

## Reflection for August 30, 2020

### **Following Jesus Come What May**

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.*

*For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

*For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life.*

Let us pray:

*Now thank we all our God, with heart, and hands, and voices, who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices; who from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

We live in exciting and exhilarating and turbulent times. We are living with a global pandemic, working frantically to care for its victims, biologically and economically. Ours is also a time of racial and cultural hatred and violence. The Novel Coronavirus has simply revealed the fault lines which have grown even wider and deeper. The three richest Americans have more money than the poorest 160 million of their fellow citizens. I guess this is the American Dream that the President of the United States of America vows to defend with every weapon in his political arsenal.

Let love be genuine. Paul believed we should treat people who are different like beloved members of our family. That is love, genuine love. Paul was well aware of cultural biases, differences, and divisions. Where does Paul's hope come from? From how his own life had been

transformed. From his sense of the expansiveness of God's love to include all. This pandemic invites us to see God in a new way, to look at life differently, and to behave differently. I believe that the faith and hope Paul expresses in Romans have prepared us as followers of Jesus for this moment and can help us respond to this invitation. Being loving, approachable, and hospitable are essential. But we are also being called to a Christlike love that actively pursues those in need.

*"If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all"*  
(Romans 12:18).

The Republican convention has concluded in the United States. Donald Trump is counting on white, evangelical Christians to deliver a second presidential term. Doris Kearns Goodwin, an American historian, noted the following attributes of Abraham Lincoln:

*He possessed an uncanny ability to empathize with and think about other people's point of view. He repaired injured feelings that might have escalated into permanent hostility. He shared credit with ease. He assumed responsibility for the failure of his subordinates. He constantly acknowledged his errors and learned from his mistakes. He refused to be provoked by petty grievances. He never submitted to jealousy or brooded over perceived slights."*

Now compare this stately tribute to the description of the current Republican president by Wade Davis:

*"The American president lives to cultivate resentments, demonize his opponents, validate hatred. His main tool of governance is the lie: as of July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the documented tally of his distortions and false statements numbered 20,055. If America's first president, George Washington, famously could not tell a lie, the current one can't recognize the truth. Inverting the words and sentiments of Abraham*

*Lincoln, this dark troll of a man celebrates malice for all, and charity for one. As a British writer quipped, 'there have always been stupid people in the world, and plenty of nasty people too. But rarely has stupidity been so nasty, or nastiness so stupid.'*"

For Paul, all of us human beings are family, called to create not a culture of hatred, but of compassion and genuine love. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Paul recognized human limitations; we can't do everything but that doesn't mean we can't do anything. "There is nothing we can do" would have raised the ire of Paul.

Rev. Hermann Weinlick, a retired Moravian pastor, lives two miles from the place where George Floyd was killed by Minneapolis police officers, and two blocks from Lake Street, the centre of the protests and the subsequent chaos. Rev. Weinlick observes that "it was amazing to see the hosts of volunteers cleaning up streets and sidewalks, removing graffiti, and setting up food shelves to replace the four ravaged grocery stores and pharmacy. Whether or not consciously motivated by faith, they were practicing the words of Paul that we find in his Letter to the Romans. I do not believe God creates such crises, but neither do I believe God wastes such opportunities. God invites us to use these moments to move closer to God's intention and hopes for creation."

As Tom Wright reminds us, "We can't build the kingdom but we can build *for* the kingdom. Every act of justice, every word of truth, every creation of genuine beauty, every act of self-sacrificial love, will be affirmed on the last day, in the new world. The poem that glimpses truth in a new way; the mug of tea given with gentleness to the down-and-out at the drop-in centre; the setting aside of my own longings in order to support and cherish someone who depends on me; the piece of work done honestly and thoroughly; the prayer that comes from

heart and mind together; all of these and many more are building blocks for the kingdom. We may not yet see how they will fit into God's eventual structure; but the fact of the resurrection, of God's glad reaffirmation of true humanness, assures us that they will. In the sight of the foolish such actions seem to die, to be lost without trace; far better to live for oneself, to look after number one. But we can be at peace, and wait for the kingdom into which our present little efforts to build will one day be incorporated. That is what following Jesus is all about" (Following Jesus, p. 113).

What does it mean to follow Jesus, come what may? For Barbara Brown Taylor, "To be where God is—to follow Jesus—means going beyond the limits of our own comfort and safety. It means receiving our lives as gifts instead of guarding them as our own possessions. It means sharing the life we have been given instead of bottling it for our own consumption. It means giving up the notion that we can build dams to contain the bright streams of our lives and letting them go instead, letting them swell their banks and spill their wealth until they carry us down to where they run, full and growing fuller, into the wide and glittering sea" (Risking Life, p. 81).

May it be so. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

*In gratitude for your amazing works in the world, we offer our gifts to further your work, Holy One. Bless us that we may be a blessing of your holy work. Guide our steps, and bless the offerings we bring, that the world may be touched by your holy love. Amen.*

*Rev. Bill Cantelon*