In Christ

Sermon by the Rev. Bernadette Hartsough

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In the Episcopal Church we value and welcome differences of opinions. Differences are our strength if we embrace them, we love and respect.

Hurt, angry, frustrated, anxious, fearful, relief, joyful, exultated, exuberant

These are some of the feelings felt by our church family this week after the election. Part of my job as your pastor is to attend to your feelings and the overall climate of the church. I cannot preach as if everything is fine when I know some of you are hurting. We do not leave our feelings and concerns at the church door. We bring them to God. They are a part of us and God wants them.

I do not normally preach on politics however politics govern how we are in the world. Political systems determine how we get basic services and how we live in this place in this time. We cannot say politics has nothing to do with religion. Politics create the structures on earth in which we live in communities, towns, and cities. Governments affect our freedoms and our rights to worship freely. For many in 2024, politics is their identity over and above everything else.

So, I am going to attempt to preach on some of the politics that are affecting our church community-this Body of Christ at St. Thomas/ Santo Tomás. It is not my desire to offend anyone. I care for all of you deeply. It is because of my care and concern that I think it is important to preach this sermon. I ask you to listen with love and open ears and hearts. Please put aside all the derogatory rhetoric you have heard about each political party. I will attempt to summarize what I have heard from each side then some thoughts on how we stay committed to each other. As I summarize, I know that not All democrats and Republicans agree on all issues. This is an overview.

First let’s talk about the hurt, anger, frustration anxiety and fear that many Democrats and Independents feel. These feelings are a result of the election outcome. President Elect Trump has used language that demeans women, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ persons. He has said that he would reform the government, close the border, and deport illegal immigrants. These words have instilled fear and anxiety in many people. There is fear for our brothers and sisters that are from Latin America. Fear that even if you are here legally you will be targeted because of your appearance and dialect. I have heard fear of losing health insurance, social security, and the right of a woman to make decisions about her body and her unborn baby. And most importantly they fear that total control of the government by one person or one party will lead to a fall in our American Republic.

Now let’s talk about others, mostly Republicans who feel relief, joy and exuberance. People are tired of inflation and struggling to work and not have enough money. Inflation has hit hard. Young families struggle to pay high rents and buy a house. They are tired of the government spending resources on people who come here illegally. They believe America should take care of her own first. They are tired of liberal government policies being pushed on them. Many on this side believe that the government has the right to restrict abortion because abortion is a type of murder. And most importantly they believe President Elect Trump will protect us from other countries attacking us.

All these concerns are valid because they are important to some of us. All or some of them may come true. All or some of them may be exaggerated. So, what can we do as Christians, as a part of the Body of Christ living in this political situation?

First, we remember who we are to this church and to each other. We have been baptized, marked as one of Christ’s own forever. We are family. We respect the feelings and needs of each other. Even though politics affects our daily life, we cannot let it blind us to who we are in Christ. Serving and loving God and others MUST come first. Being a Democrat, Independent, or Republican is NOT our main identity.

Second, we must remember that everything we have and are come from God. We see that in today’s gospel passage. Jesus compares the widow that gives all that she had compared to others giving out of their abundance or what they had left over after they paid their bills. Jesus wants us to give all of ourselves to being Christian-to following him. That means that we don’t use God or religion to justify the hate of others even when we disagree.

Third, we trust in Christ to be with us, to mourn with us, to be joyful with us but also to transfigure the world. We may not see the transfiguration in our lifetime. There may be tough days ahead. Change is always hard but, in the end, we take one day at a time, one step at a time. We make space to hold the ones in our community that are hurt, and suffering and we listen to understand their pain even if we disagree with them. We continue to promote justice and dignity of all persons and are vigilant about keeping our government leaders; locally and nationally accountable for the same. This is not party politics; it is what it means to be Christian.

I want to end with the closing prayer of Eucharistic prayer A.

“All this we ask through your son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever, AMEN”. Page 363.

All the Eucharistic prayers end with similar words. These words are asking God to accept all our requests. They remind us of our place with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is by Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus through the Holy Spirit that we live in God. All of us as Christians. We are united by the Holy Spirit. Please say this prayer with me now and I will ask you to say it again with me at the end of the Eucharistic prayer.