

Pastor's Reflections

By Dr. Jeffrey Frantz

In the afterglow of President Barack Obama's Inauguration on January 20, 2009, I share these edited words, portions of my sermon delivered on Sunday, January 25, 2009, entitled, ***The day the heavens rejoiced.***

The implications of President Obama's election for race relations in our nation cannot be overstated. Although there is, no doubt, much in the American spirit yet in need of redemption, still, the landscape has forever changed and it is a new day.

The day the heavens rejoiced

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-5)

*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain. (Isaiah 65:25)*

President Obama's Inauguration

was more than a mere official observance. It was a richly symbolic event, symbolic of a purification and redemption of the American spirit.

Just as the truth shall set us free, we must be bold and humble in telling the truth about ourselves. Our nation's role in slavery has forever been a malignant cancer in our soul. From its inception in the 17th century, its story has been a shameful one.

Its darkness and evil have diminished us all; and, sadly, we've known it from early on and through the buoyant days of our Founding Fathers. They knew it was wrong ... but felt that without an awful compromise, our nation's birth story could not have been written.

They may have been right, but at a horrendous price.

As we declared our independence as a nation and began to grow—acquiring new land and new wealth—slavery's insidious reality gnawed away at our national conscience. At last, there was no way out save from a horrific war, a war that brought us to our knees as a nation; and then the decades of segregation and Jim Crow that followed.

From the civil rights movement of the sixties, spearheaded by Martin Luther King, Jr. and symbolized in his famous ***I have a dream*** speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial in August of 1963, gradually, incrementally, we've been inching forward ... making progress ... seeking, however haltingly, to redeem ourselves of this wrenching and insidious wrong.

Its in this backdrop, that President Obama's Inauguration was a landmark event.

As he laid his left hand on the sacred text (the revered Bible of Abraham Lincoln), and spoke the words of the presidential oath, how many thousands, even millions of voices sounded out across our nation and the world? *Never thought it would happen ...not in my lifetime.*

As the tears flowed and memories upon memories were evoked, it was a sacred moment. A moment suspended in time when, somehow, we were all elevated to a higher place. To a place where we were a little more redeemed and a whole lot more hopeful.

Part of the symbolism of the event unveils the unflinching truth, rooted in our past and yet—while sustaining us over the years of toil and struggle—alive for us today ... the foundational truth ...

That good will triumph over evil, virtue over deceit ...

That generosity will rise higher than the clenched fist of greed ...

That the exalted morality of divine purpose cannot be diminished ...

And that the voice of an enduring *peace with justice* will never be silenced.

Friends, we are Americans. And at our best—Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, non-believer ... all that we are—we have within us the capacity and the will to embrace the highest ideals of our Constitution and our most sacred biblical writings.

We have it within us to aim high, to reach

high, and to live out—together—the true meaning of our creed. To be sure, we Christians come at this with a particular story—a story rooted in a love that welcomes everyone and that will not let us go.

At this dynamic juncture in our nation's life story, let us resolve—each of us—to stand up and do our part. Together, let us determine to live out the rich inheritance God has given us.

For now that the words of the presidential oath have been spoken, hope is all about; possibility is everywhere. With the right spirit and the right purpose, we can lift our nation once again to a more lofty place; a place where all the people of the earth are seen, valued and dignified, no matter anything about us.

With God's guiding hand upon us—together—we the people can do great things. Let the words of Abraham Lincoln echo through the years (words from his Second Inaugural):

With malice toward none and charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right ...

Let the dream be realized: and let every man, woman and child be drawn into its glow ...

That one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be a plain, and the crooked placed made straight ...and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all the peoples of the earth shall see it together.

The day the heavens rejoiced.