***Dear Sisters and Brothers at All Saints:***

***One of five benchmarks of the ELCA’s Montana Synod, developed in 2012 to measure the work of the synod, was “promote unity.”***

***These words ring in my ears at the end of this week of the 2016 presidential election. I am deeply aware -- having stayed up a little too late on Tuesday night, glued to online reports -- of the divisions alive and well across our country. I am also aware that these divisions are alive and well here in Big Sky, and in our All Saints assembly.***

***But while division is a negative word, diversity is its companion. Every Sunday, when I look out over a congregation – All Saints in Big Sky, but before that, the Bratislava International Church, and before that First Lutheran Church in Plains – I try to open my eyes more fully to the diversity: diversity of politics, home-life, experience, background, and emotional state. There is always someone who comes to church at the top of the world, and in the pew behind is another person, worn down by a wretched week.***

***So it will be this Sunday: Some of our assembly will be deeply thankful for the choices made by the American electorate on election day; others will be distraught.***

***Yet here is the remarkable thing – and it makes me believe again in the power of the Holy Spirit – this Sunday and every Sunday, God brings us together, despite division and diversity, and makes us one. God gathers us in the one Triune Name; God announces to all of us one word of forgiveness; God makes our voices one in shared prayers and songs; and God re-forms us into the one body of Christ, in the sharing of Holy Communion.***

***Made one, we can go out again into the world and follow the advice of our 2Thessalonians reading: Brothers and sisters, do not weary in doing what is right.***

***And what is right? It is right to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. It is right to confess our failure to do both, and still keep trying. It is right to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick and in prison, to welcome the stranger. It is right to learn to dialogue with each other, across our differences, always with patience and compassion. It is right to promote unity, even as we acknowledge and celebrate the real diversity that exists in the church, our nation, and our world.***

***Grace and peace,***

***Pastor Miriam Schmidt***