

As I texted with my brother in Montana on Wednesday morning following the recent presidential election, he wryly responded to the query of how he was doing with, “So, the Canadian Immigration Website has crashed. . .” In response to the same question, my sister living in St. Paul, MN, offered, “Well, Minnesota elected Jesse Ventura as governor and we survived.” While these exchanges clearly betray my siblings’ political leanings—and they may not play well with my other brother in Fargo and others who voted for the president-elect, Donald J. Trump—a little levity was welcome.

Clearly, there was far too little levity throughout the whole campaign. And with the election result another odd recurring theme of a split electoral college vote and a popular vote, it is equally clear that we seem more and more divided in this country. The threads that connect us continue to fray. However, what I want to say in this piece is that precisely at this divisive moment, we need to actively engage the work of binding together the fraying of our public discourse, interchange, and action. For those who opposed the election of Donald J. Trump, this is not the end of the world. And for those who voted for him to be the 45th president of the United States, there is much work that remains so that what Martin Luther recognized as the fundamental task of government—the care of its citizenry—may thrive.

Indeed, I think the model for this type of action occurred in what, perhaps, embodied the best part of the whole election: the remarks following the vote. The acceptance speech of Mr. Trump, the concession speech of Mrs. Clinton, and the remarks of President Obama all expressed the better aspects of our nature. They were complimentary in their acknowledgment of the strong competition and highlighting the need for unity now; they were conciliatory in accepting the outcome of the election and wishing the best for the victor; and they underscored the need for a smooth transition from one administration to the next. It would be easy to launch into vitriol and sour grapes on the part of the loser. It would be equally easy to gloat and humiliate on the part of the winners. Instead, these were moments where the tapestry that is the beauty of this country and its citizenry was on full display for the world to recognize we can come together. That is our task.

Of course, actions speak louder than words, and what follows in the coming weeks, months, and years will say a great deal about the substance of the graciousness and humility of acceptance and concession. Yet, rather than expect the worst, we need to take a deep breath, listen to what is being said, and find places where we have common cause. Invariably, the contentiousness of these political races can make it extremely difficult to remain open to what the other will say. Yet, our work, to a certain extent, needs to be about remaining open in the concentric circles of the relationships of our lives: self, family, friends, community, state, nation, and world.

Raising the various levels of our commitment presents the complexity that is our life. The difficulty of ascertaining clearly what is good for self and the multiple others that we meet in many real ways and the growing virtual pathways of life is hard. Indeed, united does not mean that we all believe the same thing or subscribe to the same principles or possess similar passions. United is something that transcends all those categories that we use to define ourselves and those around us. United moves us to another plane of existence, where we recognize connection beyond the cosmetic or aesthetic, beyond the routine or regular, beyond the identities and affinities that immediately arise within our lives. United moves us to recognize a larger world, a deeper bond that holds us together, and a force that forces the features we favor to fade so that our felicitous unity might prevail.

Pollyanna? Naïve? Pie-in-the-sky? Certainly there are the cynics on all sides who would say

so. Yet, I believe that this is the very work that we are about, precisely because we are Christians. We know what this transcendent unity looks like. We do not make the world over into our image or demand allegiance to our creed. Rather, we are part of a tradition that profoundly grasps the idea of unity that transcends our differences. Our baptismal covenant is the place where we acknowledge this. We come together in all of our diversity and variation not because we are the same and hold similar views or possess similar histories or can relate because of our similar lifestyles. We come together trusting that there is something that binds us together that is so much bigger than we are individually and collectively. However, this reality calls us to be together and to see the mark of the Holy or the image of Christ imprinted in those whom we meet. We continue to wrestle with how best to live individually and collectively, but our vision of the world and the other is irrevocably altered. We are one with others because of the grace that has permeated all of our lives.

Of course, this does not mean that we then can rest on the laurels of such grace. Rather, this perception of the world and our unity means that we are given strength, courage, hope, and love to engage the very world that God has planted us in to bear more of that grace to a world sore in need of it, to live more fully into the unity that God has already given, and to continue to seek and serve Christ in each person and respect the dignity of every human being. From where I sit, there is no better time to do this than the present.