

I woke up yesterday elated by the news of Reverend Raphael Warnock's election victory. He'll be Georgia's first Black senator, and I was heartened by the idea that the Senior Pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church—the home parish of Dr. King and a spiritual and organizational hub during the Civil Rights Movement—would be representing his state in the United States Senate.

In just a few hours, though, my heart had fallen harder and faster than I can remember. Like all of you, I watched as a gang—organized, violent, and mad they'd lost an election—laid siege to the United States Capitol. They set up gallows. They proudly waved the traitorous flag of the Confederacy through the halls. They desecrated the center of American government. And once authorities finally gained control of the situation, these rioters and gang members were led out of the building not in handcuffs, but free to carry on with their days. The day was a fulfillment of the wishes of an infantile and unpatriotic president who can't handle the truth of his own failures. And the wreckage lays at the feet of a party and media apparatus that gleefully cheered him on, knowing full well the possibility of consequences like these.

It all left me with so many questions—questions about the future, questions about security, extremism, propaganda, and more. But there's one question I just can't shake: What if these rioters had looked like the folks who go to Ebenezer Baptist Church every Sunday? What would have been different?

I think we all know the answer. This summer's Black Lives Matter protests were an overwhelmingly peaceful movement—our nation's largest demonstrations ever, bringing together people of every race and class and encouraging millions to re-examine their own assumptions and behavior. And yet, in city after city, day after day, we saw peaceful protestors met with brute force. We saw cracked skulls and mass arrests, law enforcement pepper spraying its way through a peaceful demonstration for a presidential photo op.

And for those who call others unpatriotic for simply taking a knee in silent protest, for those who wonder why we need to be reminded that Black Lives Matter at all, yesterday made it painfully clear that certain Americans are, in fact, allowed to denigrate the flag and symbols of our nation. They've just got to look the right way.

What do all those folks have to say now?

Seeing the gulf between the responses to yesterday's riot and this summer's peaceful protests and the larger movement for racial justice is so painful. It hurts. And I cannot think about moving on or turning the page until we reckon with the reality of what we saw yesterday. True progress will be possible only once we acknowledge that this disconnect exists and take steps to repair it. And that also means coming to grips with the reality that millions voted for a man so obviously willing to burn our democracy down for his own ego.

I hurt for our country. And I wish I had all the solutions to make things better. I wish I had the confidence that people who know better will act like it for more than a news cycle or two. All I know is that now is a time for true patriotism. Now is the time for those who voted for this president to see the reality of what they've supported—and publicly and forcefully rebuke him and the actions of that mob. Now is the time for Silicon Valley companies to stop enabling this monstrous behavior—and go even further than they have already by permanently banning this man from their platforms and putting in place policies to prevent their technology from being used by the nation's leaders to fuel insurrection.

And if we have any hope of improving this nation, now is the time for swift and serious consequences for the failure of leadership that led to yesterday's shame.

Thankfully, even in the darkness, there are glimmers of hope. It's something I imagine Reverend Warnock has preached about before—and I'm still heartened beyond belief that he's headed to Washington. I'm glad his fellow Georgian, Jon Ossoff is, too, and that together they'll help give control of Congress back to the only party that's shown that it can put our democracy above its own short-term political fortunes. I pray that every American, especially those who disagree with them, will give our new Congress, President-Elect Biden, and Vice-President-Elect Harris the chance to lead us in a better direction.

But make no mistake: The work of putting America back together, of truly repairing what is broken, isn't the work of any individual politician or political party. It's up to each of us to do our part. To reach out. To listen. And to hold tight to the truth and values that have always led this country forward. It will be an uncomfortable, sometimes painful process. But if we enter into it with an honest and unwavering love of our country, then maybe we can finally start to heal.