

The Diocese of Nebraska

The Right Reverend J. Scott Barker, Bishop
109 North 18th St. Omaha NE 68102



November 6, 2020

Beloved in Christ –

This past week, nearly 150,000,000 million votes were cast in the election of our new president, the largest turnout for a US election in over 100 years. At the time I write to you, our votes are still being counted, and the result of the election is not 100% sure. It is likely the outcome will not be certified for days or weeks, as lawsuits and recounts play out.

So let me be clear that for the purposes of this short letter, it makes no difference who wins the presidential election. My aim is to encourage you to follow Jesus no matter who becomes president, or in what direction the political winds of this country might blow in the months and years to come. I write to you not as Republicans and Democrats, nor even as citizens of the United States. I write to you as disciples of Jesus Christ.

As disciples of Jesus, we are a people called to kindness and goodwill, including loving others as ourselves and even loving our enemies. Yet for too long now we have allowed partisan media and predatory commercial interests to influence our hearts and minds with false narratives about who our neighbors are and what our neighbors believe. We have allowed ourselves to be poisoned, and that poison – the lies we are told and have come to embrace about our neighbors – have transformed us like Dr Jekyll into creatures who too often think and act out of anger and fear rather than grace and hope.

As disciples of Jesus, we are a people called to seek out the person of Christ in the poor and the marginalized, and to sacrificially care for others. Yet heartbreakingly, our addiction to comfort and our selfish and fearful grasping at whatever little wealth we have, has rendered us unwilling and unable to follow after the one who taught that caring for the least is the way to the kingdom of heaven, and that using our money to enrich the lives of others is among the most deeply faithful ways that we can follow after him.

As disciples of Jesus, we are a people called to make no peace with oppression, and as this morning's collect reminds us, "to destroy the works of the devil." Yet like too many generations who have gone before, we daily succumb to the temptations of the evil one, compromising our own cherished moral standards and even the faith we hold dear. We support deeply flawed public policies because they advance our own narrow, political interests. We excuse unconscionable behavior on the part of our leaders. Since, "nobody's perfect," why should expect more?

Well, we should expect more. Of our country, of our leaders and of ourselves. We can do better. We can *be* better.

Half of the those who voted in this election – fully half – will be disappointed in the result. And while there have been many close elections before, this moment is noteworthy because the chasm of the divide between those who voted for different candidates is presently so great, that we've already given up hope on finding common ground in the next chapter of our national life. Indeed, our political leaders are already making plans to continue to sew division between us, and to stop at nothing to annihilate the other side.

This is not who we are called to be my sisters and brothers. This is not how we are called to act. And in the kingdom to which we have pledged your deepest allegiance and our best selves, this is not how citizens behave.

You are beloved: cherished of God, known by your name, and assured of God's companionship in the person of Jesus across every precious moment of your life.

You are provisioned: not with everything you need to make your way alone and in comfort, but with gifts and treasure to share, so that you can play your essential part in building a beloved community where all are fed, cared for and able to flourish.

And you are called: as followers of the one true God, who becomes incarnate in the person of Jesus and bids us to follow after him by loving boldly, caring deeply, forgiving limitlessly ... and bravely battling together against any form of evil including in the ones we chose to lead us, and in ourselves.

As the results of this election become clear, let us pledge ourselves to acting first and foremost as disciples of Jesus:

By holding our leaders to account,

By loving all our neighbors with determination and grace,

By embracing God's greatest gift and the deepest truth we know, that Jesus Christ comes into our lives to save us from the evil that is in the world in that is in ourselves...

That if we truly know and love and follow after him, we have nothing in the world to fear.

Faithfully Yours in Christ –

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a small cross-like symbol followed by the initials 'JSB' in a cursive style.

*The Right Reverend J. Scott Barker, Bishop
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