



*"Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree."*

~Attributed to Martin Luther

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

Have you ever seen a new tree planted that has two supports added? I'm thinking of a young tree that stands between two poles to which are attached a tether, each pulling the tree in the opposite direction. Not only do these supports help guard against windstorms, but they ensure that the young tree grows up straight and true between the opposing tensions of being pulled in opposite directions.

So too, I imagine, do the opposing pulls of the Democrat and Republican parties do the same for our country. Blue and red need each other; right and left, conservative and liberal. We need the dichotomy, the tension of opposing forces, the disagreement, so that we can grow, straight and true somewhere in the middle.

I can only imagine what the tree feels as it is being pulled in two opposite directions, but I would guess it is something like what our country is feeling now. When considering the election results, some feel relief and even elation, others feel disappointment and even anger. Never before have so many voted. Never before has the country offered such clear and disturbing statistics for how many are pulling in opposing directions. We are polarized, standing in support on opposite sides of the tree, pulling with all we've got, and yet, if one side has too much influence, the tree will bend. There is value in having each side pull, so that our country can grow straight and true somewhere in the middle.

What then does this mean for ministry?

It is curious to me how 100% of our congregation members can agree that Jesus Christ is Lord, but we do not agree on what that

means, how that impacts our vote, and how we embody that conviction in our ministry efforts. But then again, the church is not known for its level of agreement *except* for the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord.

When political convictions run deep, when we feel the tension of being pulled in opposing directions, when we are grieved by the lack of agreement and the swirl of emotions and the resentment towards those who are pulling the opposing tether, I urge you to extend some grace.

Forgive others for not voting as you did. Forgive others for not championing the same convictions that you hold dear. And turn your efforts, your attention, your energy to push and pull the growth toward and into the work of Christ.

We are not going to agree as a country, and not even as congregation, but we can agree that we are invited to participate in the breaking in of the kingdom of God. We are called to bear the light of Christ. And our efforts in ministry are strengthened when we work together towards some goal, some embodiment of the presence of Christ in the world. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Comfort the afflicted. There is blessing and life-giving growth as we concentrate on the nuts and bolts of our faith.

Yes, there is still the pandemic which is no small challenge. But consider that it is an additional tether, another added tension. Don't let that get in the way of you and your congregation growing straight and true and keeping the thing, the thing. Jesus Christ is Lord. And more than that, Jesus Christ is your Lord, your Lord and Savior. The rest is just...tension, albeit challenging, grieving, thick, and concerning tension, but through which we grow straight and true.

In the midst of this tension, God is at work. As we consider our own convictions with humility, and the convictions of our friends and neighbors with grace and forgiveness, we will find our way

forward, as a country and as congregations called to serve the work of Christ.



And whether or not you believe the world is going to pieces, I am glad to remind you that the Northern Great Lakes Synod has indeed already planted an apple tree. In November of 2018, I was invited to participate in the retreat for newly elected leaders sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation. In observance of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, I planted an apple tree on behalf of our synod in Wittenberg, Germany. We are Tree #468, and if you are ever in Wittenberg, please feel free to find our tree and take a picture.

Because even if the world goes to pieces, Jesus Christ is Lord and you and I are invited, encouraged, indeed, we are called and equipped to be his presence in the world. And that, my dear friends, colleagues, and congregational members, is no small thing.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan.

