

Baptism Sermon Liam Baird

November 13, 2016

I cannot tell you how thrilled I am to be able to participate in Liam's baptism today! I have known Dean since he was in our youth group, I got to know Audrey when I officiated at their wedding, and I now have the privilege of participating in their son's baptism. What a humbling blessing it is for me, and what a joy for all of us! *Thank you*, Dean and Audrey, for sharing this holy time in the life of your family with all of us!

Whenever we celebrate a baptism, *all* of us become part of the liturgy, the sacrament, renewing our own baptismal vows. We are not spectators, but active participants, recalling and re-committing to the meaning and promises of our own baptism. We began our service with a quotation from Ephesians. The full passage reads: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Eph. 4:4-6)

I cannot imagine a more appropriate time to claim our oneness in God through our **one** Body, **one** Spirit, **one** hope, **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** God and Father of **all**, than this Sunday following the end of a very contentious election season. Listen to what St. Paul writes just a few verses later in Ephesians, and hear what he is saying in the context of the election season: "The gifts [Christ] gave were ... for building up the body of Christ, until **all** of us come to the **unity** of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to **maturity**, to the measure of the **full stature of Christ**. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But *speaking the truth in love*, we must *grow up* in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the **whole** body, joined and knit together by **every** ligament with which it is equipped, as **each** part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up *in love*." (Eph. 4:11-16)

My friends, **that** is our *fundamental* identity, our identity as baptized members of the Body of Christ; and it is a far more **foundational** identity than any political affiliation. As citizens of the United States, we have one President who will serve for a maximum of 8 years; but as citizens of the Kingdom of God, we have one **Lord** from before time and forever, one head of the Body of Christ, of which we are **all** members (and, as Billy Graham said, people of **other** religions are also included in the Body of Christ ¹). You and I may pledge allegiance to the flag, but this nation, as all nations, is a fleeting entity in the history of humanity – one nation amongst a multitude of nations on God's earth, each and every one beloved of God. We profess that ours is one nation *under* God, and it is to **God** that we re-commit our principal and most fundamental allegiance as we renew our baptismal vows today. In our vows, we re-commit to resist evil; proclaim in both our words and in our lives the Good News of God in Christ; seek and serve

Christ in ALL persons, loving our neighbor as ourself; and strive for justice and peace among **all** people, respecting the dignity of **every** human being. (BCP pp. 304-305)

My friends, it is my responsibility as your priest to try to bring some meaning to this election in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This election has stirred up way too many hurtful words, negative emotions, and divisions which desperately need to be healed. And there is no better context in which to talk about healing than the celebration of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

This past summer, amidst the shootings of blacks and police, I did a lot of research and soul-searching. At *that* time, *also*, there were a lot of intense emotions stirred up and a lot of taking sides, one group of Americans against another group of Americans. I felt it such an important spiritual matter that I preached about it and spent three sessions of Adult Forum on the issue of race relations in our nation. This election *also* has stirred up a **lot** of intense emotions, and a lot of taking sides; and we *must* deal with these **not** in political partisanship but in light of the meaning of our Baptism and the Gospel.

Andrew Doyle, Episcopal bishop of the Diocese of Texas, wrote a pastoral letter to his diocese the morning of Election Day, **before** the results were known, in which he states, convincingly, that the **election itself** was **not** the *cause* of our divisiveness and rancor; the election only *revealed* divisions in our country which have been festering for years. Bishop Doyle likened the campaign season to an 18-wheeler truck crossing a bridge and leaving cracks in its wake. “We don’t blame the truck,” he wrote. “The truck reveals a structural unsoundness already present in the bridge. The current presidential election has been an 18-wheeler driven over the bridge of American social and political life. It has revealed deep cracks in our community, and it has exposed our deep need for healing and reconciliation at the social and political level.”²

In *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of Evangelicals, Michael Wear, an expert on the intersection of faith and politics, wrote this the day *before* the election:

“It is now undeniable that the current state of our politics is causing spiritual harm in the personal lives and shared lives of our nation.

“...Politics has become tribal, with **more** Americans staking their identity in their *political* views and with those who *agree* with them than anything else.”³ We stake our identity in our political views instead of in our identity as Christians, followers of Jesus, baptized members of the one Body of Christ.

“Instead of our values influencing our politics,” Michael Wear continues, “our political circumstances are shaping our values. As partisan citizens, we explain *away* the flaws of the candidate we *support*, and *buy* nearly **any** outlandish theory about the candidate we *oppose*. We even **change** what we believe to fit the moment...

“Politics is causing great spiritual harm in Americans lives, and a big reason for that is Americans are going to *politics* to have their **spiritual** needs met.”³

My friends, he just named the elephant in the room, the elephant in church sanctuaries throughout our nation. Americans are going to *politics* to have their **spiritual** needs met. Even life-long church-goers are looking to politics to have their spiritual needs met, despite the fact that “politics does a [*very*] poor job of meeting spiritual needs.”³

This is why I have been saying over the past few Sundays that the true Church of Jesus Christ – Christ’s Body in this world, Christ Church, Canon City – has never been more needed than now.

My friends, we have to open our eyes and see the great spiritual harm to our individual and corporate lives which our politics has brought to light. Long before the election day, school teachers reported students were [fearful](#) about the election outcome, even to the extent that they were having [nightmares](#) about [the election]. Children who are black, Hispanic, or Muslim have been especially fearful.^{4,5} At a Middle School in Royal Oak, Michigan (an upscale suburb of Detroit) the day *following* the election, some students chanted, “Build the wall! Build the wall!” while Hispanic students stood by crying. The police had to be called in, and remained at the school the rest of the day Wednesday and all day Thursday. One parent said, “We now have a community full of scared parents and they don’t want their children to be at the school.”⁶ The Royal Oak School District superintendent wrote on the District’s web site: “In responding to this incident – indeed in responding to this election – we need to hear each other’s *stories*, not slogans, we need to work towards *understanding*, not scoring points, and we need to find a way to move forward that respects and values each and every member of our community. We will be working on this in school today. **Please work on this with us.**”⁷ Similar chants occurred at a school in Columbus, Indiana, hometown of our Vice-President elect. One Hispanic parent in Columbus, the Rev. Dr. Felipe Martinez, who is the pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Columbus, said his two Hispanic sons were intimidated by other students on two occasions with chants of “build that wall!” Dr. Martinez wrote in a Facebook post: “My stomach is in a knot. The intimidation and hatred is escalating.”^{8,9}

On the other side of the political divide, anti-Trump protests following the election have turned violent in some places. Police in Portland, Oregon, citing “extensive criminal and dangerous behavior,” declared the violence a “riot” and some of the protestors “anarchists.”¹⁰ Outside Donald Trump’s residence in New York City, a steady stream of protesters has caused an environment of fear which nearby Fifth Avenue stores – including Tiffany, Prada, and Gucci – are afraid may keep people away just as the holiday shopping season is ramping up.

My friends, is this the kind of country we want Liam Baird, or any of our children, to grow up in? Is it?

The title of the *Christianity Today* article which Michael Wear wrote the day before the election was: “There's Still Hope for Our Politics: But only if we plant our feet in the gospel.” Wear concluded his article with these words: “The church has a significant role to play in this season of discontent. Our politics can only cause such spiritual harm because our national life has become so spiritually vacuous.

“As our fellow citizens attempt to solve our political problems, the American church has the opportunity to stand with the tradition of the saints and the gospel we love. Our spiritual needs will never be met by politics, and no amount of political reform will change that. The best way for our nation to get the politics it needs is for **us** to become the kind of *people* our politics needs.”³

The best way for our nation to get the politics it needs is for **us** to become the kind of *people* our politics needs: followers of Jesus, baptized members of the Body of Christ, fervently committed to our baptismal vows to resist evil, and whenever we fall into sin (which we ALL have during this election season) repent and return to the Lord; to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve Christ in ALL persons, loving our neighbor as ourself; and to strive for justice and peace among **all** people, respecting the dignity of **every** human being. (BCP pp. 304-305)

AMEN

¹ <http://a-voice.org/discern/graham.htm>

² <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/11/09/election-statement-texas-bishop-andy-doyle/>

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/november-web-only/theres-still-hope-for-our-politics.html>

⁴ <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/report-children-color-terrified-about-trump-presidency>

⁵ <http://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-election-stress-disorder-20161104-story.html>

⁶ <https://latest.com/2016/11/middle-school-students-chant-build-that-wall-at-crying-hispanic-children/>

⁷ <http://detroit.cbslocal.com/2016/11/10/royal-oak-students-chant-build-a-wall-in-cafeteria/?replytocom=319651>

⁸ <http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/2016/11/11/vp-elect-pences-hometown-students-face-build-wall-taunts/93648774/>

⁹ <http://www.bucyrustelegraphforum.com/story/news/politics/2016/11/11/vp-elect-pences-hometown-students-face-build-wall-taunts/93664018/>