

Words Have the Power of Life and Death, Senate Chaplain's Prayer Reminds Us

The Wired Word

In the News

It ended with a prayer.

On Thursday morning, January 7, a joint session of Congress concluded its work and certified Joe Biden as the president-elect. This was a notable conclusion, since Congress' work had been interrupted the day before by angry protestors in support of President Donald Trump's attempt to overturn his defeat in the election. They violently broke into and overran the Capitol building aiming to prevent that very outcome.

As best as we at *The Wired Word* understand the overall motivation of the rioters, they, like the president, believed that Biden's electoral victory was due not to a legitimate election, but to voting fraud and wanted the election overturned. (For more on this, see item #3 in the "For Further Discussion" section below.) Of course, in the large crowd, there may have been people with other motivations as well, which we are not able to know.

Also, though thousands of people attended the rally, many did not participate in the riot. (We have stated this judging from the photos and news videos from the day. *The Wired Word* has been unable to find any figures about what percentage of those in attendance actually joined the mob action.)

It took over three hours for Capitol Police, assisted by the local D.C. Metropolitan Police Department to retake control of the Capitol, using riot gear, shields, smoke bombs and batons. By the end of the day, police had arrested 61 people for "unrest-related" offenses, with about half of these arrests occurring on the Capitol grounds.

Five people died during the riot, which was labeled a "failed insurrection" by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. A woman among those invading the Capitol, Ashli Babbitt, was shot by police as the mob tried to break through a barricaded door in the Capitol, and three more in the crowd outside had unspecified medical emergencies leading to their deaths. A Capitol Police officer, Brian Sicknick, who was defending the Capitol building, was hit in the head by a rioter with a fire extinguisher, and later died from his injuries. Investigations into Babbitt's and Sicknick's deaths have been opened by the federal government. (A second Capitol police officer who responded to the riot, died by his own hand three days later, though it's not clear if his suicide was in any way connected to the riot.)

Thus, at the conclusion of the congressional joint session, when the Senate chaplain, Barry C. Black, closed the session with prayer, his words were no perfunctory pronouncement.

"Lord of our lives and sovereign of our beloved nation," Black, a Seventh-day Adventist minister and retired Navy rear admiral, began, "we deplore the desecration of the United States Capitol building, the shedding of innocent blood, the loss of life, and the quagmire of dysfunction that threaten our democracy."

Black then turned to some lessons of the stunning events of the preceding day. "These tragedies have reminded us that words matter and that the power of life and death is in the tongue. We have been warned that eternal vigilance continues to be freedom's price."

He also petitioned the Lord to help us "remember that we need to see in each other a common humanity that reflects your image," and to bring "healing and unity to our hurting and divided nation and world."

And Black thanked God "for what you have blessed our lawmakers to accomplish in spite of threats to liberty." (See Black's full prayer in the 2KUTV link below and in this lesson's closing prayer.)

More on this story can be found at these links:

['The Power of Life and Death Is in the Tongue,' Senate Chaplain Says in a Powerful Prayer Calling for Unity. *The New York Times*](#)

[Following Violent Day, Senate Chaplain Delivers Prayer. 2KUTV](#)

[Utah Activist Inside U.S. Capitol Says Woman Killed Was First to Try and Enter House Chamber. Deseret News](#)

Applying the News Story

Words matter.

If there is anything we've learned from the sorry events of January 6, it is that words matter, especially when they come from a powerful individual with a large base of supporters who take seriously everything he says, even when his claims are unsupported by sufficient evidence.

As Chaplain Black said in his prayer, the tragedies of January 6 "have reminded us that words matter and that the power of life and death is in the tongue."

For most of us, this is not new information; we understand the power of words, But in the current hostile bipartisan climate of our nation, it is especially important that we remember that. We need to, so far as is possible, seek the truth about what we hear and not allow ourselves to be conduits of misinformation or foot soldiers in efforts to weaken the fabric of what holds us together as a nation.

We are indeed a people "standin' in the need of prayer."

Questions to Ponder

1. What steps do you take, if any, to determine the truth of outrageous claims people around you may accept as fact? How do you recognize when you are only receiving one-sided reports? What are some ways you can then seek explanations of the other side?
2. If you consider yourself to be a follower of Jesus, how should this show in things you say? The claims you pass on to others? The efforts you make to determine the truth of what others say to you?
3. In a bipartisan climate, how important is it to read or listen to news as interpreted by media outlets that tend to be voices of views different from your own -- as well as to outlets that are more in line with your views?
4. What, if anything, have you found helpful in controlling your tongue?
5. It's possible for people to have different interpretations of the same facts. However, when friends, family or fellow church members make statements that appear to have no basis in reality, do you feel it important to address these statements? And if so, how do you do it? Is it possible to engage in dialog in which you hold your ground and refuse to accept the premise you consider untrue, and yet remain friends, family and fellow church members?