

*"What then shall we say to this?
If God is for us, who is against us?"*

~Romans 8: 31

Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

As I write this article, we are still in a flurry of executive orders and declarations that give rise to a host of emotions. While some are cheering campaign promises kept, others fear for those most impacted and question the constitutional integrity of actions and orders. My own heart feels heavy as funds have been paused for humanitarian aid. I know the work of Lutheran Social Services makes a compassionate difference in the world and frankly, US AID funds make America look good. (It was through US AID grants that the NGLS was able to help build Kisarawe Junior Theological Seminary in Tanzania.) As we consider our theme of Seeds Sowers and planting seeds of faith, the seeds that are now being sown by these actions are unclear. Within that space of planting and growth is the tension between border security and a compassionate immigration system that works, between excessive spending and effective stewardship of federal resources, between legal processes and getting things done. What then shall we say to this?

There is much that I disagree with, and much that provokes concern. But my understanding of the example and call of Jesus to be his disciple brings me back to what I can do, what I should do, and what lies beyond my reach (although not beyond my grief and disquiet.)

I can call my congressional representatives to work to restore funds, and in the meantime, I can encourage congregations to gather in their Synod Assembly offering for World Hunger. I can support local and global efforts to address issues of poverty. I can participate with the efforts of our synod to make a difference with the people who are in our reach and continue to educate

around international issues even as we pray for peaceful resolutions and just action.

And I can remember, and remind you and myself, that the God we proclaim is one who promises new life from death. The Savior we serve is one who bids us to "go and do likewise," not seeking to condemn but inviting us into a deeper understanding of how it is that the least are the greatest. God is for us and working through us to be the presence of Christ. What that means for us in these days, we figure out together. I find that the words of ELW Hymn #705 speak to me with new resonance:

*God of grace, and God of glory
On your people pour your power.
Crown your ancient church's story.
Bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour.*

*Lo! The hosts of evil round us
scorn the Christ, assail his ways.
From the fears that long have bound us
free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days.*

*Cure your children's warring madness;
Bend our pride to your control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss your Kingdom's goal.*

*Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
Let the gift of your salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving you whom we adore.*

Grant us wisdom. Grant us courage.

In Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan