

From the Bishop

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A Special Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Hawai'i

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“Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.”

*“An Outline of the Faith commonly called the Catechism”
of The Book of Common Prayer, page 848*

My dear Siblings in Christ Jesus,

As Christians, we have been challenged in recent days by wars in Palestine/Israel and Ukraine. The events in Venezuela have brought into question the world order and the possibility of more military action. The threat of the government of the United States to acquire Greenland “the easy way” or “the hard way” is frightful. There are struggles and disagreements about the Administration’s use of Federal agents and troops for immigration enforcement on the streets of cities in the United States that only produces fear and division.

The tragedy of the killing of Renee Nicole Good adds to the anguish of our times. The Bishop of Minnesota, the Right Reverend Craig Loya, offers a profound reflection of that tragic event:

As people of the Epiphany, our call is to stand in the midst of a world where Herod continues to flex and posture, not in outrage or with reciprocal violence, but gazing in wonder and expectation for the joyful manifestation of Jesus wherever the poor, the outsider, the weak, and the oppressed are to be found. As people of the Epiphany, in the midst of a world where cruelty tries to pose as power, we continue to rejoice in the assurance that absolute and final power resides in poor and crucified Jesus, who alone is the true king. Our Epiphany joy is not some naive and shallow notion that everything will be ok, when everything is so obviously not ok. Our Epiphany joy is the deep, defiant, revolutionary hope we have in the assurance that love is the most powerful force in the universe. (Read the full message at [Minnesota bishop invokes story of Herod in statement lamenting ICE killing of woman](#))

The call for a full and impartial investigation into the killing of Ms. Good is essential to rebuild our sense of the common good. It is also important for the sake of ICE agent Jonathan Ross. It is necessary for all our sakes.

More deeply, as the followers of Christ Jesus, we call our nation’s leaders back from divisive rhetoric and government sanctioned aggression. The immediate use of language vilifying Ms. Good and suggesting some type of nefarious conspiracy without an investigation only increases the divisions and mistrust. Further, the current obsession with destructive military might and

threats of violence (domestically and internationally) creates a world of fear. It is demonic and promises destruction.

In a recent interview with *The New York Times* published on Thursday (January 8, 2026), President Trump made significant comments about restraints on his use of power and moral decision-making. When asked whether there were any limits on his global powers, Trump stated that his personal morality and judgment are the only constraints on his authority to order military actions worldwide. Specifically, he said: “Yeah, there is one thing. My own morality. My own mind. It’s the only thing that can stop me.” This example of egoism actually empowers everyone to do what is “right in their own eyes.” (Judges 17:6) There is no system of morality other than the whim of the self and the raw power to enforce one’s will.

I began this message with a quote from the Episcopal Church’s Catechism on sin. I admit that I do have an understanding of human sin as a constant reality of our nature. The Catechism also teaches that “We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God.” It is in our freedom, however, that “[f]rom the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices.... [b]ecause we rebel against God, and we put ourselves in the place of God.” (See “An Outline of the Faith commonly called the Catechism” of The Book of Common Prayer, page 845)

These times have drawn me deeper into prayer and Bible study. I have particularly found the Book of Lamentations and the Prophet Micah to help me engage our times. I have also spent more time studying the Revelation to John. This last book in our Bible is an apocalyptic document with images grounded in both the Hebrew Scripture and the Ancient Near East. I don’t think it is a prediction of the future. It is a response to the needs and actions of a group of Christian communities in the Asia Minor (modern Turkey). These Christians lived in Hellenistic cities that had a history of deifying the ruling emperor (Greek and then Roman). It was part of a person’s civic duty to offer a sacrifice and join in eating the meat offered as sacrifice. It was part of being resident in the city. John, the author of Revelation, is challenging comfortable Christians facing pressure to fall in line with their families and neighbors. The early Christians were under pressure to conform even to the point of violence, but it is generally the struggle to be both a follower of Jesus Christ in the face of a system that deifies power and wealth. The amazing images of Revelation were both a call to hold fast to God and the promise that all shall be well.

Michael Gorman suggests that the key is understanding the Emperor cult is distorted reality:

It makes blind, unquestioning allegiance appear to be freely chosen, religiously appropriate devotion. The grand lie does not appear to start as deception, but only as rhetorical exaggeration. The exaggeration deepens, lengthens, and broadens in an almost organic act of self-distortion. Eventually the rhetoric becomes a blatant falsehood, but now people have not only come to believe the lie, they also live the lie; over time they have been narrated into it. At that point, the exaggeration-turned-falsehood becomes uncontested and uncontestable truth, and its effects highly dangerous. Evil in the name of good and of God is now nearly inevitable, as the lie functions as an apocalypse, a religious revelation that only a true Apocalypse can unveil. (Gorman, Michael J., *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation*, [Wipf and Stock, 2011, p. 169], Kindle Edition)

The corruption of life is making the material (an individual, a nation, military power, money, etc.) into your god. It is living a lie as the truth. “The problem with some of John’s readers is that some influential congregational leaders bought the claims of empire (that it is truly powerful) and argued that Christians should accommodate to those claims. Later on, in Revelation 13, John will see visions that illustrate just how impressive Rome seemed. However, the visions will reveal that that power is not life-giving power as claimed by Rome (and by those in the churches who wanted to be at home in the empire).” (Grimsrud, Ted. *To Follow the Lamb: A Peaceable Reading of the Book of Revelation*, [Cascade Books, 2022, p. 77], Kindle Edition)

It is basic human sin to seek “our own will instead of the will of God.” When it is embodied in the policies and practices of the leaders of a nation, we are in a dangerous place. We again face a time when military might is glorified for the sake of war and material conquest, when rhetoric of anger and hate is actually public policy and flows from the lips of our nation’s leaders, and morality is reduced to the whim of an individual.

What shall we do as the followers of Jesus Christ? “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:12)

We must not follow into the rhetoric of anger and hate. Our actions must be peaceful and respectful. As Jesus teaches in the Gospel of Matthew: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48)

We must gather and pray. We must study the Scripture. As Episcopalians, we can keep up to date on the teaching of our Church. We will speak truth with love. For some, it will mean attending peaceful protests. For some, it will mean engaging in peaceful civil disobedience. For some, it will include engaging our elected representatives. I hope we will support one another. I hope we will all keep up to date with the events of our local communities, the nation, and the world understanding them in light of the Gospel. We must not judge others. “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5)

The days ahead will not be easy. I do my best – albeit in my limited way – to hold fast to the Franciscan values of living the Gospel through radical love, humility, simplicity, and service, emphasizing peace, justice, and reverence for all creation. It can be summarized by the Franciscan motto "*Pax et Bonum*" (Peace and All Good). The key principles are solidarity with the poor, communal life, ongoing personal conversion, and seeing all people and nature as family, fostering joy, compassion, and justice.

John in the Revelation gives the promise that all shall be well: “They will hunger no more and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:16-17) These words offer hope in times that seem hopeless. They keep us focused on the source of our hope: Christ Jesus.

Finally, we must continue to pray: pray for Renee Nicole Good and her family, pray for Jonathan Ross, pray for those that threat deportation, pray for those who protest, pray for the Federal agents, pray for the President, pray for the United States, pray for the world, pray for peace.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:7-9)

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart and especially the hearts of the people of the United States, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko mākou Haku,
+Bob

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