

A Pastoral Letter

From the Right Reverend Craig W. Loya
X Bishop, The Episcopal Church in Minnesota
November 6, 2020

To All God's Beloved in Minnesota,

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ.

On this Lord's Day, we gather in the wake of one of the most bitterly divisive presidential elections in our nation's history. We have known for some time that either outcome would be a painful disappointment for about half of our population, including many, many Minnesotans.

The narrative in popular media would have us believe that there are two Americas: red and blue. The real story, however, is not that simple. The electoral map is not the only fracture in the fabric of our national life. The challenges of 2020 have exposed a labyrinthine network of chasms that cut across social, economic, and racial lines, to name just a few. After the votes are counted, we remain a deeply divided nation.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul reminds us that "in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus repairs the breach between us and God, and as baptized disciples, the Spirit sends us to be repairers of the breach with God. One of the marks of the Holy Spirit's activity in the world is when dividing lines of every kind are crossed, and exclusion is turned to embrace. Our mission is to join the Spirit in that work.

But make no mistake: the reconciliation that we are called to work for is not a mere compromise. It is not settling for an easy peace with the forces of evil that are real in our world. It is not simply agreeing to disagree, pretending that we have not inflicted wounds on one another, or that Christians should check the public square at the church door. The reconciliation we are called to is about inviting one another to embrace the politics of Jesus. The politics of Jesus are neither red nor blue. The politics of Jesus are about embracing the poor, loving our enemies, feeding the hungry, lifting up the oppressed, reforming the unjust structures in society, seeking good for the other instead of insisting on our own way, disregarding the boundaries of social exclusion, calling out our own self-interested hypocrisy and that of our religious and civic leaders, making room at the center for those who have been pushed to the margins. Those are the things that Jesus actually did. These are the marks of what it means to be his followers in the world.

The kind of reconciliation Paul knew, and exhorts us to, is what happens when we allow our selfish desires, our insistence on our own way, our idolatrous commitments to national identity or political party, to be crucified with Jesus, so that we are raised to new life in the ecstatic embrace of God's love. I can tell you from my own hard-won experience that such a death and resurrection is the only way we can truly be free.

Our world is crying out in every corner to know and feel that liberating, life-giving love.

As 2020 draws to a close, many of us are anxious about the future of our beloved old Episcopal Church. While we can be sure that God will always have the church God needs, the future of our branch will depend largely on whether we are willing to commit ourselves to Jesus' way of love with a fierce and singular passion. That love, and that love alone, has the power to mend the fractured fabric of our common life. The message of Jesus will always be compelling to the world, but only when its followers live the politics of love with radical integrity and authenticity.

That, beloved, is the work that lies before us. As we gather on this and every day, are we willing to allow our own preferences, our own desires, our allegiance to anything that is not of God, to be crucified with Jesus? Are we willing to love our enemies, seek good for each other, embrace the millions on every side of the election who are poor and oppressed, repent of the ways our institutions, including our own church, collude in the lie that some lives are worth more than others? Are we willing to give away our own comfortable pew in order for someone else to have a seat at God's table?

The coming months and years will continue to be full of division and challenge. From where I stand, there is nothing more important any of us can give our one life to than joining the Spirit's project of healing our hurting and divided world with love. Giving ourselves up, and giving ourselves over to that love is the way to true, abundant, and everlasting life. Thanks be to God we have been invited into that work. Thanks be to God we have been given the gift of one another as Minnesota Episcopalians. Thanks be to God for each of you, who are precious, cherished, and loved so much more deeply than you can imagine.

Yours in the Way of Love,



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