

*“What then shall we say to this?
If God is for us, who is against us?
He who did not spare his own Son
but gave him up for us all,
will he not also give us all things with him?”*
~Romans 8:31ff



Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

This verse has been coming to mind lately...

When we needed to cancel our Walking Together events, *what then shall we say to this?*

When hospital beds are full of covid patients, leaving little room for accidents and other health emergencies, *what then shall we say to this?*

As people continue to disagree about vaccine safety, masks, and protocols, *what then shall we say to this?*

God promises in Christ, that God is not against us. This is good news. But what if we are against each other?

When suspicions are stronger than the ties that bind, when the conviction of political views undermines our common mission and congregational unity, *what then shall we say to this?*

I think we look for answers, for a diagnosis, for someone to explain or blame. Perhaps we stop listening and only assert our position more loudly. Perhaps we seek to convince instead of understand.

I believe it helps to remember that we are not the first people of faith to argue, lament, suffer, and disagree. The Israelites in the wilderness certainly suffered uncertainty, fear, and pain. And they also grumbled and complained. Paul's letters to the Galatians, the Corinthians, the Colossians and more give witness to each congregation's challenges, from persecution and fear to how to get along and remember their purpose. In his

letters, Paul makes an effort to remind people of faith who they are in Christ and what that means.

In the midst of the grief and weariness of all that we must face in these days, I ask you to remember who you are in Christ Jesus, and all that Christ calls you to do and be, no matter the circumstances.

Matthew 22:35-44 reads,

“...and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

I encourage you to weigh your words and your actions, your social media posts and your conversations, your opinions and convictions, against the metric that Jesus provides, love of God and love of neighbor.

While I know there is interpretive room as to how to live these two commandments, I would like to think that remembering love of God and neighbor can indeed help shape our actions and our words in these days, as it has always meant to.



What does it mean to you to love God with your whole heart? What does it mean to you to love your neighbor as yourself? And who do you consider to be your neighbor? Jesus answered this question for us with the parable of the Good Samaritan. If we apply historical context to contemporary circumstances, our neighbor is anyone whom society considers “less than.” Or in the nitty gritty details of the parable, anyone that you would rather not be obligated to, anyone you would rather not have touch you, anyone whom the dominant culture considers free to disparage, exclude, ignore, ridicule, oppress, or denigrate.

As you know, loving people that we dislike or do not understand is not easy. And yet, Christ’s call upon our love, our speech, and our actions remains.

I encourage you to remember in this pandemic wilderness that “this too shall pass.” A time will come when either the pandemic will be managed, or some other new reality will emerge that feels less anxious. Then we will have the luxury to argue about new things and disagree about something other than the current disputes.

Whatever the future holds, we are the body of Christ now, called to show the world the rest of what Paul writes in his letter to the church at Rome in Romans 8:38-39, that

“neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from
the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan