

A Letter to the Congregation

November 11, 2016

Dear friends,

The events of this week have shaken this nation and our own community. The numbers tell the story – we are as divided as we feared we might be. But political division is not new to us. Elections have often been very close and have reflected differences between parties and political stances on the issues of the day. This week has been different. The results of this election have people around the nation responding with a myriad of emotions more intense than I ever remember seeing them. Half the nation feels joy and relief, believing the United States has elected the right new President and will be stronger in the future. The other half of the nation has reacted with shock, anger, confusion, and sometimes tears of deep grief and fear. The chasm that separates us has grown deeper and wider this week.

Though I do not imagine that our congregation all voted for the same person (and I know there are many reasons to vote for a candidate, or not to vote for a candidate), I do know that many of you are wondering what we are to do next, having elected a President whose words and actions left many people feeling attacked, persecuted and dismissed as less-than-human. Many are left wondering what will become of them and what will become of our nation in this new order. How are we to respond?

First, we turn to God, always our best support, resource, and guide, our greatest hope, our one true love, our highest joy, our brightest light, our Savior and our Lord. Across the years God has guided God's people through times of transition, fear, and change, through slavery, wilderness, exile, war, exclusion, and persecution. The one whose spirit rests in God will not despair. We must not despair. I turn to Psalm 46 to be reminded of this,

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.¹ "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Second, we turn to one another for support, for encouragement, for courage. We are the community of faith and we need one another. We need to talk about our hopes and fears openly

and honestly. We need to listen to one another in love. We need to confess the ways we have fallen short of the love Christ calls us to have for one another. We need to understand the power of God's grace for us all. I, for one, want to confess the white privilege that has shaped my life since birth and given me opportunities my sisters and brothers of color have not had. I confess that I have benefitted from a system that oppresses others. Lord, have mercy. As we reflect on the Body of Christ as a community of love and faith for all God's people, let us turn to Romans 12:9-21,

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Finally, we turn to the world and live out the love we have received from God in Christ and have shared with one another. We are called as people of faith to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

We must remind one another that we stand together. To anyone who feels persecuted and afraid, know this: You are not alone. We stand with our Muslim sisters and brothers who feel threatened and afraid. We stand with our African-American sisters and brothers who are threatened daily in their own bodies by systemic racism and racial bias in a world built for white people. We affirm that black lives matter, now and always. We stand with our LGBTQ brothers and sisters who worry that their newly gained rights might be ripped away from them and that persecution against them will increase. We stand with our Hispanic brothers and sisters who fear deportation, destruction of families, and discrimination based on the color of their skin or the language they speak. We stand with women who have been assaulted, abused, taken advantage of, and objectified. We stand with the handicapped who have been mocked, mistreated, forgotten and neglected. We stand with the elderly who are alone, sick, tired, confused, and without resources. We stand with children who have no one to speak for them. We stand with those who suffer from injustices in a system which leaves them with no voice. We stand together as God's people, seeking to right wrongs, love with abandon, and bring hope to the hopeless. We will not stop working. We will not stop loving. We will not stop hoping. We will not stop working for peace.

We will not stop following Christ.

I hold you deeply and continuously in my prayers. I ask that you will hold me also in yours.

Grace to you all,

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