

## ***Two Readings***

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT  
July 6, 2025 – A Sermon for Sunday Morning Worship with Communion  
Text: Micah 4:3-4

Good morning! Thank you so much for being here on this warm Sunday morning on a holiday weekend. I hope your 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations have been a joyful time to reconnect with loved ones as well as a much needed respite from the chaos that is daily life these days. As I pondered what I wanted to do on this particular 4<sup>th</sup> of July Independence Day weekend, I quickly realized that there are folks far more eloquent than I whose words I could share with you this day. Both have historical significance and are literally part of our history in this country. They warrant being heard again, especially in light of what has been happening in our beloved country in recent days. I hope in my reading of them I can do them justice, and provide you with thoughts worth your pondering and prayers as this weekend continues.

First, I will read Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. On March 4, 1865, only 41 days before his assassination, President Abraham Lincoln took the oath of office for the second time. It's significance in the history of our country cannot be underestimated.

### **Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address**

"Fellow countrymen: at this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends is as well known to the public as to myself and it is I trust reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

"On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it ~ all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place devoted altogether to saving the Union without war insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war ~ seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

"One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves not distributed generally over the union but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To strengthen perpetuate and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph and a result less fundamental and astounding.

Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered ~ that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses for it must needs be that offenses come but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." (Matthew 18:7) If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which in the providence of God must needs come but which having continued through His appointed time He now wills to remove and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him. Fondly do we hope ~ fervently do we pray ~ that this

mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword as was said three thousand years ago so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"With malice toward none with charity for all with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right let us strive on to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan ~ to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

Then, 156 years later, at the inauguration of another President, a brilliant young African American poet offered these incredibly powerful and still poignant words:

*THE HILL WE CLIMB by Amanda Gorman*

*When day comes we ask ourselves,  
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?  
The loss we carry,  
a sea we must wade  
We've braved the belly of the beast  
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace  
And the norms and notions  
of what just is  
Isn't always just-ice  
And yet the dawn is ours  
before we knew it  
Somehow we do it  
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed  
a nation that isn't broken  
but simply unfinished  
We the successors of a country and a time  
Where a skinny Black girl  
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother  
can dream of becoming president*

*only to find herself reciting for one  
And yes we are far from polished  
far from pristine  
but that doesn't mean we are  
striving to form a union that is perfect  
We are striving to forge a union with purpose  
To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and  
conditions of man  
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us  
but what stands before us  
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,  
we must first put our differences aside  
We lay down our arms  
so we can reach out our arms  
to one another  
We seek harm to none and harmony for all  
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:  
That even as we grieved, we grew  
That even as we hurt, we hoped  
That even as we tired, we tried  
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious  
Not because we will never again know defeat  
but because we will never again sow division  
Scripture tells us to envision  
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree  
And no one shall make them afraid  
If we're to live up to our own time  
Then victory won't lie in the blade  
But in all the bridges we've made  
That is the promised glade  
The hill we climb  
If only we dare  
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,  
it's the past we step into  
and how we repair it  
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation  
rather than share it  
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy  
And this effort very nearly succeeded  
But while democracy can be periodically delayed*

*it can never be permanently defeated  
In this truth  
in this faith we trust  
For while we have our eyes on the future  
history has its eyes on us  
This is the era of just redemption  
We feared at its inception  
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs  
of such a terrifying hour  
but within it we found the power  
to author a new chapter  
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves  
So while once we asked,  
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?  
Now we assert  
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?  
We will not march back to what was  
but move to what shall be  
A country that is bruised but whole,  
benevolent but bold,  
fierce and free  
We will not be turned around  
or interrupted by intimidation  
because we know our inaction and inertia  
will be the inheritance of the next generation  
Our blunders become their burdens  
But one thing is certain:  
If we merge mercy with might,  
and might with right,  
then love becomes our legacy  
and change our children's birthright  
So let us leave behind a country  
better than the one we were left with  
Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,  
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one  
We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west,  
we will rise from the windswept northeast  
where our forefathers first realized revolution  
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states,  
we will rise from the sunbaked south*

*We will rebuild, reconcile and recover  
and every known nook of our nation and  
every corner called our country,  
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,  
battered and beautiful  
When day comes we step out of the shade,  
aflame and unafraid  
The new dawn blooms as we free it  
For there is always light,  
if only we're brave enough to see it  
If only we're brave enough to be it*

Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. May God, as always, show us the way forward  
and give us the courage to walk it. Amen.