

Isaiah 58.6-12

Psalm 34.15-22

Matthew 25.34-40

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and will save those whose spirits are crushed”
(Psalm 34.18)

Either way the election went, approximately half our country was going to wake up this morning to find that the person who they voted for is not the President-elect. For those who voted for Hillary yesterday, there is an understandable feeling of brokenheartedness – of shock, grief, loss, sadness, and perhaps even shame. It is a political outcome that few newspapers predicted. And perhaps these are some of the feelings that either party would have felt, regardless of who won the election.

However, if you are someone who is feeling down today, I want you to know that our Psalmist knew something about having a broken heart. He knew what it was like for his people to have endured slavery, and exile: for people he knew and loved to have lost some of their personhood.

Here in the United States, our political system is based on debate – it depends on the Hegelian dialectical tension of two opposing viewpoints – even two perspectives that might seem diametrically opposed to one another. Debate allows us to seek something new, to look for something life-giving to spring out of the space in between our divergent perspectives. It is when we are in dialogue across areas of disagreement that is when something new can spring forth.

And, I think that the Word found in Scripture today also reminds us that, even though political administrations might change, God’s Word and God’s promise remains the same. God is with us when we seek to offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted. God is with us when we seek to loose the bonds of injustice. God is with us when we seek to let the oppressed go free. Nothing can change those promises – they are principles of divine reality. They are, if you will, the spiritual “laws of physics”.

And, if we are being honest as a nation, we will find that there are a lot of opportunities to “satisfy the needs of the afflicted” as Isaiah put it. As human beings, we are all afflicted by racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia, and islamaphobia, whether we publicly identify with one of those groups, or not. We are offering spiritual nourishment to ourselves and to one another when we participate in our racial reconciliation forums, when we stand up for justice as a part of VOICE, when we speak up for refugees, when we educate ourselves about injustices connected to gender, when we stand up for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

Over the last eight years we have been blessed to have a African-American man as our President. We have had a chance to look at our history in a new way – especially with the opening of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in the past few months. We have had a chance to face racism in a new way as a nation and we have been empowered to follow in the way of love in some new ways as well. But there is still a long way to go. We live in a broken world, and we need to lean on God in Christ to guide us forward.

This Friday is the feast day in our Episcopal calendar where we remember St. Martin, a saint from the fourth century who left his life as a soldier to serve Christ. The readings for today are connected to his feast day.

This Friday is also Veteran’s Day in the United States – the day we remember those who serve our country and who have served our country. This holiday began on Armistice Day in 1918, when a peace agreement was signed, bringing World War I to its conclusion. Later this holiday was expanded to honor those who had served in any war, not just World War I.

At this point in our national life, I think we are in need of peace and healing, across parties. Some of us may have felt like there was a war going on during the campaign, and that, at this point, we need to do peacemaking within our own country, so that we can heal and move forward together as a nation.

There is a legend that Martin was riding his horse one day in the depths of winter when he met a beggar in very little clothing. Moved with compassion, he used his sword to cut off half his cloak and gave it away to the person in need. That night, Martin saw Christ appear to him in a dream, wearing the same half of his cloak that he had given away. He heard Jesus say to the angels “Martin, who is still but a catechumen, clothed me with this robe.” This inspired Martin to embrace his faith in a new way, becoming baptized at 18 (usually individuals were baptized later in life at that time). He eventually left the military to become a monk and hermit, and then was ordained a Priest, eventually serving as a Bishop. He had recognized and cared for Christ in that beggar, and Christ’s presence had transformed him.

I live in hope, that, like Martin, whose life was transformed on the day when he left his service in the military to serve God, we too might find our lives transformed by unexpected blessings as well, in the days and years ahead. I think we are being invited to leave behind some parts of our national life – particularly racism, slavery, sexism, and other ways that we have failed to care for one another as individuals and as a nation – things done and left undone. We can choose to give God our disappointments, in order to recognize, shelter, and nourish the new life that God is giving us for the future.

So, whether you feel like you are St. Martin, on the horse with the large cape, recognizing Christ in a new way through acts of compassion, or even if you feel like the beggar, who is cold and weak and dejected this day, my prayer is that we can all take encouragement from God, to go forth to meet Christ in our small acts of care toward ourselves and one another. May we find strength and courage to care for each other in our afflictions, and may we find God's light rising for us in the darkness.

"If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday" (Isaiah 58.10)

Amen.