

**Our prayer this morning is adapted from concerns raised by American Baptist Churches USA General Secretary Rev. Dr. Spitzer. Let us pray... *Praise linked to previous song....***

This morning Lord, we think on your command that we Love you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength AND that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

We see much in the news, in our relationships, and even in our own hearts God that does not fulfill that command. We experience a great deal of turmoil, pain and stress.

We pray for more civility, more kindness, in both discourse and behavior in all strata of our society.

We pray for our elected officials in particular that prejudice and fear of people from other countries doesn't become policy. Make your justice to rule in our city, state and country.

Lord, you want to bless us with people from all around the world. But immigrants are seen as a threat and not a blessing. That kind of government policy and personal action is not loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

When violence is seen as acceptable in our schools, we don't love our neighbor as ourselves. When we don't always speak up against sexual harassment and abuse we don't love our neighbor as ourselves.

Months after hurricanes devastated Puerto Rico, and we don't help with the rebuilding, we are not loving our neighbor as ourselves. Forgive us God.

God, as we studying the book of Mark together, we hear the stories of Jesus about the Rule of God, the Kingdom of God. A kingdom that teaches *the infinite worth of every human being because we are all made in Your image.*

Even when a person looks different from us, or grew up on the other side of the globe, help us still act like they are made in Your image.

Even when a person who holds a different viewpoint from us, help us still act like they are made in Your image.

Even when a person demonizes our beliefs, help us still act like they are made in Your image.

Jesus, would you help us find ways to join you where you are at work, solving problems, speaking the truth and love, and helping your kingdom come?

Give us hearts that long to befriend the stranger, undocumented immigrants, and protect the powerless.

Give us souls that treat others with caring, respect and generosity.

Give us wisdom to love our neighbor well, holding our tongues and not plotting harm against them. Holy Spirit help us. Amen.