Opinion
Guest Voices
Voices of Sisters
Social Justice



(Unsplash/KaLisa Veer)



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I don't know about you but since Donald Trump was inaugurated, I've been having a hard time keeping my spirits up.

Every day a new "unprecedented" (I'm beginning to hate the word) executive order wreaks havoc on human rights and congressionally mandated agencies and programs that serve the common good. The president wants mass deportations of undocumented people even though most are crucial to local economies and international and U.S. laws require due process for asylum claims.

In the U.S. and abroad, Elon Musk's chainsaw is indiscriminately firing or offering buyouts to more than 100,000 civilian workers in 20 government agencies. Budgets are being slashed by 65% at the Environmental Protective Agency and 50% at the General Services Association. The latter oversees government contracts. These draconian cuts do not bode well for combating climate change or providing government oversight of companies such as those of Musk, whose businesses received nearly $38 billion in government subsidies over the past five years. And those are just the ones in the public record.

> Now is not a time to deny that it is dark. Very dark. It is a time to lean on God's own Spirit to help us figure out which candle is ours to light.
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Hardest hit (and most painful) is the dismantling of USAID, where 10,000 professionals were fired from an agency that for 65 years has provided lifesaving development assistance to some of the poorest people in the world. And this at a fraction (less than 1%) of the federal budget. Most vulnerable are seven countries in Africa where experts warn that in South Sudan more than half a million people with HIV will die unnecessarily. Abrupt cuts to children's programs including nutrition, maternal child health and disease prevention are causing millions of children to suffer and putting tens of thousands at risk of dying from starvation or easily preventable diseases.

I am shocked, angry and deeply ashamed by this illegal manipulation of my taxpayer dollars. For most of my life I have been proud to be a U.S. citizen. I was proud to support so many grassroots movements that enshrined into law our founding ideals that "all are created equal" and have the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Now? Not so much. Now I'm mostly depressed.

What to do? Here are some thoughts that are helping me endure and meet the present moment. Maybe they will help you, too.

People hold signs protesting USAID cuts.

People hold placards outside the U.S. Agency for International Development building in Washington Feb. 3 after billionaire Elon Musk, who is heading President Donald Trump's drive to shrink the federal government, said work is underway to shut down the U.S. foreign aid agency. (OSV/Reuters/Kent Nishimura)

It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

When invoking this mantra and discerning what is my candle to light, I notice how easy it is to forget that the general context is darkness. That's the whole point. We hate to face the darkness and therefore it is easier to simply avoid the news. Or worse we somehow normalize living in the dark.

Now is not a time to deny that it is dark. Very dark.

It is a time to lean on God's own Spirit to help us figure out which candle is ours to light. Maybe our candle is to regularly contact our local, state and federal legislators. Maybe it is to sign the "We're Giving Up Billionaires for Lent!" pledge and take action to save SNAP, Medicaid and more. Maybe our candle is to have that conversation with a friend or relative newly doubtful about Trump policies. Maybe it is doubling donations to your favorite nonprofit serving the marginalized here and abroad.

Do something. It will make you feel better.

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Your/our deepest identity is not that of a U.S. citizen.

As much as we love our country, we are first and foremost members of the family of God. As such we have no real home here, or in any other country. For me, a silver lining of this time is that I am being pushed to my roots. Who am I really? My deepest home is within the heart of God. I can count on God to be a secure anchor and guide as I navigate this gut-wrenching, scary storm.

Jesus lived in an oppressive political system. What did he do?

Now is a good time to remember that throughout human history, oppressive political systems have been pretty much the norm. They were (and are) run by oligarchs, dictators and other elites more concerned about expanding their power than helping the poor and powerless. Too often religious leaders were (and are) complicit.

Jesus' proclamation of the new kin-dom of God was unsettling. He proclaimed that everyone — including the rejected and powerless — were deeply loved and respected by his abba ("dear father") God. In God's kin-dom, everyone — powerful and powerless alike — must love and respect one another.

The Elon Musks and Donald Trumps of our universe have a different agenda.

So what did Jesus do? Well, he prayed. A lot.

I find the Lord's prayer very comforting right now because it grounds me in the values Jesus held most dear. Jesus experienced his deepest identity flowing from the heart of his Holy abba-God. From that experience he learned the power of his abba-God to bring heaven's values to earth.

Jesus spent his earthly life helping a small band of male and female followers have a faith like his own that God's kin-dom of love, justice and right relationship would come "on earth as in heaven." Today, despite the encroaching darkness, we are invited to a similar faith.

In his book Jesus Before Christianity, Albert Nolan explains: "For Jesus, the almighty power that achieves the impossible can be called faith. Faith releases within us a power that is beyond us. … It was their faith that enabled the sick to be cured and sinners to be released from their sins. So too, it is people's faith that enables the 'kingdom' to come."

Our faith releases a power that is beyond us. It can also strengthen us for hard choices.

People hold crucifix during Good Friday procession.

Men carry a statue of Christ as they take part in a Good Friday procession March 29, 2024, in the courtyards of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Managua, Nicaragua. (OSV News/Reuters/Maynor Valenzuelaers)

The Gospel for the second Sunday of Lent shares what happened when Jesus prayed (Luke 9:28-36). While all three synoptic accounts include the story of the transfiguration, only Luke's Gospel situates it while Jesus is at prayer. Peter, James and John accompany him, signaling that something major is about to happen. The story of the transfiguration comes directly after Jesus' hard teaching that he must suffer and die, and those who wish to follow him must also "lose their lives to find it" (Luke 9:24).

But for now, the disciples (and we the readers) see Jesus in other-worldly glory: "While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white." When Moses and Elijah — representing the law and the prophets — speak with Jesus about his "exodus," we begin to understand that this mystical manifestation connects the horrific ordeal facing Jesus in Jerusalem to the most powerful events in Jewish history.

Jesus' passion is of a piece with God's power to save and liberate. Death and oppression will not have the last word. Jesus will suffer and he will also be glorified.

Both Jesus and his faithful friends receive unprecedented heavenly strength to suffer for God.

Because of their faith — and their willingness to make hard choices — God will be glorified, and that glory will be theirs as well.

What hard choices are you being called to make this Lent?

What candle is yours to light?

This story appears in the **Lent 2025** feature series. View the full series.