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(This blog post can be found in its original context on www.nathanpiphon.com)

Meanness or Mercy

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The choice is clear:

Meanness or Mercy ...

Cruelty or Compassion ...

Conformity or Freedom ...

With a flurry of Executive Orders in his first week in office the President of the United States has made his choice clear. He is choosing meanness and cruelty and demanding conformity.

In the love of Jesus Christ, as a bishop in Christ's church, and speaking on behalf of all those targeted by these Executive Orders, I speak against the mean and divisive actions of the President of the United States. While I respect that elections have consequences and winners can enact policies that reflect the will of the majority, the massive amount of swift Executive Orders, on all aspects of American life, reflect a vision for division that do not reflect the teachings of Jesus Christ nor do I believe, ultimately, reflect the will of a majority of Americans.

All January 6th insurrectionists are pardoned ... governmental workers are encouraged to snitch on their coworkers as programs encouraging diversity, equity, and inclusion are banned ... permits for wind energy are rescinded while those for oil and natural gas are expanded ... citizens forced into gender conformity that does not align with their lived experiences ... neighbors forced into fear over ICE raids, afraid that at any moment they may be caught without the paperwork proving their legal residency in the United States and instantly flown out of the country.

These actions are mean, they are cruel, and they demand conformity to the vision of one man imposed upon the country.

I speak out today because when I was elected Bishop of the New England Synod in June 2024 I shared that my top three priorities would be to tell the story of Jesus, nurture relationships, and do racial justice.

At this moment in time, the story of Jesus I tell is told in Matthew 25 where Jesus tells a parable of a king separating sheep and goats for reward and judgment. Apart from the scenes of judgment which can be difficult for Lutherans, I see a beautiful incarnational promise. Jesus makes the stunning point that when we serve our neighbors in need we serve Christ himself. The sheep judged righteous are told *“Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”* (Matthew 25:40). On the other hand, the goats judged unworthy are told, *“Truly, I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me”* (Matthew 25:45). To be in relationship with the stranger, the sick, the prisoner is to be in relationship with Christ himself! To fail to serve the least among us is to fail to be in relationship with Christ himself!

In an already polarized society where the United States Surgeon General has warned of an epidemic of loneliness as social connections come apart, and where one study among transgender adults in the United States found that 81% had thought about suicide and 42% had attempted suicide, the President is actively sowing division, breaking apart relationships, and ignoring the least among us. He is incurring judgment upon us as a nation in implementing policies that turn us away from one another and from caring for the least among us.

The choice is clear.

We can choose the President’s path in our silence and inaction, by yielding to despair, and by throwing up our hands in frustration believe the lie that there is nothing we can do.

Or, we can retain our power and authority as baptized children of God and choose the path of Jesus Christ in our daily interactions, in our community service, and in our public advocacy.

The path of Jesus is mercy, compassion, and freedom ... it calls us to see the image of God in all our neighbors and celebrates a diversity of lived experiences ... it invites us to understand that Christ-like sacrificial service for our neighbors is the key to life.

The path of Jesus leads us into trouble for eating with the outcasts, sinners, and others society reviles ... it calls us to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, care for the sick, and visit the prisoner regardless of citizenship status ... it calls us into relationships with our transgender siblings and all who are bullied and targeted by the President’s actions.

The path of Jesus Christ celebrates and welcomes the Holy Spirit guiding, leading, and sustaining us in community with one another... it finds its strength and power in the Holy Spirit filling us with boldness to love, serve, build, create, and enact relationships and communities announcing the dignity and worth of all people.

The choice is ours. In my words and deeds as the Bishop of the New England Synod I choose the path of Jesus Christ. I choose the path of mercy, compassion, and service that leads to the life, healing, and salvation of the world.

I invite you to join me on the path of Jesus. As you do so, be encouraged and emboldened by the faith of the psalmist who sang: *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.”* Psalm 46:1-4

May our actions and service for our neighbors in Christ’s name be the glory we give to God!

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