

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Proper 27-B; 10 November 2024
St. Thomas', Glassboro – Todd Foster
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Election

I. Seek and Serve Christ in all persons

Our first lesson of scripture today was from the book of Ruth. It is about a woman from Moab. Not a Jew, not an Israelite. The Moabites had an unsavory reputation, and a patriarchal society was especially suspicious of the women. But Ruth, when she was widowed, remained devoted to her mother-in-law and accompanied her back to Israel. Ruth was an immigrant, undocumented, and of a race that was much maligned, the subject of ugly epithets. And we won't even get into what went on on the threshing floor and Boaz's concern that Ruth not be seen there! But God chose Ruth to be the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ. She was a critical part of the story of God, of our story. When we seek and serve Christ in all persons, we confess that we believe this about every person we meet. Each one is a critical part of the story of God.

II. Election

Since Tuesday's election I've spent a lot of time thinking and praying about the events of this week and what a pastoral response looks like. What would Jesus do? What would Jesus say?

We are blessed, truly blessed, to enjoy a diversity of opinions here at St. Thomas'. Our diversity of opinions and experiences issues forth in the deep and complex motivations that shape the

ways we vote. I've thought about the concerns about fairness and accuracy in the election, and the success with which this one, like pretty much every one before it in the United States, was carried out. It was by the books and it resulted in a clear and genuine manifestation of the will of the American people. Democracy happened. Decisions were made without resorting to violence. In that important sense, this election cycle was a success for every person involved. To this I imagine we can all say, "God be praised." It doesn't happen like this in every place and in every time. Transitions of power are times of persecution, imprisonment, and civil war in places around the globe even today. But not here. Not yet.

Instead, on Wednesday morning, some woke up rejoicing about the results of the election, and some crying. Some were mildly disappointed and some didn't know what to think. All that is as it should be in a Democracy. We made a decision together, and that decision involves compromise for the sake of our country. [Monday] Tomorrow we celebrate Veterans Day, and this is indeed the privilege and the responsibility for which our veterans served and fought and sometimes endured great hardship, grave injury, or death. For this our veterans are to be honored and thanked.

III. What now?

So, what next? Despite the claims of partisan strategists, politics is almost never a clear-cut case of good and bad, right and wrong. As much as the people begged him to do so, Jesus never invited his followers to rally around a national flag, not even his own! Jesus was not willing to be co-opted by any party or social movement. Jesus urged his followers to live peaceful lives, contributing to society in ways that make the world a better place. But Jesus was not naive.

Jesus knew that governments and institutions frequently cater to the wealthy, the powerful, and the connected. Jesus, however, always sided with the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. On the cross Jesus joined the company of the very least in his society, choosing to die the death of the slave and the traitor. So in wondering what Jesus would do, the crucifixion is always our starting point.

How did you feel as you voted this year? Or maybe you didn't vote, but you found the cultural currents of emotion lapping at your feet like the waves at the Jersey shore. There have been some ugly currents in this election season. Ugly words and crude epithets have created a climate of permissiveness for the expression of all kinds of violence, cruelty, xenophobia, and racism. This is the world we have lived in through this whole campaign season, and I pray that it will stop now. But I am not feeling optimistic.

Also, I'm concerned about my family, friends, and neighbors.

I'm concerned about Fr. Robin Pierre, leading parishes of primarily Haitians across the Diocese of New Jersey, including nearby in Millville. Fr. Pierre's parishioners have found their culture maligned with demonstrably false accusations. Their dignity was the price chosen to pay for a few more votes.

I'm worried about undocumented people who belong to our neighboring parishes, people who have lived here for decades and raised families, who now wonder if those families will be ripped apart after clear, explicit, and repeated promise of mass deportations.

I'm worried about a variety of friends, clergy and lay, who now fear the rights they have as a married couple to care for each other into old age will be taken away because they don't fit someone else's ideal of what a family looks like.

I worry about trans people and the parents and friends of trans children, including several connected to St. Thomas', who are afraid not just of laws being proposed to limit their access to medical care or to schools or to other resources, but also the mental, emotional, and spiritual damage that lies in the offing. Suicide is a real and present danger for trans people, especially trans children, in a culture which would deny their legitimacy, their right to exist or to their own unique experience as human beings.

I worry about my wife and my daughter, as they anticipate further government meddling with their bodies, with their private conversations with their doctors.

These are all real people. Not just neighbors but close neighbors. Members of St. Thomas'. Members of nearby parishes. Members of our Diocese. I've spoken with some of my family, with colleagues, with neighbors about how they feel about this election. Many of them feel vulnerable. They feel like targets. They are tired and afraid and despondent.

This is not OK. This is not what Jesus is about!

This election has divided friends and strangers, created distance and silence within families, within my family, and caused not a few people to walk out of church!

Which raises the question: why are we here? Us, St. Thomas', this congregation?

We are here for the same reason we come every week. Because God calls us here. Because God calls us to be God's people in every circumstance of life and at every time. Because God calls us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, to a special concern and responsibility for those who feel vulnerable, afraid, and marginalized. The Gospel is about Jesus' solidarity with those who suffer. The Gospel is about Jesus' solidarity with us!

Democrat or Republican or Independent, young or old, black or white or brown, rich or poor, working or retired or under-employed, male or female or nonbinary, articulate or slow of speech: we are all different people. But we are, all of us who have been baptized, first and foremost we are Christians. We are people who gather in God's name, lay our meager gifts before God, and ask God to act in our lives so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In the Church there is no place for hatred, bias, or discrimination. In the Church we learn to stand with the vulnerable, with those at risk: because Jesus chose to stand with us. In the Church we learn to lift our voices on behalf of those who believe they have no voice. In the Church we learn to express solidarity with those who find themselves otherwise marginalized, sometimes making the difference between life and death.

As we sit for a moment, I invite you to take stock. How are you feeling today?

And what about *your* neighbors? Who among your family, your friends, the person sitting beside you in church, might have experienced this week differently than you did? This is the place, this is the time for us to draw together as the Church. This is the time to check in with your neighbor, to ask with genuine curiosity: “how are you?”

It is in times of chaos and confusion, disruption and re-alignment, that we do our best work: looking to Jesus Christ and following him always. I pray that God’s will will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and that especially in the community of St. Thomas’ we will be mindful to care for, to protect, and to love one another and all our neighbors as ourselves.

FIN

Announcements:

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