REFLECTIONS FROM BISHOP BOB HUMPHREY, Virginia Synod, ELCA
Reformation and All Saints festivals 2020

TIME FOR A "HALFTIME SPEECH!"

I believe this moment in our history is filled with both peril and promise. Our emotions are running high. Our energy low. We see the daily number of people infected with the novel coronavirus reach all-time highs. We await the results of very important national, state and local elections, and once again we feel the violent reaction to injustice across our beloved country. Add to these deep concerns news of raging fires and fierce storms and it can lead us into fear and fatigue.

But, no matter how weary, anxious or concerned we may be, we have reason for hope. Instead of getting caught up in and frozen by these understandable uncertainties, now is the time for the church to step forward and be a bold, clear voice of reassurance and inspiration to our congregations and communities. In other words, now is the time for a half-time speech!

I think many of you know of my enthusiasm for the Green Bay Packers – the team in the smallest community in the NFL with the most World Championships. See where I am going with this? As Lutheran Christians, we may seem small, but we have a huge heritage and big message!

Even if you don't follow sports, you know, one of the primary responsibilities of coaches is to rally the team at half-time and get them ready to meet the challenges of the second half of the game. Even if their team is ahead, they must urge them not to become complacent – to play hard for the full game.

Most experts in our country and around the globe agree that it will be another 7-8 months, at least (there may be "overtime" – who knows?) before an effective vaccine and treatment are widely available and accepted by the general population. Until then, we face opponents (the virus, unhealthy partisan politics, injustice, disasters) that are relentless and do not appear to be nearly as tired as we are. So, how can we, as followers of the only One who has met every challenge and risen victorious, reassure and calm ourselves, our beloved congregations and communities in which we live, work and serve?

Unlike some coaches of beleaguered and untalented teams, our reassurances are not empty. We really are the bearers of a divine truth that nothing "in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!" (Romans 8:38) Nothing!

Think of all the challenges followers of Jesus have faced throughout history; think of the challenges Martin Luther faced in the Reformation; think of all the Saints who have faced famine, global depressions, world wars and disease and disasters in the past. We really do have an amazingly talented and resilient team and wonderful Good News and truth to share!

We like to say in the ELCA, "We Are Church Together." So, let's rally to meet all the challenges before us – together. Whatever our political stripes, age or identity, we are all the body of Christ and individually members of it (cf. 1 Corinthians. 12: 27). We have so much to offer one another and the world right now.

So, let us remain vigilant. Put on the protective equipment of our faith (cf. Ephesians 6: 10-20), as well as our face masks, physical distancing, digital worship, careful cleaning and other ways of loving our neighbor. Together we really will make a difference… Let's GO Team!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! Amen.