26th Pentecost, Proper 28, Year C 1

November 13, 2016

Work, Pray, and Give

God of mercy and blessing, be with us in this sacred time of change. Turn our hearts to you, Lord, and show us your will. We ask in Jesus’ name. *Amen*.

Whew! What a week. An emotional roller coaster. No matter how each of us voted, we are all amazed and unsure of what comes next. Some of us are rejoicing. Some of us are in mourning. And some, my friends, are living in terror. The question for all of us is: What should we do now?

**The first step is: Don’t live in fear.** Let me tell you about one of our neighbors. Maybe you, too, have driven past this lovely cottage-style older house on your way downtown. A few years ago, it began its passage through progressive stages of neglect, until finally a tall board fence went up, making the property look like a fortress. With every election, large hand-lettered signs appeared on the fence. They went far beyond a preference for any candidate, and into dire warnings. Probably this neighbor thought he was showing his power. But he wasn’t. What his signs really spelled out was: **FEAR!** Fear screamed from every new post.

Yet despite his fear, none of his greatest terrors materialized. No one ever came for his guns. No Sharia law came to the U.S. The U.N. didn’t take over America and abolish our government. All white people weren’t jailed. All that *energy*, wasted on things that never were likely to happen. It was very sad. Fear led him far astray. Excessive fear doesn’t get us anything. It just sucks up energy that could be used in actually making the world a better place. Step one: Don’t live in fear.

**The second step is: avoid false prophets.** Our fears can seduce us into running after people who make big, unrealistic statements, good or bad. That neighbor was so caught in his fears that he lost his capacity to reason. The opposite can happen, too. We can get so lost in euphoria that we aren’t dealing well with reality. When I watched the first inauguration of Barack Obama in 2009, and saw those huge, ecstatic crowds on the Mall, churning with so many expectations, I knew that no human being could live up to the gigantic hopes that were being placed on this one mortal. I looked at the crowd and thought, “However you feel today, in two years, half of you will hate him.” And so it was. They turned that President into a false prophet by expecting the impossible of him. Some of us have gigantic expectations of our next President, too, and like the last one, he will not be able to fulfill them, even if he does his best. We must be prepared for this. Expecting too much of any President is creating a false prophet. He is bound to fail. Step two: Let go of unrealistic expectations. No false prophets.

We think we are at a new place in history, but we are not. We only have to turn to today’s gospel. Jesus foretells the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem — which to 1st-century Jews and Christians seemed to spell THE END.

Jesus talks about these same two steps. He says “Don’t fear!” Don’t fear – as that neighbor should not have let his fears run away with him. “The end is not yet,” Jesus tells us. True then, true now. Second, he warns about false prophets. When someone comes saying “I am he!” don’t follow them, Jesus says. When one person claims to be the new savior, they are not trustworthy. Only Jesus is the savior. A President is not a savior. He can’t solve everything. Only Jesus can do that. Step one: Don’t live in fear. Step two: No false prophets.

**Third, Jesus warns of danger. Sadly, not all fears are unrealistic. The danger we face now is real, just as it was in the 1st century.** Jesus cautioned that “before the end” — when justice comes back to earth – “they will arrest you and persecute you.” He warns “you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends.” It’s hard for us, safe here in this building, most of us middle-class and white, to understand the fear others are feeling. This election has stirred up terrible hatreds and encouraged violence. Our American way of life, our belief in liberty and justice for all, is truly in grave danger. We must not live in fear, but we must acknowledge what is actually happening.

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So many of us said, “Oh, it can’t happen here.” But horrible things have are happening. We must look reality squarely in the face. People are not “needlessly upset” because the other candidate didn’t win. In getting ready for this sermon, I came up with a depressing list of bad things happening around the country, but I’ve decided we don’t need to spend time on what is happening in New York or Texas. Let’s just look at what is happening in Montana. Here are some things far too close to home:

1. On Friday, a Salish-Kootenai tribal member, walking on the University of Montana campus, was assaulted by someone who said "you need to go back to where you came from, you Mexican, because Trump is president now." This isn’t hearsay; there were witnesses.
2. Nazi flyers have appeared in Missoula. The local rabbi has asked for police protection at the synagogue.
3. Right here in Great Falls, a gay teen was assaulted this week.

ALL THESE PEOPLE ARE OUR NEIGHBORS.

This is real. **Don’t look away**. We must face this darkness and hatred inside our fellow Americans. If we don’t want it to “happen here,” we must acknowledge what’s going on. Third step: We must recognize actual danger.

So, Jesus, we see it. Now what are we to do? He says, “By your endurance, you will gain your souls.” That means “keep going! Keep working!” **Fourth step: Endure. Don’t give up.**

1. Paul warns that salvation is not found in sitting around. We have a lot to do. Our endurance is to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom.
2. The Old Testament reading tells us what we must work for. We heard the prophet’s vision of “new heavens and a new earth” — justice and peace. Not glorious battle wins or tremendous wealth for rulers, it points instead to basic needs of every family being satisfied: a place to live, crops that thrive, and a good life span. Rather than oversized, impossible, flashy success for a few, it says the justice of God is in a simple, safe life for everyone. So that is what we must work toward.

First, don’t live in fear. Second, don’t follow false prophets (and don’t make the new President into one). Third, be aware of real dangers. And fourth, endurance. Keep working!

HOW shall we work? Above all, we must remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. Stand up for those who are not like you.

1. Be a witness, in public and in private, for fair treatment of everyone.
2. Join groups that work for justice and equality or promote fair health care. Attend meetings or just send $10.
3. Think the church should work for justice? Want this parish to be here to do that? We’re not meeting our budget, folks. We all need to increase our pledge.
4. Advocate for fair housing and enough food.
5. Volunteer for Family Promise or the Clothing Closet or FISH.
6. Don’t accept language that diminishes someone for being who they are.
7. Speak up when you hear hate speech.
8. Write our Congressman. Email our Senators.
9. Write a Letter to the Editor.
10. Go to a meeting. Join a committee.
11. Don’t like meetings? Start a book club or gather a few friends in your home, and together compose a monthly letter to someone who needs to listen.

Do not be silent! This is our work. This is our sacred duty. This is what we MUST do. This is how we make sure it *doesn’t* “happen here.”

We CAN do this work, because we aren’t alone. We can address the problems ahead of us because we are many, not one lonely individual. Jesus always spoke to people in community, asking them to work together. Together, we are strong. We are a tremendous force. We are the Body of Christ. We have the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Let’s see what the Church tells us. Let’s turn to our prayer books. Go to page 855, at the top.

Q: What is the mission of the Church?

A: The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Q: How does the Church pursue its mission?

A: The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace and love.

Q: Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A: The Church carries out is mission through the ministry of all its members.

And on the next page, we find out what our mission is. Turn to page 856, the third question down.

Q: What is the duty of all Christians?

A: The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

We can do that. With Christ’s help. Let us pledge to each other that as America changes, we will do these things.

**Don’t live in fear. No false prophets. Be aware of true danger. Keep working.**

Let’s say it together: We will, with God’s help.

Before closing, I want to share with you our Bishop’s reflection on this election. Here is a letter that he sent out this week.

From The Episcopal Diocese of Montana

November 10, 2016

We have just finishing a bruising and difficult election, one which has left many worried, fearful, and angry, and injured. I myself have never seen our country as divided and frustrated as it is at this moment.

This situation calls us to be aware especially of our identity and mission as the church. By virtue of Baptism we all are ambassadors of Jesus, and our mission to serve as agents of his resurrection and reconciliation.

I am convinced that we must dedicate ourselves anew to the ministry of prayer for our country and our leaders. In prayer we open ourselves to the transformative power of our Lord as we minister in our individual lives, in our churches, in our communities, and in our beloved country.

I am convinced that in our discussions with others, particularly those whose views differ from our own, we should treat them according to the command of Jesus, namely, that we love each other as he has loved us. This involves respectful and patient listening as well as charitable and sensitive expression of our ideas.

I am convinced that this election calls us to look deeply into ourselves and our congregations so that we become aware of the anger, self-interest, and racism that we harbor within and among ourselves. And then we can begin the difficult yet necessary spiritual discipline of rooting them out.

I am convinced that we need to lift up the virtue of the common good. Our current political process has encouraged us to make public decisions on the basis of what we individually will receive. But as Christians we know that caring about the welfare of the whole community, including refugees, is part of our vocation as Christ’s people. Justice, community, and peace flow from a commitment to the common good of all who have been created by God and for whom Christ became incarnate among us.

I pray for Christ’s blessing on our country in the difficult days ahead.

C. Franklin Brookhart

IX Bishop of Montana

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Remember our Canticle from today. “Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and **he** will be my Savior.” If fear troubles you, say it often. Then, go out and do the work he has given us to do, rejoicing in the Power of the Spirit.

*Amen.*

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