

The Wired Word

Student Handout

Sunday, **March 7, 2021** --- from 9:00-9:45am

Zoom ONLY

Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220 --- Passcode: 195152

Dear Class Member,

Participants in the January 6 invasion of the Capitol are now facing judges and making statements about their actions. Some are seeking to shift the blame to others or to play down the seriousness of their actions. Because these court cases are in the news, our next class will focus on admitting guilt, taking responsibility and showing true repentance.

How To Participate:

We are offering *The Wired Word* class live via Zoom. *The Wired Word* Zoom discussion will be from 9:00am-9:45am on Sunday mornings. You can also use these resources to reflect or study on your own, with your family/friends, and/or with your Abide Group.

Until further notice, there is NO in-person Sunday school due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

You can participate in *The Wired Word* virtually by Zoom on your computer or smart device at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86089807220?pwd=eStWa0ZZK0hOTVdwU0pjZlMrdk5ydz09>

or by telephone (land line or cell phone) by calling: 1-301-715-8592

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For more information about *The Wired Word* go to: <http://www.sprucc.org/classes/sunday-classes-for-adults.html#WiredWord>

For other learning opportunities through St. Paul's UCC go to: <http://www.sprucc.org/classes.html>

To subscribe or unsubscribe for the **free** weekly mailing of *The Wired Word* student handout, please contact the church office at Office@sprucc.org.



Defendants in Capitol Invasion Case Make Statements About Actions

The Wired Word for the Week of March 7, 2021

In the News

More than 300 people are now facing federal charges for their participation in the invasion of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. Prosecutors have not sought detention for most of the alleged rioters, because they are accused only of misdemeanor trespassing. Such defendants have no criminal records and are people with work, community or family ties. Also, some have histories of public or military service. In general, judges are reluctant to jail individuals for crimes that did not involve violence in the Capitol invasion.

But detention is being ordered for many who knocked down doors, sprayed pepper spray or bear spray at law enforcement officials, and injured police in the building. In the violence, one demonstrator was killed and a U.S. Capitol Police officer died (cause of death is still under investigation). About 54 individuals have been detained on grounds that they are a flight risk, pose a danger to the community or are charged with violent offenses. Some of these defendants are seeking to have their release conditions modified, and are making statements to judges that are shifting blame or downplaying their actions as "mere trespassing or civil disobedience."

The attorney for one of these defendants shifted the blame to President Trump, saying that his client believed that Trump requested his unlawful conduct. U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell did not accept the argument. She said that if a president could authorize overturning an election he would be no different from "a king or a dictator," and "that is not how we operate here" in the United States.

Then the attorney added that his client, the accused leader of a far-right Proud Boys group, had been "chastened" by the federal charges and that his anti-government "fever has broken." Once again, Judge Howell was unimpressed. "Has he expressed any remorse or rejection of his membership in the Proud Boys, a gang of nationalist individuals?" she asked.

"Does he reject the fantasy the election was stolen? Does he regret the positions that animated the mob on January 6th? Is there anything on the record about any of those things?" She saw no evidence of admitting guilt, accepting responsibility or expressing true repentance.

Through attorneys, at least six of the defendants have argued that they should be released from jail because they are now disillusioned with Trump. Some, such as the widely publicized horn-wearing "QAnon Shaman" named Jacob Chansley, are presenting themselves as both victims and perpetrators. "Please be patient with me," Chansley said in a public statement, "and other peaceful people who, like me, are having a very difficult time piecing together all that happened to us, around us, and by us. We are good people who care deeply about our country." Chansley initially hoped to get a pardon from the president, and then offered to testify against him in Trump's impeachment trial.

U.S. District Judge Royce C. Lamberth, a former Army captain and prosecutor, told attorneys for a pair of defendants that describing their behavior "as mere trespassing or civil disobedience is both unpersuasive and detached from reality." Lamberth ordered detention for Lisa Eisenhart and Eric Munchel, a mother and son who entered the Capitol in tactical gear and armed with a stun gun, searching for "traitors."

Their defense attorneys argued that Trump "invited" all Americans into the Capitol, a defense that Lamberth rejected. "By word and deed," wrote the judge, "[Eisenhart and Munchel] supported the violent overthrow of the United States government" and pose "a clear danger to our republic." He ruled that "no condition or combination of conditions of release will reasonably assure the safety of the community" if the two are released pending trial.

Judges are also using these cases to offer civics lessons to the defendants and the wider public. "American democracy didn't always exist," U.S. Magistrate Philip R. Lammens said in a detention order for Kelly Meggs, an alleged Florida Oath Keepers leader. "It started with ... the Articles of Confederation. That original founding document contained one branch of government -- a Congress. It proved insufficient." He said that the founders went on to establish a stronger government with three branches, an electoral college and certification of winners by both houses of Congress and the vice president. What happened on January 6, Lammens wrote, wasn't just an attack on Congress, "but it was an attack on the very foundation of our democracy." The attorney for Meggs declined to comment.

Some defendants, however, are expressing remorse. According to his attorney, a New Yorker named Dominic Pezzola got involved with the Proud Boys last fall, had "honorable intentions" and believed he was "protecting his country" when he broke a window at the Capitol. But, says the attorney, Pezzola "now realizes he was duped into these mistaken beliefs" and "is consumed with guilt." Prosecutors say Pezzola was among the first people to cross barricades onto the Capitol grounds, confront police, grab a police riot shield, and break a window. A judge has not yet ruled on Pezzola's release.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Capitol Riot Defendants Facing Jail Have Regrets. Judges Aren't Buying It. *The Washington Post*](#)

[Judge Keeps Mother, Son in Capitol Riot Jailed Pending Trial. *Fox News*](#)

[The Capitol Siege: The Arrested and Their Stories. *NPR*](#)

Applying the News Story

The statements of defendants in the Capitol invasion case raise questions of what it means to admit guilt, accept responsibility, and express true repentance.

The Big Questions

1. What factors make it difficult for people, whether accused of crimes or not, to admit guilt and accept responsibility for misbehavior?
2. When have you, or people around you, shifted blame or downplayed the significance of actions? What were the consequences, both short-term and long-term?

3. True repentance involves turning yourself around and going in a different direction. What steps are involved in such a shift?
4. What streams of information are most influential in our high-tech world? How can the church be a more reliable source of information?
5. Defendant Dominic Pezzola believed he was "protecting his country" when he broke a window at the Capitol. But he "now realizes he was duped into these mistaken beliefs" and "is consumed with guilt." What relief does the Christian faith offer him, along with anyone else feeling remorse? What does the Christian faith not offer him in these circumstances?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Genesis 3:13

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." (For context, read 3:1-13.)

In the Garden of Eden, "the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made" (v. 1). The serpent asked the first woman Eve if God prohibited eating from any of the trees in the garden, and then told Eve that she would not die if she ate from the tree that was in the middle of the garden. Eve ate some of this fruit and gave some to her husband Adam, who also ate. "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (v. 7).

When God confronted them in the garden about eating the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed Eve, saying, "[S]he gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate" (v. 12). Then Eve passed the blame again, saying, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

Questions: Why are human beings so quick to blame others, instead of taking personal responsibility for their mistakes? What good comes from confessing sin and expressing remorse?

Job 42:1-6

Then Job answered the LORD: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (No context needed.)

After 37 chapters of debate about why bad things happen to good people, God speaks to a suffering righteous man named Job. God gives Job a view of the world from the divine perspective, going back to the first day of creation. Job's eyes are opened to the vastness of God's work throughout the universe, and realizes that his human perspective is far too limited. As a result, he says to God, "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Such repentance is practiced by many Christians during the Season of Lent, which begins with the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday.

Questions: What is the value of seeing our lives from God's perspective? How do you feel challenged to repent and go in a new direction after having your eyes opened in this way? In what ways would our current political disagreements benefit from a divine perspective?

Matthew 3:1-2

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (For context, read 3:1-12.)

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by calling people to repent, using the Greek word *metanoia*, which means "a change of mind." When the people of Jerusalem and Judea heard his words, "they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (v. 6). When John spotted many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he called them a "brood of vipers" and challenged them by saying, "Bear fruit worthy of repentance" (vv. 7-8). John believed that true repentance resulted in a new way of life.

Questions: What sort of "change of mind" is most needed today, in our homes, churches, community and nation? What new actions and attitudes would show our desire to "bear fruit worthy of repentance"?

Acts 3:17-21

[Peter said] "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. (For context, read 3:11-26.)"

Soon after the Day of Pentecost, Peter healed a crippled beggar in the name of Jesus Christ. Then he spoke to the people of Jerusalem, reminded them that they had rejected Jesus and handed him over to Pilate, and told them that they had "killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead" (v. 15). But then Peter acknowledged that they had "acted in ignorance." He gave them an opportunity to repent (change their minds) and turn to God so that their sins would be wiped out, "so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

Questions: What misbehavior today comes more from ignorance than from malice? How can it be named in a way that people see the error of their ways? What "times of refreshing" do you hope for, in your own life and in the life of your church and community?

For Further Discussion

1. Reliance on the internet for discussion and debate has led many people to converse only with like-minded individuals, on the left and on the right. The result is an echo chamber in which the most extreme views are amplified. How can the church provide a healthier forum for conversation? Be specific.
2. According to religion professor Paula Fredriksen, Saint Augustine observed in the year 395 that the only sin against the Holy Spirit that could never be forgiven is despair. Despair, he argued, inhibits repentance. If people do not repent, they cannot reject their sin and be forgiven. But if they repent, they will be restored to right relationship with God. Respond.
3. Sentences for a criminal conviction can take many forms, and a conviction does not always mean a trip to jail or prison. What would be an appropriate alternative sentence for a person convicted of invading the Capitol? Fines, restitution, community service? Required work at a polling place, or studying civics and teaching it to at-risk youths? Be creative.
4. When Jesus began his ministry, he called people to "repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). In a world of bad news, Jesus proclaimed the good news of God. What good news should Christians be spreading today?

Responding to the News

Think of one way that you need to repent, change your mind, and move in a new direction. Take an action this week that shows your commitment to living according to the values of Jesus and the kingdom of God.

Prayer

Help us, Lord God, to admit our guilt, to take responsibility for what we have done as individuals and communities, and to show true repentance. Forgive our sins, and inspire us to walk in your way. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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