

Roslyn. The Feast of St. Patrick, March 17, 2017

Community in Christ at Living Word Lutheran Church,

Grace and peace to you and mercy in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ!

The past several years have seen political polarization in our country. That statement most likely reaches you without contest. Simply turn on the television, open a newspaper, or log on to social media, and you will find copious and ample proof that people in this country—in this world—are not of one mind when it comes to how to address the very real problems facing us as a human race. And debate is a healthy, good, and even salutary thing. People should wrangle over how best to structure society so that all can live life to its fullest—as God intended from the beginning of time.

But the polarization that we are facing is troubling in its acrimony, vitriol, and tenacity. What are we as Christians to make of this discord? Are we to say anything at all to the present situation? Or do we remain silent as events unfold? These questions, and others like them, are important, and many faithful Christians—of differing political stripes—are asking them.

The events happening in this country since the inauguration of President Donald Trump have highlighted the deep-seated division among people in this country. This letter is not an occasion to criticize or extol the president's methods of governance, but it is a call to recall the basics of our faith—the gospel of Jesus Christ. We as Christians stand firmly upon the Word of God, who for us and for our salvation became flesh and lived among us so that we might know just how much God loves us. This same Word, this same Jesus Christ, proclaims to us a radical good news that rattles the very foundations of this world. Just as Christ's entry into human history disrupted Satan's tyranny of sin and death, so the gospel of Christ continues to shake the forces that strive against God's love.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is political. It is political insofar as it indicts corruption, exploitation, enmity, narcissism, and hubris. The gospel is political insofar as it calls us to lives marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The gospel is political insofar as it calls us to give up our lives for the sake others—dutifully and faithfully bearing our cross in reflection of our Lord and Savior's life-giving act on Calvary. "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me," Christ baldly tells us, "cannot be my disciple."

Some might push back on the notion that the gospel is political, that politics and faith should remain separate from one another. Such a position is untenable for a Christian. "No one can serve two masters," Christ again plainly states, "for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other." As Christians, with lives transformed by the good news of God's love for us in Christ, we cannot divorce any part of our lives from our faith. God is all in all, and our relationship with God is the defining relationship of our existence. Politics cannot be removed from our personhood anymore than our faith. And so as Christians, we are forced to look at our politics through the lens of God's love for us in Christ.

Christians can and should differ on how to order our lives together in community, but we must not waver in our commitment to the integrity and worth of people. For God so loved the world to send Jesus Christ, his own Son, to save it—to give up everything, even his own life, for our sake—yet we spend countless hours discussing, debating, disputing, and disagreeing over who is worthy of our help, compassion, and support. Recalling Matthew 25, I am personally indicted, again from the very words of Christ himself, for all the times that I have failed to live up to the Christian challenge to love another as Christ has loved me:

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ . . . Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

Who is hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison in our world that we stand by silently and not care for them? Who is hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison in our world that we stand by silently as a government formed in our name, at our behest, as representative of us does not care for them—and even actively works against such care? Are we satisfied with our complacency or do we feel compelled by the gospel to speak out and stand up to such injustice when it happens?

No government is perfect. No political party is perfect. No candidate, no politician, no country is perfect. Only God is perfect. But we as Christians are called to be God’s hands and feet in the world, to work for justice and peace, care for others and the world God made, and by doing so, to proclaim God’s love for us and for all people through our words and actions. We may, can, and should differ on matters of politics, but we may not, cannot, and must not differ on matters fundamental to the gospel promise of God’s love for all people or the gospel obligation to bear our cross in love of neighbor and stranger alike.

May we never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to us, and we to the world. Peace be with you, and to the whole community, with love and with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Pr. Daniel