphold the constitutional rights we hold so dear for all of us.

These actions were taken against Japanese Americans based on our government’s claims of “military necessity,” saying their ethnicity made them disloyal to the United States, that our country was at risk of harm if they were not locked up, and that the loyal could not be distinguished from the disloyal. They were imprisoned behind barbed wire for over three years, and deprived of virtually every right guaranteed by the US Constitution, not because of any wrongdoing, but solely because of their race. Many lost all they had – their homes, farms, livelihoods and friends. Some lost their lives as well. The President, Congress and the courts all approved these constitutional deprivations based on claims of “military necessity.” No similar mass actions were taken against Americans of German or Italian descent.

A fair examination of the circumstances underlying these wartime actions never occurred until 1980, when Congress established a Commission on Wartime Internment and Relocation of Civilians to investigate these events. The Commission took testimony from over 750 witnesses and examined thousands of wartime documents, many declassified for the first time. The Commission’s 1983 report, entitled “Personal Justice Denied, concluded: “The promulgation of Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions which followed from it - detention, ending detention and ending exclusion - were not driven by analysis of military conditions. The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.”

Congress subsequently approved an apology and symbolic monetary redress to Americans of Japanese ancestry, and a presidential apology was issued to all survivors. Yet the “precedent” of these wartime actions lies about like a loaded weapon, ready for the hand of any authority that can bring forward a plausible claim of urgent need. (Justice Jackson, dissenting in *Korematsu v. United States*).

In the past year, we have heard repeated references to the “precedent” of these wartime actions, to propose rounding up, registering, imprisoning or deporting Muslim Americans, Syrian refugees, Mexican Americans, and others. We pray that we never forget the lessons learned from our wartime treatment of Americans of Japanese ancestry.

A Litany of Remembrance and Commitment

One: We remember that time 75 years ago, when our nation was gripped with wartime fears and uncertainty. Our Japanese American neighbors needed our help and protection, but instead experienced exile and imprisonment.

All: Lord hear our prayers.

One: We again feel fear and uncertainty rising around us. We wonder if others are dangerous because they may look different, or believe differently, than we do.

All: But then we remember, we have been here before. Loving God, give us the courage and compassion to understand, love and embrace our neighbors.

One: Our fear is intensified by hearing that the wartime exclusion and imprisonment of Japanese Americans is being used as “precedent” for potential registration, exclusion, imprisonment or deportation of Muslim Americans, Mexican Americans, immigrants from Syria and others.

All: But then we remember, we have been here before. Loving God, we know you expect us to better...we know we can do better. Help us to fight our fears with faith, and to build bridges instead of walls.

One: We remember the dangers of racism, wartime hysteria and lack of political leadership. We seek to learn from our mistakes, to be a stronger nation and to give dignity and honor to each person, as Jesus would do.

All: Loving God, help us be your hands in the world. Give us the courage to stand up, speak out, and protect the dignity and rights of all of your children. Help us learn to celebrate our differences rather than fear them. Help us learn to love the whole of Your diverse creation!

Call to Worship

One: We have gathered from diverse places of roots and birth and home

Many: to praise and worship God.

One: We have come...

Many: all that we are, all that we have been, and all that we can be with God's help.

One: We have come with...

Many: our deepest joys and our deepest fears hoping that God can weave them together that we can become closer to God's hope for all creation – Your Beloved Community.

One: We have come with hope and a prayer.

Opening Prayer

All: God of all creation, in this hour of worship, help us to remember and learn from our past. Open our eyes and hearts to see our present through Your eyes. Open our hearts to welcome Your transforming spirit that our tomorrow can be all that You hope for! Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Loving God, forgive us...

- when we respond to fear and uncertainty by casting suspicion and blame on others,
- when we seek greater protection for ourselves than for others, and
- when we view others as less valuable or dangerous, due to race, religion or national origin.

Help us remember that Jesus focused his mission on people who were despised, feared and marginalized. He admonished us to love him by loving and protecting “the least of these.” Forgive us for our lack of courage to understand and know our neighbors. Help us embrace and celebrate our differences and protect and love one another as we would want to be loved and protected. Help us to face our uncertain future with the commitment that we will stand together in love and dignity. Amen.

Offering Prayer

Loving God, help us be the instruments of your peace. We offer ourselves, along with our tithes and offerings, to support the coming of your Kingdom on earth. With You, we seek to create a world where all will stand together in love and dignity. Amen.

Suggested Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 1:17, Matthew 25: 35-40

Other Suggested Readings, from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr:

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy to a friend.”

“People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don’t know each other; they don’t know each other because they have not communicated with each other.”

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”

Other resources, for background or discussion in education classes:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internment_of_Japanese_Americans

www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history

www.theatlantic.com/photo/2011/08/world-war-ii-internment-of-japanese-americans/100132/

www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/the-shadow-of-korematsu/416634/

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/2/18/japanese-americaninternmentremembrancemuslimpatriotssa.html>

www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/.../internment/pdf/teacher_guide.pdf

Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1982-1983

Films:

- *Come See the Paradise* (1990) Follows an interracial family separated by the wartime incarceration program
- *Conscience and the Constitution* (2000), a documentary about Japanese Americans in the prison camps who refused to be drafted before their freedoms were restored - "free us before you draft us."
- *Farewell to Manzanar* (1976) Made for TV adaptation of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's memoirs of her time in the Manzanar concentration camp
- *Forgotten Valor* (2001) Written and directed by Lane Nishikawa, a Nisei veteran remembers his experiences during World War II [4]
- *Go for Broke!* (1951) Based on the real-life story of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated army unit of Japanese American men, many of whom served while their families were incarcerated on the home front
- *Legacy of Heart Mountain* (2014) Emmy Award winning documentary about life in one of the Japanese American internment camps, in Wyoming, including *Rabbit in the Moon* (2004) A documentary/memoirs about the life and deprivations suffered by in the Japanese American prison camps
- *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1999) Adaptation of the novel by David Guterson
- *Under the Blood Red Sun* (2014) A young Japanese American boy faces monumental adversity in Hawaii in 1941 Hawaii, when the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor.

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