

Problem: What is our calling after the election?

-“Abide with me; fast falls the eventide; The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide; When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.”

-When I was in grade school, I remember asking my now passed away grandfather who fought in three wars if when he became most afraid. He told me the story of when he was a chaplain in Vietnam. His platoon set up camp and my grandfather decided to take a nap in a nearby fox hole while he was on break. While he was asleep, the call came in that the Vietcong were advancing rapidly and his platoon made a chaotic and hasty retreat. This all happened while my grandfather was asleep and no one woke him. After sleeping, he popped his head out and saw....no one. Just equipment that had been left and a couple fires burning things that the commander didn't want to get into the hands of the enemy. That was one of the most scary times of my whole life I remember him saying. "Looking over nothing and seeing chaos," he said. "It was a feeling that went right to my core." Now what was he going to do?

-I feel a little like my grandfather right now: looking over chaos and trying to comprehend what is going on. Whatever your political convictions in this congregation, and I know there are many, one thing I believe we can all agree on is that no candidate for the United States Presidency has ever used this level of hatred and labeling to win. It is in despicable how this has affected our own community and so I am asking myself: "what am I going to do now?"

Solution: “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.” -Dietrich Bonhoeffer

-“Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away; change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me.”

-Two thoughts:

-(1)“Bearing Witness” We as a church community need to understand that there are individuals, communities, and entities that are already in greater danger because of the rise of hate and anger. Yes, even in Missoula. I talked with a teacher a couple of days ago who said that all Missoula schools have reported a rise in swastika painting (even at the Middle School level!!!). There have been multiple incidents already where women wearing hijabs have been threatened, and just yesterday my colleague and friend Laurie Franklin, Rabbinic leader of the Jewish Har Shalom Center asked for more police patrol around her synagogue because of fliers that have been dropped in multiple locations around our city saying: "The Jews' purpose is to destroy us and our families from the inside out, slowly and gradually perverting us with their own special kind of poison “ Refugee families, LGBTQ individuals, Immigrants, women (especially minorities), people with disabilities, and our climate are seriously threatened. This is a fact.

-Our confirmation class was just talking about what the 10 commandments are and they discovered that the word commandment never appears in the Hebrew. What does appear is “way”. So the lawyer in Matthew 22 is actually asking Jesus: “Lord, what is the most important way?” Jesus answers: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” [a] 38 This is the first and greatest way. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ [b] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two ways.”

-This is for me what I have to hold onto to. In wrestling with “what am I going to do next” I feel I must act first and foremost to love and protect our neighbors. I believe our church needs to as well, not just follow in the generalist “peace and justice for all” mentality, but specifically say swastikas have no place in our community. Fliers and hate mail have no place in our community. Treatment of women on the University campus has no place in our community. I believe it takes us as a church denouncing this hatred directly and standing up, even to the President of the United States if necessary, and in the name of Jesus Christ proclaim that there is no room for persecution and targeted hate in our world.

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor and one who was executed by the Nazis for being part of a plot against Hitler said: *“It is the Christian call to not simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, but to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”* Justice needs to be at the center now of all we do and say.

-(2) “Building Bridges.” The context of the Gospel of Luke was one fraught with persecution, betrayal, and fear. Here was a community of Christians, probably living in Rome in the 1st century, who were fearful. Many in this community were endangered by members of their own family who didn’t understand what Christianity was about. We have Roman records from a similar time period to the Gospel of Luke which deemed Christians as “cannibals” who ate each other’s flesh and blood. Some early Christians were even executed on this charge. It makes sense in a way, doesn’t it? If you know nothing about Christianity and heard/read the words of Jesus saying: “Take and eat of my body and blood”, that’s pretty horrifying. Of course this is not at all what Jesus was talking about.

-One of the things that began happening in myself (and I know in others) after the election was me going around and labeling people who “must have voted in a certain way.” I found sometimes anger building in myself which is OK to feel, but not at the expense of others. I feel shocked myself still and need to be in that place right now. But, I know I have an obligation to get beyond this anger eventually because it could destroy our communities. If not checked, I believe we could find ourselves being like the Romans accusing Christians of cannibalism simply because we don’t understand.

-In one of the many conversations Abby and I have had with friends, one of our close friends spoke to a theory that they had: everyone in this country, no matter who you

voted for, wants two things: safety and connection. I think this is really true. So it really comes down to empathy. How do we empathize with one another? How do we feel another's pain in their safety and connection being threatened? I believe this is the only way forward as we seek to love God with all of our heart and mind and our neighbor as ourself. I'm not there yet, but know this is the direction I need to go.

Implication:

"I need thy presence every passing hour; what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power? Who like thyself my guide and stay can be? Through cloud and sunshine, oh, abide with me."

-What did my grandfather, after thinking to himself: now what, do? He started to walk down the road. Maybe it was a road to be captured and killed by the Vietcong. Maybe it was a road to get lost on and starve. Maybe it was a road that led in the opposite direction of where his platoon went (he didn't know). It turns out the commander forgot some important documents and came down the road the opposite direction finding my grandfather....walking.

-This is what we as a church and as a country have to do too. We have to give ourselves some time to say: "Now what?" Then we have to start walking down the road, a road that is uncertain together. You may feel triumphant after this election, come walk with me. You may feel scared out of your mind. Come walk with me.

-In our walk down this road, we must remember this: "For I am with you always, even until the end of the age." That's our faith. To know that we are never alone. We are never alone in acting out our Christian convictions of speaking out for our neighbor nor empathizing with others whom we disagree with. It will take walking together, stepping down this road together, to remind me of that.

*"I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still, if Thou abide with me"*
Amen.

