Luke 6:20-31 All Saints 2016

by Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner

The day is finally upon us this Tuesday: Election Day.

This year, and it seems like forever,

has been one of the most contentious,

divisive presidential elections in years. Certainly in my lifetime.

I know we are all different places with this, but

I will admit to you I am heartily sick of it,

and I haven't watched much political news for the past few weeks.

After the first presidential debate,

I was so worked up about it,

I was not paying attention to Luke, 2 1/2 old son

as he brushed his teeth on the bathroom counter.

I was muttering rebuttals and opinions under my breath

when out of the corner of my eye, I saw Luke fall off the bathroom counter onto the floor.

he was ok, but as he cried and I comforted him and a bruise formed on his forehead,

I realized this was not worth it.

I refused any longer to be sucked in by the extreme threats and fear wielded by both sides.

too manipulative of my time, my emotions, and playing on my most selfish fears.

Jesus words from Scripture today called the "beatitudes"

As we enter the final countdown of this most polarized election season

I was struck by the extreme opposites that Jesus lifts up.

Apparently we haven't progressed as far as we would like to think we have.

2000 years ago without TV, internet, iPhones, electricity or flushing toilets

they still functioned in the same polarizing, extreme ways as we do today.

poor/rich

hungry/full

weep/laugh

hate/love

bless/curse

Beg/keep

Take/give

enemies/friends

winners/losers

They lived back then, like we do today.

As if polar opposites are our only options.

As if extremes are our only explanations.

As if a binary world is the only way to be & to understand ourselves, and to function.

Jesus tells us that it is not so among you.

Really these words are at the beginning of Jesus Inaugural address.

Sermon on Mount-Matthew

Sermon on Plain in Luke

Jesus says that people who believe in him and follow him

will blur the lines.

Doing ridiculous stuff

like praying for our enemies

turning our cheek,

giving to those who beg or take,

and the other impossible chore

of wanting all the good stuff I want for myself

for *those* people on the other side,

on the other extreme too.

Our church, Immanuel Lutheran, and our parent church body,

10,000 churches of the ELCA has a variety of political opinions.

We are not a red church or a blue church, but we are a purple church.

And I love that.

Because it keeps us honest with our selves and with each other.

We insist that both the bleeding heart liberal

and that die hard conservative

have sins and brokenness to confess.

We insist that both the bleeding heart liberal and the die hard conservative

have been created with at least

an itty-bitty, smidgen of the image of God.

Both the bleeding heart liberal and the die hard conservative

get a lot of things wrong, BUT

even begrudgingly, we can agree

God can still work through them to bless and serve God's world.

*At least I try to do that on my best days. I believe Lord, help my unbelief!*

This is what our Celebration of "All Saints" Sunday is about

Today, we don't celebrate

the superhuman faith

or the spiritual power of a select few.

Instead, We marvel and wonder

at God's ability to use deeply **faithful**,

yet deeply **flawed** people

to do ordinary acts of love and mercy and blessing.

Some of you remember our sister in Christ, Michele McGuirl,

who was member here at Immanuel for many years.

She recently moved to WA DC for her job.

Michele told me that she has been blessed

to provide housing to a woman from Afghanistan

who has been given asylum in the US

as a result of her work on behalf of our government.

Her name is Durani Waziri.

Michele describes her as a warm and courageous Muslim

who used her law degree to uncover how foreign aid to her country

was being misused by Afghanis and coalition forces.

Michele shared that Durani's sister and mother have long-term illnesses.

Durani had to deplete all her savings

for her sister to go to India for treatment of a neurological disorder.

Durani, the family breadwinner,

willingly sacrificed all her savings,

but she didn't know how she would make it

if she found refugee status in the US.

Durani's mom, a Muslim, told her that God would surely take care of her in America.

A day after Durani returned with her sister from India,

she received the communication from the US refugee center

with Michele's offer to host her in her home.

Durani and her mom felt this was an answer from God,

which is why she said yes with no reservations.

Michele said she was so humbled to learn of Durani's story

and for the opportunity to be an instrument of God's love.

Michele contacted me a few weeks ago, and asked if Immanuel

could spare two prayer shawls

that she could mail to Durani's mother and sister in Afghanistan.

*(Show one given to me for Luke or another one)*

Prayer shawls are knitted at home by folks from our church.

As they knit, they pray for the person who will receive the shawl.

Then we surround them with our prayers in worship

and anyone who knows someone in need of prayer for whatever reason,

can request one from church office.

Prayer shawls are one of the ways we create a community of care & connection.

We are low on prayer shawls right now, we have given so many away.

Lynn, our office manager and I, were brainstorming how we could find two to send.

It was within one or two days, That Nancy Marks approached me,

and asked what they could do with the two precious prayer shawls from Immanuel

that had once laid upon her mom,

Joy Fagenstrom, through the last days of life,

and upon Ron's mom,Shirley Marks, in the last days of her life.

I shared with her Durani's story and Michele's request.

And Ron & Nancy thought this could be a powerful way

to share the prayers of our church,

the faith of their mothers,

and our hope of unity through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Michele received the prayer shawls and thanked us that

they were "pre-loaded" with the love and wisdom

of these two faith-filled women and Immanuel's prayers.

Michele said, "The prayer shawls make a beautiful gesture

of interfaith love and support,

which is so desperately needed in these crazy times."

She said, I continue to be inspired and influenced by the faith of Immanuel's people.

We think we are connected to other people because of our extremes:

our political preferences

the color of our skin

our country of origin-Mexico or Norway or Afghanistan or America

Muslim or Christian or Jew

Jesus shows us another way. It is not red, it is not blue.

It is Jesus' way of doing unto others as we would have them do to us.

It is blessing people when they are

poor or sick or grieving or even seem to be our enemies.

It is God using deeply **flawed**, yet **faithful** people,

like Michele, like Ron, like Nancy, like Joy, like Shirley, like our knitters, and all of you

to blur the lines, to mix the colors together,

and help us all catch a glimpse of God's kingdom of shalom & peace among us now.

Our church cannot function in extremes.

We cannot mirror the polarities and binaries of the broader culture.

Our communion table, the Lord's Supper is a sign that God's Spirit

inspires us to live another way.

Somehow that table proclaims that though we may have

absolutely nothing else in common,

we are connected through forgiveness of our sin &

through the body and blood of the risen Jesus Christ.

Our feeble faith and our fervent hope

is that, all of that, somehow

saves us and frees us

so that we don't have to worry about tomorrow,

and it gives us some direction about

how to live and treat each other today

even in our confusing, polarized political climate.

We know we will fail at this again and again.

I can hardly believe Michele's generosity in opening her home, to a stranger. a muslim. from

Afghanistan that she knew very little about.

I barely let my own family come stay because I don't want to clean the toilets or do the dishes.

We live out Jesus' vision and God's kingdom only in part.

But what is impossible for us, is possible for God.

Finally, it is only God's Son, God's own heart,

God's very self that truly fulfills

the beautiful words of the beatitudes.

Jesus, who truly blurred the lines

of hate and love

of sin and forgiveness

of friend and enemy

when from the cross he forgave those who nailed him there.

and proclaimed peace to the disciples who abandoned him in the first place.

Jesus who truly blurred the colors

of death and life by rising again, wounded, yet alive.

Jesus who blurs the lines of

heaven and hell, saint and sinner

by promising you and me

that our Redeemer lives

and no matter what happens today or tomorrow or Tuesday

whether we are

Red or blue

winner or loser

friends or enemies

blessed or cursed

we will have a place with Christ

alongside all the other sinners

in the great mystical communion of saints forever. Amen.