

Our View

Aloud, in unison

There’s something wonderfully powerful about reading out loud.

Studies have shown that small children start school with a learning advantage if their parents or caregivers have spent many hours reading aloud to them. The cognitive abilities of older people are also enhanced if they spend just a few minutes daily reading out loud.

Powerful and brave words spoken aloud can change history, from “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” from Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s first inaugural address in 1933 to “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,” spoken by President Ronald Reagan at Germany’s Brandenburg Gate in 1987.

A humorous passage in a book can make one chuckle if read silently, but those same words, if read aloud in a group, can leave people howling with laughter.

Prayers and passages spoken aloud simultaneously by congregations are a core element of rituals in faith communities. Such a moment will take place in Alexandria at 4 p.m. on Saturday at Market Square, when leaders from city faith communities will gather together at a soil collection ceremony for lynching victims Joseph McCoy and Benjamin Thomas.

The words to the Black national anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” will be spoken aloud by Black and white faith leaders from across the city, some of whom come from congregations that many years ago broke apart because of race.

Beautiful words, spoken aloud, can heal and move – they can alter attitudes and actions. These are the words from the moving poem by James Weldon Johnson that will be read on Saturday:

Lift every voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list’ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.
Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast’ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.
God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Opinion

“Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe.”
- Thomas Jefferson

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Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.

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