

Rev. C. Kevin Gillespie

Sermon on Healing the Nation

Holy Trinity Catholic Church, November 8, 2024

We gather tonight as fellow Americans facing governmental changes and as Christians seeking God's presence amidst the changes ahead. Whatever our political persuasion these changes will be disruptive; for many fearful, shocking and saddening.

One local wise figure, Dan Kerns, sent out a missive on Wednesday morning, which read:

I am challenging myself to not see yesterday's results as a red or blue scorecard or from the perspective of "left" or "right" as employed in reference to political leanings. Rather, I am trying to consider the more everyday use of "left" and "right." What's "left;" that is, what remains and needs to be done after a campaign that was as divisive as any in current memory. What is "right;" should be understood within the context of what is correct, ethical and best supports the enduring values of our nation as we chart a way into the future.

(N.B.: Kerns' full text appears at the end of this sermon)

The readings we have heard offer us a sense of what is left to be done and what is right to do. The passage from Isaiah 58 offers an urgent and clear message for us today as we face profound polarization in our nation and deep divisions in our communities. Isaiah calls us to a way of living that goes beyond rituals and appearances, challenging us to seek real justice, mercy, and healing for all people. Through these verses, God reveals that healing and hope come not from words alone, but through action—through compassion, empathy, and justice that reflect the heart of God.

Meanwhile, the reading from Jeremiah were words spoken to the people of Israel as they endured exile in Babylon, a time when they felt displaced, alienated, and hopeless. Tonight, we may feel a similar sense of exile in our own society, facing unprecedented division and discord. We find

ourselves in a polarized world, where many feel isolated, unheard, or even hostile toward one another. But just as God's words encouraged the people of Israel to look forward in hope, they remind us that even in seasons of division, God has a plan for peace and restoration.

This message invites us to move from division to healing, from conflict to unity, and from despair to hope.

Thirdly, in Mark 4:35-41, we encounter a scene that resonates deeply in times of uncertainty and disappointment. Jesus and his disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee when a sudden, violent storm arises. Waves crash into the boat, and the disciples, gripped with fear, wake Jesus, crying out, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus stands, rebukes the wind, and says to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" The storm ceases, and there is complete calm. Turning to his disciples, Jesus asks, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

In this passage, we see the disciples' fear and uncertainty as they face forces beyond their control. Their reaction is so relatable—they are overwhelmed, feeling perhaps abandoned, wondering if their teacher cares. But Jesus' response to the storm and to their fears is one of quiet, reassuring strength. He brings calm not only to the seas but also to their troubled hearts, reminding them of his presence and power.

In light of recent events, some may feel a sense of sadness, confusion, or frustration, much like the disciples felt in that storm. In times like these, we can take comfort in knowing that even when circumstances feel turbulent, God's presence is with us, guiding us through.

Jesus' rebuke of the storm demonstrates that our God is sovereign over all things. This doesn't mean that everything will always align with our desires or expectations, but it does mean that we can trust in a peace that surpasses understanding—a peace not dependent on any earthly condition. Jesus invites us to move from fear to faith, to ground ourselves not in the shifting tides of worldly events but in the assurance of God's unwavering love and purpose.

In this respect, Dan Kerns finds comfort in the words of St. Francis de Sales – who in facing the storms of his day, wrote:

“We shall steer safely through every storm, as long as our heart is right, our spirit fervent, our courage steadfast, and our trust fixed on God. If at times we are stunned by the tempest, never fear. Take a deep breath and start afresh.”

Friends...these scriptural passages, our hymns, and our presence with one another this evening, all remind us of the call to community. The disciples were not alone in the storm; they faced it together, leaning on one another and, ultimately, on Jesus. Today, we too are called to support one another, especially when some in our community feel weary or discouraged. We may not agree on every issue, but we are bound by our shared calling to be peacemakers, to embody compassion, and to uphold the dignity of every person as made in God’s image.

And that is one of the purposes of our gathering tonight: that we do not face the storms ahead of us and our nation alone. As fellow Americans, and as fellow Christians we can face them together, prayerfully and practically.

In this respect, Kerns remind us:

President Lincoln, who served in some our most tempestuous times, provides us with an equally eloquent way to consider our differences and the obligations of citizenship. In his first inaugural address, he wrote, “We are not enemies but friends. Though passion may strain, it cannot break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot’s grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, will yet swell the chorus of our union, when touched again by the better angels of our nature.” We are now called to invoke these “better angels” so America can endure, prevail, and excel.

Allow me to conclude with an image...an adaptation, if you will, of the Japanese pottery practice of kintsugi (literally, *gold seams*). It is a traditional repair method that takes the broken or chipped parts of cherished vessels, glues them back together with a Japanese lacquer, and paints the seams with gold or silver powder.

Some years ago at my ordination, I had my own experience of this ritual. You see, for several years when I studied theology in Berkeley, California I ministered to a group called *The Beginning Experience*. They were individuals who were experiencing a significant loss, whether through death, marital separation, or divorce. With separated, divorced and widowed individuals in the San Francisco Bay Area...each of them had experienced a significant loss.

For an ordination present they gave me a plate with the words of St. Paul, “Rooted and grounded in love” inscribed on it. When I left the Bay Area, I sent it by mail to my new placed of ministry in Pennsylvania. When it arrived, however, it was broken in several pieces. As you may imagine I was quite distraught about it being broken. In response to my sense of loss, my *Beginning Experience* friends sent me a different plate with the same words inscribed on it. While the broken plate was not repaired, the new plate, nevertheless, had the inscribed words, “Rooted and grounded in love.”

I offer this image to suggest this is where we are as a nation. We are broken and it will take some time to grieve...and it may take a very long time. We may, nevertheless, hope that our nation will arrive at a place where the loss we may feel tonight will be transformed into a more just and peaceful society.

From Dan Kerns, former President of the Father McKenna Center, and former Head of School at Georgetown Visitation:

Dear Friends,

“We shall steer safely through every storm, as long as our heart is right, our spirit fervent, our courage steadfast, and our trust fixed on God. If at times we are stunned by the tempest, never fear. Take a deep breath and start afresh.” – St. Francis DeSales

The long Election of 2024 is over.....the voters have spoken and now it is time to move forward. While some votes remain to be counted, it is apparent that former President Trump will return to office. Given the polar opposites the campaign engendered, half our nation celebrated a win for their candidate today, while the other half of the electorate faced the day dazed, contending with feelings of anger, anxiety, uncertainty and even a sense of palpable fear. I know that I have family and dear friends at all points on this spectrum. My hope is that these emotions are temporary, for neither euphoria nor despair are productive to the challenges that lie before us.

I am challenging myself not see yesterday’s results as a red or blue scorecard or from the perspective of “left” or “right” as employed in reference to political leanings. Rather, I am trying to consider the more everyday use of “left “ and “right”. What’s “left;” that is, what remains and needs to be done after a campaign that was as divisive as any in current memory. What is “right;” should be understood within the context of what is correct, ethical and best supports the enduring values of our nation as we chart a way into the future.

What is left? At its core, America is very similar today to what it was yesterday. The Earth still spins on its axis, the sun rose this morning over Breton Bay, the Capitol still stands, the American values we embraced yesterday remain and God is still in the heavens. The election provided us with an outcome, not a catastrophe. But that is not to soften the urgency of the moment. It is disappointing that character did not seem to matter. Statesmanship lost to self interest, noble purpose to expediency. The issues at the heart of the campaign discussions remain. We continue to face a crisis at the border, thousands are still cleaning up from natural

disasters due to climate change, many face economic inequities and lack adequate health care, and the marginalized remain at the fringes of society. The impassioned positions of the campaign were not settled nor diminished. Those who feel that their positions were not heard must continue to advocate with the same determination within the new landscape and structure; but collaboratively as partners, rather than partisans.

What is right? Our nation remains.....fractured yet strong, divided yet hopeful, filled with promise and potential. Campaign partisanship, as reflected in the hot glow of political rhetoric, must be put aside for authentic, informed, and thoughtful discussion on the issues. Successful candidates need to accept victory with humility and accountability, while defeated candidates need to accept the outcome with grace. No one wins if the nation cannot move towards a peaceful transition and without a commitment to finding a common ground and the common good that provides all citizens, and those who wish to become one, a voice and the opportunity for a full, free and productive life.

We need to remain confident in the goodness of the American People. As citizens and as a people of faith, we are all now called to the challenges of the day....to cure the divisiveness, to bridge the divisions, to be people of optimism, renewal and hope. We have weathered this challenge before. Historian Jon Meachem writes in today's New York Times, "America has always been shaped by the tension between hope and fear, justice and injustice, grace and rage. Whether the good prevails against the bad, whether we move closer to the promises of the Declaration, or away from it, is contingent on the habits of the heart and mind of a sufficient number of Americans, both in power and far from it."

President Lincoln, who served in some our most tempestuous times, provides us with an equally eloquent way to consider our differences and the obligations of citizenship. In his First Inaugural Address he wrote: "We are not enemies but friends. Though passion may strain, it cannot break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory stretching from every battlefield and patriot's grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, will yet swell the chorus of our Union, when touched again by the better angels of our nature." We are now called to invoke these "better angels" so can America has endure, prevail and excel.

I feel our moment calls for healing, renewal, and some prayer. The saint and sage, Francis DeSales, whose quote opened this reflection and who himself navigated complex political issues in his time, provides a prayerful reminder for us today and as we approach the next few days and weeks.

“Do not look forward in fear to the changes in life. Rather, look to them in full hope that as they arise, God, whose very own you are, will lead you safely through all things.

Do not fear what will happen tomorrow.
The same everlasting God who cares for you today
Will care for you then and everyday.
He will either shield you from all suffering or
give you unfailing strength to bear it.

Be at peace then and put aside all
anxious thoughts and imaginations.”

Sincerely and in hope,

Dan