

Bishop Budde's Writings

Exile in Our Own Land

November 10, 2016

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. Jeremiah 29:1-7

We knew beforehand that whatever the election's outcome, half the country would feel exiled in their own land. Indeed, one lesson of this long election season is how profound that feeling of exile has been for many Americans. Perhaps exile is our common experience.

In Scripture, the prophet Jeremiah speaks most directly to those in exile. To be clear, the exile of Jeremiah's day was far more painful than a presidential election. The nation of Israel had been invaded by a foreign army. Jerusalem had fallen, and many Israelites had been carried away to captivity in Babylon. Like so many people around the world today, they had lost everything, including hope for the future. And as people of faith they were at a complete loss as to how to interpret what was happening. Where was God? And more practically, what were they supposed to do?

Jeremiah's word to them and to us is both bracing and comforting. He said, in essence, "You're going to be in exile for a long time.

For in their welfare, you will find your own.” This was no small request: They were to seek the the welfare and make their homes among the very people whose soldiers had carried them into exile. “

I was not among those who voted for Mr. Trump, for reasons that I need not rehearse here. Thus I listened with an exile’s ears as he pledged to be a president for all Americans and said that it was time for the nation to come together. Speaking on behalf of the Diocese of Washington, I pledge that will take an active part in the healing of America. In faithfulness to God, we will seek the welfare of the cities, towns and communities in which we live. As Americans, we give thanks for the peaceful transfer of political power and we respect it.

Yet healing from such a bruising campaign is not accomplished with one call to unity. Things have been said in this election that cannot be easily unsaid or forgotten. The president-elect made promises that if fulfilled would be devastating to our country. And so we will stand with those with reason to fear for their safety and will defend their place in our society. Nor will we forget the highest ideals of our nation and our call to follow Jesus in the ways of love.

As election night drew into early morning, I remembered another fateful night when we were in turmoil as a nation: April 4, 1968. On that night, Senator Robert Kennedy was campaigning in Indianapolis when he heard that Martin Luther King, Jr. had been shot and killed. The police tried to convince him to cancel his speech, for fear of violence. Kennedy refused, and from a flatbed truck he spoke to a grieving, angry crowd.

Before he spoke, he gathered his volunteer campaign workers and asked them if they would be willing to walk among the people and share their grief. There were 100 riots in American cities that night. The only major city that did not erupt into violence was Indianapolis, where Kennedy made his speech.

Kennedy's speech in its entirety well worth reading. Here is a portion of what he said:

"In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it is perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in... We can move in the direction as a country in greater polarization ... Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and to comprehend, and to replace that violence ... with an effort to understand, compassion and love.

"What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness; but is love, and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black."

Kennedy stated his conviction, that I share, that the vast majority of people in this country "want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings that abide in our land."

And he concluded with a request for prayer.

My daily prayer, which I invite you all to pray with me until its cadences become as a part of you as breathing, is the Prayer of St. Francis.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love.....

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