

In the name of the God of justice, peace and life abundant. Amen.

I want to say thank-you to your retiring bishop whom I know is much beloved in this diocese and who has been a great companion in ministry and mentor to me. And I want to say thank-you to your new bishop for the privilege of being invited, in what seems like another time, to speak today. The tiny group gathered in this place is a poor reflection of the beautiful diversity of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, and all the folks whose lives and stories would be celebrated this day if it could only be so. You need to know that your new bishop has a heart that is aching at least in part right now because all of you cannot be here to be seen and heard. And beloved, the day when you will all gather and be able to lift up your many voices in worship and praise to Jesus is surely coming soon!

The passage from John's Gospel we just read is part of Jesus' "Farwell Discourse." It's from that big chunk of John that's devoted to recording the story of the Last Supper, and all Jesus taught that evening in both word and deed. It's often noted the farewell discourse is delivered in an extraordinary moment. It's a loaded part of Jesus' story that unfolds at a breathless pace, with all the action and all the teaching heightened by the setting of the tale. The way John remembers it all, supper has concluded, Jesus has washed his disciples' feet, Judas has been identified as Christ's betrayer and fled, Peter has been tagged as sure to deny the Lord, Jesus has issued a "new commandment" for his disciples to embrace. And though Jesus never comes straight at it, he leaves no doubt with his disciples that his life and ministry are coming to a close. "In just a little while, you will see me no more," he says earlier in the discourse, and then - prophetically in today's passage - "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

That's the next thing that happens of course. The supper ends, the page in John's Gospel turns, and Jesus leaves Jerusalem, to cross the Kidron Valley and visit the Garden of Gethsemane, where he is arrested by the Roman authorities and taken to Pontius Pilot. Now there is no turning back. He is on his way to the cross.

Probably the best gift Craig Loya gave to Nebraska was his constant, passionate proclamation of how deeply we are beloved of God in the person of Jesus. I don't think I've ever heard Craig preach a sermon in which he did not assure me that I am cherished of God, and he has *lived* that Good News every bit as much as he has preached it. In his work with Magdalene Omaha, Downtown Episcopal Outreach, Inclusive Communities, Brownell Talbott and many others, Craig figured out how to join with, and care for, folks across just about every divide of race, ethnicity, class or condition than can make it hard for us to embrace others. Among our clergy ranks, where even the most well-adjusted occasionally suffer from imposter syndrome, too often comparing ourselves and our work to that of our colleagues, Craig managed to befriend and connect with almost everybody, by selflessly encouraging and supporting us all. He's remained a devoted husband and dad, somehow balancing, with his beloved Melissa's help, the demands of the competing vocations of marriage, parenting and ordained ministry. In faithfully nurturing those with whom he lives with every day, Craig has shared and known what

it is to be truly treasured. Minnesota: you have chosen a bishop who knows how to love, and whose commitment to that work is bound up in his knowledge that he too is loved: known, chosen, cherished and saved by the person of Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus issues a new commandment, the one we recollect and celebrate every year in Holy Week on Maundy Thursday: “Love one another,” Jesus says, “as I have loved you.” On Maundy Thursday we tell the part of the story where Jesus washes the disciple’s feet, recalling that in that act of humble service he teaches us about servant leadership, and how a simple gesture of caring can be inspirational – even subversive - when a person with power and authority defies expectations, and uses their gifts in a new way. It’s a great story and a key teaching. A sort of signpost from Jesus that has pointed his followers in a faithful direction across the years.

But on this occasion – as we gather to ordain and consecrate a new bishop into the apostolic succession of the Church Catholic, it’s important to say that “loving like Jesus” is about more than extraordinary kindness, compassionate caring or even humble service. “Love one-another as I have loved you” asks a higher commitment than that. In the “Examination” which will be addressed to the new bishop in a few minutes, we will hear these words: *Your joy will be to follow him who came not to be served but to serve and gave his life as a ransom for many.*

The story of this Jesus who loves us so, and whom it is our joy to follow, is not merely the story of one who came to humbly serve, but the story of the One who sacrificed his life, and embraced death on the cross for the salvation of the world. And the ministry of every faithful bishop will be a story of not just one who comes to humbly serve, but who - in the heritage of patriarchs, matriarchs, apostles and martyrs – abandons their whole life, to follow the way of the cross.

I know everyone present here this morning loves our Episcopal Church. It’s a, “good old church” as our Presiding Bishop often intones. But it is also true, that at some deep level over the course of our long history, our denomination has too often conflated the values of an ascendant republic with the teachings of Jesus. For 250 years we thought we were thriving because we were being so faithful and so good, when in fact:

- We were participating in the genocide of native American cultures in the name of evangelization, and constructing church buildings with money made from trading human beings as chattel, and built by the labor of enslaved Africans ...

- We were failing to honor the divine image in women called to leadership ministries, brazenly redacting the key roles women played in supporting the ministry of Jesus in the early church, and we were demonizing LGBTQ people on the basis of a narrow and selective reading of scripture ...

- And far too often, in the name of “decency and good order,” we have failed to simply call ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Christ to account for the embarrassing, distressing and shameful sin that is in us ... to look to Jesus alone to show us the way to forgiveness, reconciliation and abundant life.

These past two weeks, we have watched in dismay and horror as we witnessed the brutal murder of George Floyd, and as this magnificent city – and countless others across the nation – have erupted in righteous fury because of the legacy of 400 years of ignorance, prejudice and brutality perpetrated by people who look like me, upon men and women of color, and we must own the fact that the Church has played its part in supporting systemic racism since its inception in this country, and so in contributing to all that sadness and all that rage that is now boiling over. We made peace with the empire long ago. And we are now paying the price.

Jesus Christ came into this world to destroy evil. And when evil rears up in this here and now, Jesus takes a side against it every single time. There is no equivocation on his part nor dare there be on ours, not even when evil appears in a pin-striped suit, or a clerical collar ... or a blue uniform with a badge on it. Far too often, the Church has failed to call out evil and sin when it is staring us right in the face. That is part of our history. That is the freighted and broken past from which we must now repent, and turn towards tomorrow.

And what of tomorrow? The 10th Bishop of Minnesota will begin his ministry as the future of the Episcopal Church arrives at our doorstep. Like a package from Amazon, the future has been dropped, unceremoniously, upon us, in a delivery hastened by a global pandemic and civil unrest the likes of which this country has not seen in over a half century. And while no one knows for sure what the Church of tomorrow will look like, we can at least begin to see what's coming from here:

- The Church will be smaller. Not because we will fail as evangelists but because it will complete its uncoupling from American civic life, and as folks who were previously spared from counting the cost of discipleship, will decide that while being a *member* was just fine, being a *disciple*, is something else again.

- The Church will be poorer. Not because the people of God will give less generously, but because we will stop focusing on accumulating wealth as a measure of success in ministry, finally embracing Jesus' teachings about the seductive and corrupting power of money, and so live with a gentler footprint and a much more gracious pattern of giving away our treasure.

- The Church will be far more diverse in every imaginable way. Not because some liberal political agenda has finally been realized, but because God created us all and equally in the divine image, because Jesus called us all and equally to be members of his body ... because we are a more compelling and accurate image of the kingdom of God when we embrace and celebrate our diversity, lifting up and empowering those dwelling at the margins of society, stepping aside to let new and unexpected leaders shine, and building structures that give voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless.

- And the Church of tomorrow will be much more deeply and honestly prayerful, as we jettison those inherited customs that we've treasured because of a classist and racist aesthetic about what is beautiful ... and begin to focus more honestly on religious practice that convicts us of our sins, and inspires us to follow in the way of Jesus ... and to live for his sake alone.

Welcome to the post-Christian world. On this episcopal ordination and consecration day, know the Church of the future will rise or fall on one thing and one thing only: the ability of this generation of believers to proclaim and to live an authentic, sincere and sacrificial Gospel, in which we follow the way of Christ, and Him crucified.

One night about a month ago, it was the very week that Craig was finishing up at Trinity Cathedral and beginning his ministry as your Bishop elect, I had a classic, epic anxiety dream. In the dream I was in the bowels of some great Cathedral, getting ready for a worship service that was about to commence, and everything was out of order. I did not know what the service was or what my part in it was to be, I could not find my way to the sacristy. I didn't have the right vestments for the occasion. I am positive every clergy person present and all those watching from afar have had some version of this dream on numerous occasions!

In the dream I finally found my way to the sacristy and a little group of folks who were similarly getting ready for church. But locating the right vestments remained elusive. In closet after closet the hangers were empty, until finally, at the last moment, I threw open a door to reveal a beautiful, brand new set of vestments that I could see would be a perfect fit for me. But as I reached out to grab them and put them on, I heard a voice say, "Those are not for you."

And then there materialized, in the way these things do in a dream, my own vestments. Which proved to be a single, massive cope – long like a bridal train – but rather than being made of beautiful cloth, it was made from scraps and souvenirs of life and ministry. I remember seeing a journal from a retreat, and a kid's painting from church camp, and rags soaked in oil and water from cleaning up after Baptisms, and a bunch of other symbols and artifacts all woven to make this big, heavy, unwieldy garment, that was certainly going to be one-of-a-kind, but was also rough, humble and worn.

That's not a bad image for the work that begins today in the partnership between this new bishop and the Episcopal Church in Minnesota. Together, in the years to come, you will collaborate to create a brand-new thing, and you'll patch it together one piece at a time. By your common prayer: around altars both great and small in and out of churches from Rushford to Grand Marais and everywhere in-between. By lifting up and forming new ministers of the Gospel, from every corner of this diocese and from every Minnesota walk of life, blessing and empowering new leaders for a new day. By your efforts to seek out and meet the person of Jesus as you serve alongside the poor, the disenfranchised and the outcast, listening for Christ's voice and watching for His activity in those he loves the best. By writing letters to the Tribune, testifying in Saint Paul and marching with those whom the Church has too long shut out or left behind, making a witness for the Good News of God in Christ. By fighting evil, with the kind of strength, courage and dedication that is far beyond the capacity of any human being, but can only be accomplished by the might of the greatest imaginable savior.

In all these ways and so many more that can't even be imagined this day, you will become the church of the future, making something altogether new and altogether beautiful, by loving one another and this whole creation just as Jesus loves us, and by following in the way of the cross.

Amen.

+ J.S. Barker