

Sunday, November 13, 2016
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Glen Ellyn, Illinois
The Rev. George D. Smith

Historic, unprecedented, apocalyptic – these are some of the words that I have either read or heard to describe the outcome of Tuesday's national election. St. Mark's is not a political monolith, so some of us are stunned, fearful and depressed, while others are excited, giddy and happy. Perhaps everyone is surprised. For all of this, I turn to the words from the Compline service (a service for the end of the day) in the Book of Common Prayer: "Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, soothe the suffering, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. *Amen.*"

The day after the election, I found wisdom in a quote by Episcopal priest and writer Barbara Crafton, who wrote on her Geranium Farm blog:

"Regardless of what happens in life we can always walk in love, as Christ loved us. Look to yourself, and be as actively loving as you can be in the days ahead."

Later that morning, one person said to me, “no politics from the pulpit!” And my response was that sermons, really all sermons, are about politics. The word “politics,” comes from the Greek *politikos* and means “of or relating to citizens.” We are citizens of the Kingdom of God, and therefore, by definition, political. It is impossible for the person giving the sermon not to be political, which is quite different from being partisan. To be partisan is to promote or endorse one political party over another. To be political is to encourage people to engage in the world, to vote in elections – to participate, to think and make good choices. It is to advocate for voting and policies that facilitate participation, against policies that block participation. Post-election, to be political is to reflect on the outcome and to guide hearts and minds in ways that reflect the virtues of our faith. This is why I am grateful that national elections are on Tuesdays, which give the preacher, me included, time to prepare for Sunday.

And thank God we have humor in all of this. The night after the election, Seth Meyers, the host of Late Night with Seth Myers, told his audience that the first woman president is out there – he just hopes that she isn't a toddler.

Today we are gathered in a sacred space – a safe space for our joys and our sorrows, whether political or personal, which we offer before God. We have just heard a reading from chapter 21 of Luke's Gospel – near the end of it, when Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd are gathered at the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the spiritual and physical center of the ancient city. The first temple, Solomon's temple, had been destroyed in 586 B.C. The second temple, the one described in the Gospel was completed around 515 B.C. several years after the Jews had returned from exile in Babylon. Herod the Great, during his reign several decades before the birth of Christ, had enlarged and refurbished the second temple. Studded with precious stones and matted with gold leaf, the temple sparked and gleamed in the

sun's light. Tourists and pilgrims, like the disciples, were in awe of such magnificence – a symbol of permanence and power. As we have heard, Jesus tells the crowd gathered in front of the temple that all will be thrown down, not one stone will be left upon another. Which is what happened. The temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by a siege of Roman armies. It adds to Jesus' credibility that he could predict such a disaster. But the Gospel lesson is not the Jesus was a seer, but that the temple in Jerusalem is a metaphor for temples of all kinds – temples of theology, injustice, pride and materialism – that all of them that we have built will be toppled. People have and continue to put their trust and identity in temples. To say that they will become rubble is a threat, and if you follow Jesus, you too will be seen as a threat. If you, as a follower of Jesus, say such things, you will be perceived as an enemy of the establishment – but the reality is that you are bearer of eternal truths. In the rubble, certain things will be unbroken: the dignity of every human being, the love of God for all people,

and the deep desire within the human soul to help one another, to serve and to sacrifice ourselves for the well-being of others and the common good. These imperishable things are unbreakable because they are gifts from God. The testimony that every Christian carries is that we are to love everyone, even and especially our enemies. This testimony is mortar of the church – a community that offers welcome to anyone and everyone without exception. The church is a community that through its many members, goes out into the world to actively serve and help those who are vulnerable, persecuted and suffering in any way.

Gathered here five days after the national election, we reflect and regroup and remember what we are called to do and to be. For those who are stunned and fearful, you are called not to go down the path of cut-off, anger and depression, but to head in the opposite direction, toward curiosity. Throughout our Scriptures, the angels offer this message: “Do not be afraid!” Instead of being fearful, we must be curious. What the election showed is

that many people felt the only choice they had was someone who promised radical change. Curiosity is possible when you know you are grounded in love, marked as Christ's own forever. That is what we claim. For those who are elated, giddy or surprised in a positive way, you are called to not to go down the path to arrogance and disregard for those who feel differently. In The Song of Mary, Jesus' mother proclaims: "he has scattered the proud in their conceit." The virtue correlated with elation is humility, which is possible when you know that all things come from God, and that none of us is his or her own master. Fear on the one hand and arrogance on the other are the ingredients for division and violence. Curiosity and humility are the paths to reconciliation, which intersect as bulldozers against walls of division and separation.

It is worth repeating what the candidates said when the election results were in:

Hillary Clinton: “Last night, I congratulated Donald Trump and offered to work with him on behalf of our country. I hope that he will be a successful president for all Americans.

I still believe in America and I always will. And if you do, then we must accept this result and then look to the future. Donald Trump is going to be our president. We owe him an open mind and the chance to lead.”

And then Donald Trump:

“Hillary has worked very long and very hard over a long period of time, and we owe her a major debt of gratitude for her service to our country. I mean that very sincerely. Now it’s time for America to bind the wounds of division; have to get together. To all Republicans and Democrats and independents across this nation, I say it is time for us to come together as one united people.”

It is easy and glib to call for healing. Like cheap grace, there is cheap healing. But we believe as Christians, that healing is

possible, through prayer, community and the virtues of curiosity and humility.

Bishop Lee wrote to our diocese:

“The future is uncertain. But the bedrock of our faith is that the future belongs to God. Jesus Christ has come to us as one of us to reveal the nature of God who is perfect Love. The death and resurrection of Jesus means that there is nothing that can separate us from that Love. God is with us to the end of the ages. And because that is true, we have the power to meet any challenge before us. We can work for justice and peace. We can stand with the marginalized and work for a world in which everyone will have what they need. We can put into practice a promise we make at every baptism-to respect the dignity of every human being. We can insist on civil discourse across differences in the public square.”

The vision of St. Mark's is a community of people rooted in baptism, growing in faith and branching into the world. What we stand for, however imperfectly practiced, is to welcome everyone to taste and see – the love of God, the Kingdom of God come near. The majority of the St. Mark's community is white, heterosexual and privileged, but we are also Latino, Burmese, Iraqi, African-American, LGBTQ, Jewish, poor and illegal. Now more than ever is a time to recommit, double down on welcome and inclusion, seeing, responding and helping the world to see the dignity that is found in every human being.

The Rev. Julia Rusling writes,

And so we commit ourselves--we commit ourselves in our churches and in our homes, in our schools and in our workplaces to the creative work of God. It's the same work Jesus proclaims at the start of his ministry, when he comes to the synagogue in Nazareth, opens up the scroll of Isaiah and reads in proclamation:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Elie Wiesel at his Nobel Acceptance in 1986, said,

"Human suffering anywhere concerns men and women everywhere. Our lives no longer belong to us alone; they belong to all those who need us desperately."

Jim Wallis, an evangelical writer and founder of Sojourners magazine.

"Today, many people are frightened — mostly the people whom the now president-elect has regularly attacked. If I read my Scriptures right, those are the people Christians and other people of good conscience should now turn to in solidarity and support."

The Temple was destroyed forty years after Jesus predicted it – in 70 A.D. by Roman armies. We have seen enough of wars, earthquakes and famines in the succeeding centuries to fulfill these prophecies a hundred times over. Has there been a generation which hasn't said, "Surely this must be the end?" But Jesus made the point clear, "You cannot know the hour...you must always be on watch." The disciples lived in the reality and expectation of a new heaven and a new earth, which enabled them to follow Jesus. We are called to do the same. We are called to shun fear and arrogance and to live into the virtues of curiosity and humility. Nourished and enriched by our community and sacraments, we will be able to respond with love to every human being who shares our planet.

Amen.