

Who Will We Be On Wednesday?

Today (Sunday) is All Souls Day, *Día de los Muertos*, a moment spent between the worlds, which feels eerily fitting, because Election Day is tomorrow (Tuesday). This week feels like we are careening from an unnerving present into an unknown and frightening future -- whatever the outcome of the election. There are dire predictions everywhere -- again, whatever the outcome. And there's the distinct possibility that we will be stuck for a time in another, deeper level of limbo -- or is it purgatory? -- than the one we've inhabited now for months. Who will pray us out of this??? (And who will bring us marigolds and *ofrendas* if it goes badly?)



Traditional altar decorations for Día de los Muertos. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

What will we do if . . . if the outcome is not what we hope (and in our big tent, different people hope for very different things)? What will we do if . . . if "the other side" doesn't accept whatever it is? What will we do if . . . if people behave badly -- very badly? What will we do if . . . if the "victors" are cruel to the "defeated," or vice versa?

As a bishop in The Episcopal Church writing to my sibling Episcopalians, I would offer my own answer. Whatever unfolds, what I will do first is remember who I am, and who each other person in this crazy mess is. I am a child of God, a follower of Jesus. So are you. And so are "those people." (Well, they're children of God, whether or not they claim to be followers of Jesus.)

Like you, I have made vows. The vows made at my baptism were clarified in a "new" prayer book some years later, and like you, I have repeated them time and again, several times a year, for decades. After I renounced Satan, evil, and sin as any way to organize my life, I accepted Jesus as Savior, put my WHOLE trust in his grace and love, and promised to follow and obey him as my Lord. I made those vows, and you made those vows. In doing so, we announced to God, and to the great congregation, who we are, and how we would make decisions for the rest of our lives.[i]

We have promised -- again and again -- that we will, even this week:

- Respect each human individual as made in the image of God. No exceptions.
- Devote our time and resources to work for justice for all.

- Act as a peacemaker in a world of anger and violence.
- Consider people from every race, nation, culture, gender, and religion our equal.
- Look behind the masks and distortions of this world to find the divine spark in each person.
- Live in a way that shows the world how everybody can live into God's dream.
- Talk about how God's love for the world is concretely revealed in the life, death, resurrection, and teachings of Jesus.
- Continue to admit the ways we have failed in following Christ, and try again each time.
- Resist the forces and impulses that seek to harm, destroy, or denigrate people or God's creation.
- Remain connected to our community of faith, learn from authoritative spiritual teachers, and maintain deep conversation with God.[ii]

What will we do as this election unfolds, come what may? We will BE the People of God. That's not Pollyanna poppycock. That's the hardest job anybody will be doing this week. We will keep our vows to the Almighty and most merciful God. We will be the people in this stressed and straining nation who bind up the wounds of strangers. We will be the people who pray for our enemies and bless those who curse us. We will be the people who show by example that breaking bread triumphs over breaking news. We will be the people who, amidst the chaos and confusion, never forget the least, the lost, the lonely, and the otherwise unloved. We will be the people who look behind the red and the blue and the rhetoric to see the human beings who are the other half or so of the human family that lives in this country. Because the truth is, either we all win, or we all lose. Either we make the world a better place for all its inhabitants, or we all suffer. And only the unselfish, sacrificial, steadfast, hardworking love that Jesus showed us how to share can heal the pain of these days.

The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. The Church pursues its mission as its members pray and worship, tell the story of the Good News of God as revealed in Christ, and promote justice, peace, and love.[iii] A pretty tall order any week, and a matter of life and death for the nation this week.

In the immortal words of Jake and Elwood Blues:

Jake: Me and the Lord, we got an understanding.

Elwood: We're on a mission from God.

Jake: We're getting the band back together.

Elwood: We're on a mission from God.

Jake: Matt, we're puttin' the band back together.

Elwood: You gotta understand; this is a lot bigger than any domestic problems you may be experiencing.

Jake: Would it make you feel better if you knew that what (I'm) asking (you) to do is a holy thing?



Elwood: You see, we're on a mission from God.

Jake: The Lord works in mysterious ways.

Elwood: Yup. [iv]

My friends, we're are on a mission from God. It's going to be a busy week for the Church, and a moment of truth about whether we are who we have said we are. The Lord works in mysterious ways, even using us. Shall we begin upon our knees?

Almighty God, to whom we must account for all our powers and privileges: Guide the people of the United States in the election of our President, Vice President, officials, and representatives; that, by faithful administration and wise laws, the rights of all may be protected and our nation be enabled to fulfill your purposes; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Elwood, behind the wheel: It's 106 miles to Chicago; we got a full tank of gas, half a pack of cigarettes, it's dark, and we're wearing sunglasses.

Jake: Hit it. [v]

God bless us all, every one.

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[i] Book of Common Prayer p.304

[ii] Book of Common Prayer pp.304-305 (read from the bottom up).

[iii] Book of Common Prayer p. 822

[iv] "The Blues Brothers". Turner Classic Movies. Atlanta: Turner Broadcasting System (Time Warner).

[v] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4YrCFzoKfc>