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# Not Ordinary Church

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## **We Tell a Different Story** **Resources in light of the U.S. 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**Rev. Allyson Sawtell, April, 2026**

### **Notes to Pastors/Worship Leaders**

On July 4<sup>th</sup> of 2026, the US is celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. For many Americans the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is a big celebration; for others, Juneteenth (<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/moments/juneteenth>) is an even more important celebration. Both holidays are major celebrations of independence and freedom.

Currently, the Administration in Washington DC is turning the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration into a major event of faulty patriotism – “America First”, based on white supremacy. It adheres to the false belief that histories that mention the horrors of slavery, attempted genocide of indigenous people, climate change, LGBTQ+ liberation, Latino/a rights, and women’s rights and achievements are not valid histories, not appropriate for children and others to learn about, and are just plain unimportant. These histories are, in their thinking, simply “woke” and not to be taken seriously.

While no one individual or congregation can change the entire narrative of the powers that be, we can certainly take a stab at it! In our services of worship during this season, leading up to and including the July 4 2026 holiday, we can engage with liturgy that pushes back against the current Administration’s version of the story. These resources are an invitation to engage, and are a small part of the movement to push back and tell a different story.

These worship resources are a varied collection. They are to be used throughout the time leading up to July 4. Do not even attempt to use them all at once in one service of worship – that would be a real chaotic mess! Pick and choose what you would use.

These resources include:

- Prayers for use in worship
- Readings for reflection (personal, small group, perhaps even in worship)
- A ritual of Joy and Gratitude
- A Communion service: “Remember me!”

## Communion – “Remember Me”

### **Introduction**

As he gathered with his friends on his last night with them, he offered them bread and wine. And he said, as we read in scripture, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

A very human plea: “Please don’t forget me when I’m gone.”

*And*, a call to his disciples: “What I stood for, how I loved, the cry for justice and the pushing back against Empire – Remember, remember. And go and do likewise. Embody that story. Live that story. Remember me.”

Christ still speaks to us in this meal, in this story, in this ritual: “Remember me.”

In every cry of the voiceless, the threatened, the devalued, forgotten, extinguished, erased, Christ cries out, “Remember me!”

### **Distribution and sharing of the elements**

*To be done as you usually do except for the prayer after Communion; you can do your traditional Words of Institution (“On the night he was betrayed”), even though these were referred to in the Introduction.*

### **Litany of Remembrance – this is in place of the prayer after Communion**

Leader: The cry of Christ is in the cry of Creation:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: The cry of Christ is the cry of those people, places, and histories our leaders want to erase:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: In the cries of those killed by ICE agents or dying held in illegal detention, never making the evening news:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: All your beloved LGBTQ<sup>+</sup> children, threatened and denied the fullness of who they are:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: Species driven to and over the brink of extinction:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: May we remember not only from the safety of our own homes and houses of worship, but also on the marches and protests – In the libraries – In the classrooms and on the School Boards – In the national parks:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: By our actions and lives, our relationships and priorities:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: When it is awkward or downright risky to do so:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: When you don't see the point of resistance, are discouraged, so afraid, and ready to give up:

**People: Remember me!**

Leader: And in all of it, truly the Bread of Life, the Cup of Love, and the power of this community of faith, will fill you and nourish you.

**People: We will remember!**

**All: Amen!**

## **Claiming Joy and Gratitude**

*To be done as part of a larger Sunday service, and not as the whole service.*

One of the things we can do to push back against mindless adulation of a whitewashed celebration of 250 years as the USA, is to call forth and model a different reality – that based on gratitude and joy instead of fear and domination.

So let's take some time to answer the questions: What do I love?

You can have people write on newsprint scattered around, or pieces of paper to be put in the offering plate, or some other way that works in your congregation.

Samples:

I love how the winter-brown tree stands like a promise

I love seeing – finally – soil that is moist

I love the courage of people as they protect vulnerable neighbors and complete strangers

I love purple flowers

I love histories that aren't erased...

...these words can be “profound” or absolutely simple or anything in between.

Read them out loud as a prayer of gratitude and celebration. Include a line of response by the congregation – something like “Thanks be to you, O God” or “Yes! Amen and hooray!” If you receive a lot of responses, you can read two or three at a time before the congregational response.

Hold on to these expressions of gratitude, and remember them.

This kind of activity helps us see and celebrate the things we are for, and not just the things we are against. We claim goodness, love, community and joy as realities and the sort of future we want to see and work for.

*Joy, gratitude, and wonder, in and of themselves, are holy. They are also acts of resistance in these times. For so many reasons, and especially in this season, it's important to engage with wonder.*

## **Call to Worship**

We gather and wonder: what will the world be like years from now? Next week? Tomorrow?  
What will this community, and each of us, be like? Things change so weirdly and rapidly!  
Where is God, the holy one?  
We gather and we wonder.

*And, we gather in wonder:*  
At the goodness of others  
At the beauty all around us, in nature, the arts, other people  
At our dogs, cats, parakeets – animal friends who love us and comfort us

We gather in wonder:  
At communities that come together and do the work of justice, inclusion, peace  
At people who don't stop hoping  
At laughter and joy

We gather, and wonder: we fear, we keep moving, we pray, we question, we celebrate.  
Together, in this wonder-ful community!

For wonder of all sorts, thanks be to God!

*The Church is really good at holding both grief and joy together, confession and “doing better”, – we don’t see these experiences as either/or events. We can do both, have done both, and can help others hold both lament and celebration together. This is one of the gifts of the Church. We can help others see that lament and celebration can both be held as we look at our nation’s 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary and our history as a country.*

## **Dearly Beloved**

“Dearly Beloved” – we say this at both weddings and funerals.

“Dearly Beloved, we gather together today...”

We say this as we gather to celebrate relationships and new beginnings, or to grieve endings and loss.

Dearly Beloved Creation,

In these days, do we gather to mourn? Or do we gather to celebrate relationship and new beginnings? Which will it be?

Dearly beloved Creation,

Are we burying our hopes for air, water, biological diversity, climate healing? Are we burying our hopes for justice, inclusion, community, home?

“Dearly Beloved”, we gather to mourn. We gather to celebrate. Either way, we gather for love’s sake.

Which will it be? For love’s sake, it will be both.

Dearly Beloved, we are a people of lament, confession *and* joy and persistence. Endings and beginnings. Loss and delight.

And above all, we are a people of Love. Above all, we are a people connected to each other, to all Creation, and to all that is Holy. We are connected as stardust through time and space. Loss and endings live within us, held in containers of infinite love and possibility.

Dearly Beloved, let us celebrate! Let us work and wonder, show up and reach out.

Dearly Beloved.

Amen.

## A Prayer for Remembering

Introduction to the prayer:

*We're told some pieces of our nation's history are too hard for some to hear.*

*We're told some pieces of our nation's history will make some people uncomfortable.*

*We're told some pieces of our nation's history will make our country look bad.*

*We're told to forget those pieces, to believe that they are twisted realities, exaggerated stories.*

*We're told it's wrong to remember them, to mention them, to teach them.*

Let us pray.

O God of the prophets, who has been known to frequently trouble the untroubled,  
when have you ever worried about a nation's image, a people's embarrassment?

O God of the oppressed, the hungry, the marginalized, of liberation, accountability, justice and  
freedom,

when has your focus *not* been on freeing people from their shackles

(literal and systemic),

Freeing nations from the lies that condemn them to forgetfulness?

O God of history, we pray for our nation's leaders. Free them from their fear, greed,  
and delusions of supremacy that hold them on their course of domination and erasure.

O God of history, we pray for ourselves, the people of this nation. Free us from fear,  
denial, division, despair.

Help us all face hard truths.

Help us push back against racism and lies.

Help us do the hard work that will someday bring us all together in accountability, justice,  
community and freedom for all.

Amen!

## **A Prayer for It All**

When our leaders turn away from the needs of people and planet:

give us the courage to turn toward that need, and to act for justice and healing.

When our leaders intentionally, willfully, and uncaringly cause harm to people and planet:

give us the courage to call them out  
to push back as forcefully as we can and still be nonviolent  
and to proclaim a better way to be.

When the onslaught of cold hostile power nearly overwhelms us, and when the danger is real:

give us the strength to hold steady, to protect the most at-risk and endangered among us  
and respond with the power of fierce and forceful love.

When it all seems too much, and when rage and numbness dance in our souls:

give us the brave vulnerability of Christ, to push through and keep going  
to walk in the footsteps of hope and resistance.

When the wrenching abyss of loss and fear in our hearts threatens to overwhelm us, and when  
our souls isolate in trembling fear:

Say to us again, "You are not alone. Our ancestors and those with us today, that holy and  
beloved community, that blessed web of life, all reside in and with you. Always."

Say to us again "Fear not!"

*We are in “the work” for justice, inclusion, peace and all of that good stuff – we are in the work for the long haul. The story of Moses reminds us of that.*

## **The Burning Bush**

Upon seeing the burning bush, Moses turned aside from his path to explore this strange thing.

And found himself standing on  
Holy ground

Curiosity led him from familiar paths,  
And he found himself standing on holy ground.

Holy ground called him to  
Challenge Pharaoh  
Lead a people into the journey of liberation

Holy ground called him from isolation into chaos and community.

And holy ground called him to a work that he would not live to see completed.

Isn't that the way of it?

So much of the time, at least.

Would that we could call back to our ancestors and say, “It’s alright! Thus-and-such turned out alright. The battle won, justice served, the people saved. You did good!”

Moses, the curious prophet, turned aside and stood on holy ground. And never saw for himself his people’s promised land.

Outcomes and long lifespans are not the point. Or even the goal. Courageous curiosity that looks beyond the worn path and asks “What if?...” is the point. Imagining and pursuing an alternative path to hate and oppression is the point. Start to make that happen and perhaps someone will someday continue the work and walk the path. And you can know, now, “you did good!”

*These can simply be questions you as pastor/worship leader reflect on. Or, they can be conversation starters with groups in your church. Or, it could be a reading for a worship service, with three readers (or a responsive reading, with the congregation asking the question). This is an incomplete list of questions – you could add your own, of course.*

## Three Questions

What makes us a nation?

- Is this a done deal, once and for all?
- What is making us and unmaking us as a nation?
- James Baldwin said once that “a People” do not come into being automatically. They become a People through what they are willing to face together (*The Fire Next Time*, 1963, referenced in “Becoming a People” by Cameron Trimble 3/31/26)

Where does it begin?

- In 1000 AD, with the arrival of the Polynesians to Hawaii?
- 1300 at the Pueblo communities in New Mexico?
- 1619 with the arrival in Virginia of the first of the kidnapped and enslaved African people?
- 1620 and the Mayflower?
- 1776 and the Declaration of Independence?

Where does it end?

- Death of democracy?
- Fracturing of community?
- The great divide?
- On the auction block? In the detention centers? Storming the US Capitol (and no accountability)?
- When we give up?



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