

November 7, 2024

As the concept of Sabbatical was coming to fruition my therapist asked me, "Are you sure you want to be gone during the election?" I didn't miss a beat as I responded with a resounding, "Yes!"

I've thought about that response. Was it responsible to my congregation? To our world? Not only as a progressive Christian, but as a progressive Lutheran pastor, I spent yesterday walking the beach and through gardens with some existential questions about ministry, leadership, and theology. I wondered if what I preach and teach about matters, not just here in Seattle, but other places where I have served, ordained or not.

I heard about Pastor Pam's sermon a few weeks ago and the power of it. Imagine for half the congregation your side won or your side lost. How will you treat each other?

My high school nieces had debates at school this week with others who said, "Why does the election matter? It won't change much." It does matter if you are of certain races, genders, immigration statuses, or sexual orientation. The election ALWAYS matters to every human, because we live in the world together. However, some feel the impact more heavily. My newly engaged niece and her girlfriend, now fiance, are concerned about the timing of when they should get married. My transgender colleagues have started a GoFundMe to help raise money for legal fees to get paperwork done sooner for second parent adoption. Some could say these are reactions, not responses. Some could say it is overreaction to fear. Only time will tell if these reactions are too big or too small, but the emotions and fears lie within each person. It is theirs to feel. If there is one thing I've learned about grief is that we must lean into the feelings and go through them. No feeling is final, but we wade through it, sometimes feeling like it is wading through molasses.

I became more aware of the progressive bubble I sit in. We are a Reconciling in Christ church and synod. The Northwest Washington Synod is one of the most progressive synods in the country. I preach differently here than I did in Iowa, when I walked a finer line. I don't know if that was good or bad, per se, but I was also in my first call. I learned how to push without creating fire. I don't mind being a spark now.

What I do know is it is hard to hear and see the name of Jesus misused and misappropriated. There is no place for Christian Nationalism, for God loves the whole world. While on Sabbatical I got to hike in Yellowstone with Bruce Gourley, a church historian and Yellowstone historian. His specialty is the dangers of Christian Nationalism. I got to geek out on both church history AND national park history while in the backcountry. We had a lot of time to talk while in the beauty that is the national parks.

What we do matters. What we have done for years matters. What we do now, matters. What we do in the future, matters. It is easy to spiral. This is why we have one another, to climb back up that spiral ladder together. Together we learn, we preach, we teach. We treat each other well,

we treat each other as humans. We go back to the 8th commandment where Luther's explanation says, "We explain everything in the kindest way" and we go back to the 1st commandment where YHWH says, "I am the LORD your God, you shall have no other gods before me." That goes for everyone--it is very easy to make something or someone your god.

My beloveds, some of you are celebrating and some of you are mourning. Martin Luther is famous for answering the question, "If the world were to end tomorrow, what would you do?" with "I would plant an apple tree."

Feel your feels and then plant an apple tree.

In Christ,

Pastor Shannyn

(I return from Sabbatical on December 1st!)