



# SAINT MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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November 6, 2024

Aloha kākou,

I'm writing this in response to the election outcome from yesterday. I know that many of us are harboring heavy feelings (and that some of us might be harboring positive feelings). I also assume that many of us are looking for answers and guidance from a spiritual leader at this time. So I will offer some thoughts in this letter.

Based off of what we know right now, this election has made completely apparent the complex divisions in the United States—to the point that, regardless of who "won," a large number of people were going to spend today hurting and feeling heaviness, even fearing for the future. This was going to be true whether we read about President-elect Trump or President-elect Harris. I'm reminded of something I once heard Bishop Gene Robinson say, when I heard him preach at my home parish back in Palm Beach. He recalled a question that was asked of him (I think it was by a reporter): "if you knew what all would happen as a result of you being elected as the first openly gay bishop, would you go through it again if given the chance?"

Bishop Robinson replied that he wouldn't change anything for two reasons. The first was that a bishop election is the result of the Holy Spirit and that the Bible has pretty strong things to say to people who go against the Holy Spirit. The second was that his election allowed something that had been simmering beneath the surface to finally come out into the open. And once out in the open, it became something we could finally deal with.

This last part has informed my view on Jesus' work of salvation being something that is "expository." Jesus aims to expose what's in our hearts, lay it all bare, so that it can be properly addressed. This election has truly allowed some things about American culture to become exposed—provided we choose to see them (or as Jesus frequently said, let those who have ears to hear, hear). Again, this election was going to result in lamentation for perhaps half the country either way. And this is the result of a majority of people feeling that the United States government has failed them in some way, which leaves people feeling pain—emotional, mental, and spiritual (not to mention, in some cases, even physical pain).

What I have noticed happening among my generation (I'm what they sometimes call an "old Millennial") is a tendency to seek salvation in politics, where every election is seen as being "for the soul of the country." I've heard this rhetoric for the last twenty-four years (every election that my generation has been able to participate in). The Chinese theologian and spiritual writer Watchman Nee writes that anything that isn't Christ is dead (because it is Christ alone that is life). Our political systems are not Christ. Therefore, they are terrible saviors. Which means they are guaranteed to lead to further disappointment and pain if we allow them to serve as our savior. We will continue to have broken hearts as a result.

But scripture tells us that God is near to us in such times. Psalm 34 states "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them and delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and will save those whose spirits are crushed" (verses 17-18, BCP p. 629). There are echoes in this psalm of Jesus' teaching in the beatitudes: "blessed are you when you mourn, for you will be comforted" (see Matthew 5). Saint Paul similarly writes "the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans" (I Corinthians 8:26, though I prefer the NRSV wording of "groans too deep for words"). This is all to say that, regardless of our political persuasions, the Lord God is near us in our pain, calling to us to put our faith in Him and not the dead political systems of the world. They have their place—it's just not the place where Christ Jesus alone is meant to occupy.

This is all to say that we live in a country quite apparently desperate for Good News. Many of us are feeling some kind of pain and no election outcome is ever going to be the salve for healing that pain. It may offer temporary relief. But in time, if it's not Jesus, it's going to disappoint us and fail us. And so we must look to Jesus not only for our own health and salvation, but for the health and salvation of those who think an election will ever save them. For He alone is the good news for which we hunger.

Take care of yourselves and each other tonight (and always). I hope to see you all on Sunday.

Mahalo nui loa for letting me be your priest. You are in my prayers (and please keep me in yours).

—Fr. Charles