

Pentecost XXVI (Proper 28 C)
November 13, 2016

St. Paul's
McHenry

The Sunday following the Election

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Let me begin by reminding you that these readings are the lectionary for today; that is, they are the appointed lessons in the Revised Common Lectionary in use in most, if not all, mainline churches. And I'll get to those readings in a few minutes.

But I must begin by saying some things that are deeply personal. My goal is to frame them in the gospel, which as you know means the good news of God in Christ Jesus. I'll do my best, which is all I can ever offer you.

The last few days have been agonizing for me. Some might call that statement hyperbole. Others might say that I'm just pouting about the loss of an election. If that's what you think, then I don't believe you understand what we've done.

And if you think I'm talking about politics, you are wrong. Politics is about policies and opinions and nuances of governance. I'm talking about justice and decency and the dignity of all people. And that transcends politics.

The agony I've been experiencing has swung wildly between despair and rage. My despair has been so overwhelming that I instinctively drew inward. I could hardly function. I wanted (and at moments still do) to withdraw from public life.

And make no mistake, mine like all clergy, is a public life. I may be a small fish in a small pond, but it's public nonetheless. Every time I wear a collar, and even when I don't, I represent something bigger than myself.

I have spent 30 years of my life in this vocation. I have tried to preach the gospel, to work for the reign of God, to love people where they are and invite them to experience the radical love and forgiveness that Jesus offers us.

On Wednesday, I woke up and felt that everything I have stood for had been repudiated. Rejected...in favor of hatred. In favor of a world in which it is permissible to be racist and homophobic; in which it is permissible to abuse women and blame all our problems on people who are different from us.

I felt like I was a stranger in a dangerous place. And if I felt that way – a relatively privileged white woman – what must my brown sisters and brothers be feeling? What must my Muslim sisters and brothers be feeling? What must my immigrant sisters and brothers be feeling?

For you see, I thought I had been helping to foster the understanding that we are all sisters and brothers. All children of God. And clearly, I and others like me have failed to get that message across very effectively.

And I wanted to quit. Just quit and let someone else do the work it's going to take to make this right.

Then on Thursday my grandson called. Owen is a precocious twelve-year-old. He had gone with his mom and dad when they voted and had asked to stay up for the election returns, expecting to witness history in the making.

As we talked – an amazingly deep and thoughtful conversation – I heard myself say to him, "I will never stop fighting to make this a better world for you." And I knew then that no matter how much I might *feel* like quitting, that I can't. And I won't.

I say again, if you think this is about politics, and if you believe that it's inappropriate for me to speak like this from this pulpit, I disagree. I believe what happened on Tuesday was the validation of hatred, misogyny, racism, homophobia, sexism, and violence.

I believe that what we've done – and I say "we" because we all bear responsibility for letting this happen – I believe what we've done is the antithesis, the very opposite of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Those who say it was about bringing back jobs and some version of so-called religious liberty have allowed yourselves to be manipulated, dear friends. To be duped. And yes, I say "dear friends." And that's what makes this particularly painful: you are dear friends. Family even. A con man has pulled one over on you, and as a result, on all of us.

So here is where I turn from my personal reaction and look for the gospel. "Gospel," you understand, means *the good news*. It means more than the traditional four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It means *the good news of God in Christ Jesus* wherever that may be found.

Take the reading from Isaiah, for instance. It is a glorious vision of a new heaven and a new earth; one in which there will be justice for everyone. "...be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating...", says God through the prophet Isaiah. "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together." "They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain." Clearly that is good news.

And don't think for a minute that the reading from Second Thessalonians is about opposition to assistance for the poor! It's about those *within* the community – the church! – who aren't doing their fair share.

In fact, the Jewish Law provided for the most vulnerable, usually referred to as widows and orphans, and required the righteous to provide alms for the poor. And the hospitality code demanded that strangers and aliens be welcomed as honored guests.

Then there is this apocalyptic gospel. The disciples are star-struck by the beauty of the Temple, which is King Herod's masterpiece. Yes, that Herod. The one who will participate in Jesus' execution.

Jesus responds to the disciples by reminding them that none of it will last. That wars and famines will come and go – and they have. They do. And though he describes how friends and families will fall into conflict, even betrayal, he promises that the faithful will endure. *The faithful will endure!*

This is the ultimate Good News: that God is in charge and that goodness will endure. Goodness, justice, and love will endure.

In spite of evidence to the contrary, in spite of our differences, in spite of our flaws, we are all – *all* – children of God and one in Christ Jesus. We all belong to the Body of Christ. **Justice, goodness and mercy, love and kindness, will win in the end.**

Meanwhile, here we are, both citizens of a divided country and a broken the world, and members of Christ's Body by way of St. Paul's. And here we all are on this one planet.

We have only to remember the first time that we human beings saw pictures of Earth from space – this small blue marble some called it – to know that we are one species. That we are one. To think otherwise is shortsighted. Literally.

We will survive together or not at all.

But meanwhile, we are still huddled together in our little countries, our little political, ethnic, racial, and religious identities. Even we Christians are divided into our little denominations.

And as Americans, we are not only divided into political parties, but also those same divisions: ethnic, racial, and religious identities. We live in a country whose *ideal* has always been one of welcome and inclusion. The words on the Statue of Liberty read:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

If we don't mean that, we should replace it with one that says: "Don't come here. We don't want you."

Of course, the reality of America has always been full of contradiction. Those who came here – all immigrants, by the way – looking for freedom built a country on slavery, child labor, limited voting rights, prejudice against every wave of immigrants, union busting... the list goes on and on.

The Church – and I mean “church” in the larger sense – has mixed reviews when it comes to these matters. Christians have been slave traders and slave owners, and Christians have been abolitionists; Christians have been suffragettes, and it was Christians who violently opposed the vote for women; we have been robber barons and union organizers. We have reached out to help the poor with one hand and then blamed them for their poverty. We're a mixed bag.

We still are. But we are God's mixed bag, all in this together, like it or not. When it comes right down to it, I believe – I hope – that this turns out to be good news.

On a more personal note again, there's this. I have spent this 30 years of ministry mostly walking on egg shells. As a parish priest, I have tried to avoid offending or alienating those who see things differently than I do.

I have refrained from putting political bumper stickers on my car or signs in my yard. Like most of us, I've avoided talking about politics – not that my views aren't fairly apparent –

but I've tried to be circumspect and respectful because we all just want to get along. I get that. But in the process, I've disenfranchised myself in the belief that it was the price I had to pay as a parish priest.

I'm not going to do that any more. Not that I'm going to talk politics all the time. But I *am* going to own and say what I think and what I believe. And I'm telling you now that that means I will be working to make "liberty and justice for all" a reality. I'm not exactly sure what that will involve, but no more walking on egg shells.

Here's my promise to you, all of you: I will listen respectfully to what *you* think and believe, should you wish to respectfully tell me. And I promise you that there are no circumstances, no differences between us, that will keep me from loving you or that will keep me from being there when you need me as your priest.

Finally this: a rector has authority over only two things. One is worship and the other is the use of the building. I am now declaring this place, St. Paul's, a **SAFE PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE**. I don't know how that will look or get lived out. But there it is.

And to our children, I want to say this: the world can be a scary and confusing place sometimes. We grownups sometimes mess things up. But we love you. We will do our best to protect you and to make the world a better place for you and for everyone.

We here at St. Paul's are part of your family now. If you are ever worried or scared or confused, come and tell us. We are here for you. We love you. We love you. We love you!

And now, my sisters and brothers all, instead of the Creed, please open your prayer books to page 292 and let us renew our Baptismal vows.