



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
NEW JERSEY SYNOD
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

September 10, 2014

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I hope that your summer, like mine, included some time for refreshment and recreation in addition to the usual responsibilities. I was fortunate to be able to visit with some of you and see your summer programs in action as well as to visit Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center to meet with their staff at the beginning of the summer and to see our “faculty” during Confirmation Camp in August. I was able to pray at Newark Liberty Airport for the send-off of our Bosnia International Servant Trip Travel Team and to welcome 300 Nebraska Synod youth who came to help in Sandy recovery work. And now, I thank you for your commitment in carrying out the varied ministries to which you are called year-round!

In the midst of all of our positive summer activity, the news of the world seemed to present a new outbreak of violence and unrest on a seemingly daily basis. Across the globe we saw increasing tension and aggression in the Ukraine, rockets from Gaza and airstrikes from Israel tearing apart, yet again, the place we call the Holy Land while a group known as the Islamic State carried out unspeakable acts of terror in Iraq and Syria. In our own country, children from Central America, seeking refuge at our southern border, encountered hate-filled speech from citizens seeking to keep them out. And as that situation began to get less attention, we watched as the town of Ferguson, MO, erupted in crisis sparked by the shooting of an unarmed 18 year old African-American young man at the hands of a white police officer. “Lord, have mercy” was a common prayer for all of us.

What follows is a devotion I was asked to write for a weekly email devotion sent out by Abiding Presence, Ewing, where I am a member. It was sent out the week of August 25. I include it here, because it relays both the lament and the hope I was feeling.

Galatians 3:27-28 -- As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

This passage has been on my heart and mind over these last weeks. As we watch events around the world and in our own country exploding with violence, these words come to my mind as hope and prayer. Much of the violence we see is a result of someone or some group looking at a neighbor as someone “other”. Using labels of race, ethnicity, economics, or religion, people get

put into categories of acceptable, unacceptable, worthy, undeserving, beloved or hated. And just to be clear, you and I perpetrate and advance this kind of judgment every day.

What would our country look like if we lived this biblical vision? What if we no longer separated our neighbors into black and white, rich or poor, privileged and oppressed? What if we looked at unarmed black teenagers and heavily armed police officers as brothers and sisters in Christ? What if the label we placed on one another was “beloved child of God”? What if?

In the waters of baptism, we are claimed as sons and daughters of God. This means that we are all a part of the family of faith – siblings to one another. When one part of our family hurts, we all hurt. When violence and hatred threaten to tear at the very fabric of what binds us together, we are called to proclaim in our words and our deeds the love of God in Christ Jesus for our whole human family. We do that by confessing our part in perpetuating the sin which seeks to separate us, receiving the forgiveness that sets us free to embrace each other and working together to end the “-isms” that keep us all chained. I believe that together, we can do this hard work of being the body of Christ in the world!

I pray: Help me to see your face, O Christ, in the face of my sisters and brothers – especially in the faces of those whose lives are so very different from my own. Open my heart to your ways. Give me strength to work for justice and peace in my neighborhood, across our country and throughout this world that you so desperately love. Amen.

We are called to work every day to bring the gospel of love and grace and mercy to a world desperate to hear it. We join in God’s mission to bring healing to the places and situations that break God’s very heart. Please continue to send us stories and pictures of ways you and your congregation are doing that in your corner of our synod so we can celebrate with each other.

Please take a minute to check out some reminders of upcoming events in the life of our synod. I hope you will make note of them, register where necessary and pass along the invitations to others.

Your sister in Christ,



The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew
Bishop