

Corona Chronicle

Week 44

Wednesday, Jan. 13th

Erev Rosh Chodesh Shevat

Impeachment Day

Coronavirus fatalities as of today: 377,000+

10 PM. It is hard to believe what we are witnessing in this last week of Donald Trump's presidency. Last week we had ringside seats, via our television screens, to an actual attempt by domestic terrorists to mount an insurrection against our government. These zealots had just come from the president's "Stop the Steal" rally on the Ellipse, where they had been encouraged by President Trump to march on up to the Capitol building, and to "fight like hell...or you're not going to have a country anymore." We have since learned (from the reports of unnamed aides) that while the Capitol was being invaded, the president sat in the Oval Office watching all this on TV with excitement. He made no attempt to call for backup by the National Guard to help the Capitol Police, who were clearly overwhelmed...even though some of the mob were raising a cry of "hang Mike Pence," and searching for House Speaker Pelosi, even though they had broken in to the House chamber, putting some legislators who had not yet been evacuated in fear for their lives. (It was reported that it was Pence who finally authorized the call-up of the Guard, after having been escorted to safety, and even then it took hours for them to show up.)

Each day since then more and more disturbing information has been coming out: evidence of collusion by some of the Capitol police force with the rioters; footage of rioters trying to bludgeon a police officer to death with the pole-end of an American flag; members of the mob carrying plastic zip-ties, good for cuffing people in case the rioters wanted to take hostages; and now today it is revealed that one member of the House saw groups being given tours of the Capitol on January 5th, the day before the riot, which she thought very odd, since no tours had been permitted since the beginning of the pandemic stringencies last March. She knew that the only way these "tourists" could have been allowed in the Capitol Building was under the condition that a legislator or one of their aides had escorted them in. Later, after surveying video and other photographic footage of the invasion, some of these same "tourists" were found to have been among the rioters. It appears that someone who worked in Congress had allowed these folks into the building for them to conduct a kind of "reconnaissance" mission.

Let that sink in. Members (or at least one member) of Congress appear to have aided and abetted domestic terrorists who threatened to kill their congressional colleagues, and also the vice president. And even after this insurrection had been put down, eight senators and 139 Republican members of the House voted against certifying Joe Biden's election via the Electoral College to the presidency, a ceremony which is in normal times just a formality.

It feels as if we are living in a time such as the time of the run-up to the Civil War. We read about such events in history books, but we never imagine that we would actually *see* such things in our own day. What we have seen *today*, however, was not unimaginable, since we saw it just one year ago: The House of Representatives voted to impeach our president – *again*. Will he be acquitted by the Senate again? Yesterday I would have said “definitely,” based on the history of this Senate for the past four years. But this event has changed the calculus considerably. The vote by the House to impeach Trump included ten Republican members (that's ten more than in the impeachment last year). The Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said publicly that he does not oppose this impeachment (which does not necessarily mean that he will vote to convict the president, but that he apparently thinks that it is an appropriate way to respond to recent presidential behavior).

Because we are only one week away from the Inauguration, the trial in the Senate will not be able to take place until after Trump's term has ended, and yet Democrats (and a few Republicans) nevertheless feel that it is important to complete this process – both because with impeachment comes a prohibition of the president ever seeking or holding any federal office again. And even if Trump is acquitted, nonetheless the ordeal itself is meant to send a message to future office-holders about the importance of staying loyal to the oath of office. No one wants to see another day like January 6th!

There are so many questions left unanswered about that horrific day. We have yet to hear any briefing from the FBI or the Capitol Police about what they knew or have discovered about that day, and yet we have heard from other sources that the FBI had for months been following the social media chatter of suspect Q-Anon conspiracists and of various white nationalist group-leaders and their followers that showed up last Wednesday. They *knew* that it would be a dangerous day. And yet next to no extra precautions were taken. Why? How could it have been so easy for this unholy mob to have gotten into the Capitol? And what did they think would

happen once they got there? (I can't help but think of that often-used analogy of the dog that caught the UPS truck!)

None of this makes any sense. Meanwhile, the coronavirus is taking lives at an ever-increasing rate, on some days claiming the lives of over 4,000 Americans. This despite the fact that we have three pharmaceutical companies that have developed successful vaccines. But we have not figured out, on a national level, how to proceed in an efficient way to get all our people vaccinated. I have begun making family vacation plans for the end of July – expecting that by that time surely we will all be safely vaccinated...but at the same time, I shelved plans that would have required us to fly and have settled on a trip that we can take by car – to the Canadian side of Niagara Falls (we were there once many years ago, but could only see the U.S. side, since Lev and I did not have passports). But if the vaccination-program continues to go as slowly as it is going now, Canada might not let us in!

I have just seen a report by Andrea Mitchell on TV on the last-day measures that the Trump administration is taking to ensure that Biden begins his presidency with foreign relation-headaches (issuing rules that will needlessly anger China, Cuba, and Iran) and lifting environmental regulations that will allow greater carbon emissions from American industries – something that I hope Biden's administration will eventually be able to undo, but that apparently are not easily rolled back. There is a bitterness, a vindictiveness. An attitude of “if I can't have it, I will ruin it for anyone else.”

And we ordinary citizens sit, and we watch. Perhaps we read, we pray, we try to organize via Zoom (yes, some still march, but I am glad that there are fewer marches now that the pandemic has gotten even worse than it was last year), we write to or call our representatives in Congress, we donate money to organizations that work for causes that we believe in...and yet still it is so hard not to feel powerless! Even though there is only one week of this administration left. How much more damage to our nation, to our earth, to the most vulnerable of our society can be done in one week?

I don't really want to find out the answer to this question. As one of our congregants always reminds me, quoting the Talmud, “God does not stop the hand of a thief.” Prayers are not enough. And yet the American people, have voted. The majority, via our peculiar institution known as the Electoral College, chose Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. The people of Georgia have chosen Raphael Warnock

and Jon Ossoff, the first Black and the first Jewish senators for that traditionally very conservative state. It is a time of change, and necessarily a time of turmoil. Before a new life begins, a woman writhes in labor. No one expects it to be easy. It has been traditional for the outgoing president to hold a meeting with the incoming president in the White House, helping to ensure a smooth transition. It does not appear likely that this tradition will be kept this year. Certainly President-Elect Biden has a rough road ahead of him!

We are only two days away from the birthday of Martin Luther King (although the federal holiday will be Monday). And so I will close with his words tonight, taken from an address he delivered in 1962 before a church conference:

...History has thrust upon our generation an indescribably important task—to complete a process of democratization which our nation has too long developed too slowly, but which is our most powerful weapon for world respect and emulation. How we deal with this crucial situation will determine our moral health as individuals, our cultural health as a region, our political health as a nation, and our prestige as a leader of the free world. The shape of the world today does not afford us the luxury of an anemic democracy. The price that America must pay for the continued oppression of the Negro is the price of its own destruction. The hour is late; the clock of destiny is ticking out; we must act now before it is too late. (“The Ethical Demands of Integration”)



Waning moon of Tevet at dawn on Monday, Jan. 11th out our kitchen window.