

Remarks and prayer by the Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas to open a Multi-faith Prayer Vigil, which concluded the Yom Kippur service at John Marshall Place Park, near the National Mall, on September 23, 2015

Friends, I am honored to pray with you. I'm glad that we are holding this service near a statue of John Marshall, the 4th Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, for he was my great-great-great-great-uncle, and my father, John Marshall Bullitt, was named after him.

We pray today in the company of all our ancestors, asking them to lend us their wisdom and strength. We pray with awareness of our descendants, as well, for they count on us, who are alive today, to sustain the conditions that make life possible.

When Christians ponder atonement, we go to the Cross of Christ, which is where we see the suffering love of God.

On the cross, Jesus cries out, "Why have you forsaken me?" We hear that cry
in the din of collapsing glaciers as they tumble into the sea,
in the crash of forests as they are felled,
and in the blast of mountaintops as they are blown open for extraction of
coal.

"Why have you forsaken me?" We hear that cry
in the murmur of refugees searching for water in lands scorched dry,
in the diminishing bleats and roars and chirps worldwide as species go
extinct, one by one,
and in the silence of dying coral reefs as they bleach in acid seas.

At the foot of the cross, we hear the cry of all humanity, and especially the poor, as the climate crisis unfolds around us. We hear the groaning of all Creation: "Why have you forsaken me?"

Gracious God, you are the source of life, the comfort of all who sorrow, the strength of all who suffer: though we forsake you, you will never forsake us. Give us ears to hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. Give us penitent hearts, and the grace and power to amend our lives. Grant us wisdom to live gently and justly on the earth.

Finally, dear God, we ask you to empower us
to reach out in love tonight to you,
to our ancestors and our descendants;
to reach out to children and the elderly, to the vulnerable and poor;
to reach out to the living world around us, and to each other,

and to say with sincere hearts: “I will not forsake you. I will never forsake you. I will stand with you, for we belong to each other and we are in this together. I will join the fight to re-weave the web of life.”

Note: For contemplative Christians, the crucifixion is not only an historical event but also an inner experience. As we imagine it, the Cross is planted deep within us and is the place where our malice, violence, greed, and waywardness are perpetually met by the love of God. Everything we bring to the cross – our numbness, grief, guilt, anger, and fear – is met by the forgiving, outpouring, self-giving love of God. The cross is a place of suffering and transformation.

The Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas serves as Missioner for Creation Care in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts. Her Website: RevivingCreation.org.