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The church has been in the news a lot this last week, taking center stage because of the service that took place at the National Cathedral in Washington DC the day after the inauguration.

By now most of us have heard about the sermon delivered by Episcopal Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde with President Trump and Vice President Vance sitting in the front row.[1]

Quoting the sermon on the Mount, Bishop Budde made an appeal for unity, for coming together and working toward a common good. For without unity, she said, "we are building our nation's house on sand."

Bishop Budde named THREE foundations or pillars of unity:

1. Dignity – Honoring the inherent dignity of every human being
2. Honesty – Speaking the truth both in private conversation and public discourse.
3. Humility – recognizing our own fallibility, that each of us is capable of both good and bad; and that the line separating good and evil passes through every human heart."[2]

Then, in the final three minutes of her sermon, realizing that there was a fourth pillar on which she had not yet spoken, she turned to address President Trump directly, and spoke of the need for MERCY.

> "Let me make one final plea, Mr. President," she said.
>
> "Millions have put their trust in you… In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now…
> Gay, lesbian, and transgender children…some who fear for their lives…
> [immigrant] communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away."

What I found extraordinary about Budde's sermon wasn't the general content of her message—for she broke no new ground…

What she said was thoroughly steeped in the Judeo-Christian tradition of caring for the stranger; loving the neighbor; showing mercy as, indeed, God continually shows mercy of each of us...

This was not new information!

What I found extraordinary was how she seized the day to remind the most powerful leader in the free world that the office he now holds is meant to be a force for good and not for ill; to implore him to govern with mercy.

Bishop Budde was courageous. And I find myself asking, would I have had the courage to do what she did, in that setting, were I in her shoes?

In the face of the social media foofaraw that's followed her sermon— the criticism, the calls to apologize, the death threats—I find myself firmly planted in Bishop Budde's corner.

[1] Find the YouTube recording here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwwaEuDeqM8&t=792s
[2] She quoted Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956

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On Friday I forwarded to you the letter I'd received from our Bishop—Shelley Bryan Wee—along with a letter from the 6 ELCA Bishops of Region 1.

These letters call us to thoughtful learning and engagement alongside the immigrant communities in our midst, in the wake of new administration policies that are being enacted.

What business is it of ours? It is every business of ours!

For, as our Lord said: I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick or in prison and you visited me. For as you have done it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me.

Friends, this is a moment for the church to show its mettle.

Now, I want to pivot to our reading from 1st Corinthians…

The community in Corinth, to which Paul directs this letter, is full of brash individualists.

- Some are convinced of their spiritual giftedness and, thus, their superiority;
- Others are intent on doing what they please—regardless of the impact their actions have on others;
- Still others, less cultured, less wealthy, are watching this play out and wondering whether there's any room in this fellowship for the likes of them.

In the 11 chapters that precede this one, Paul takes on the issues confronting this community one by one, calling out selfish behavior and admonishing them to embody a higher standard of unity.

Then in chapter 12 he tells them they must let go of their OLD WAYS of behaving and embrace a NEW WAY of seeing one another: as contributors to a new reality greater than the sum of its parts.

JUST AS THE HUMAN BODY IS ONE AND YET HAS MANY MEMBERS,
AND ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE BODY, THOUGH MANY, ARE ONE BODY, Paul writes, SO IT IS WITH CHRIST.

Our lives in the world are NOT the stories of separate, autonomous individuals making separate, autonomous decisions apart from outside influences.

NO! Being IN CHRIST means we are YOKED to each other!

As varied and diverse as we are—like the parts of the human body—we are, by God's intention, designed to complement each other, to work together; to function as one integrated, interdependent system.

When we push others away, label them, exclude them—claim that God's image resides more faithfully in US than it does in THEM—we put the whole body at risk.

This is not how God designed things to be.
Because Christ is the head of this body we will never be able to say to others:

- YOU DON'T BELONG HERE, or,
- YOU AREN'T PART OF THIS BODY, or,
- YOU'RE NOT WELCOME.

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In today's gospel Jesus shows us that, where God reigns, not only is there MERCY—there is GENEROSITY, there is ABUNDANCE, there is JOY.

Where God reigns, impossible things become possible;
water is turned into wine; anxiety into gladness; scarcity into plenty.

This first "sign" Jesus performs is wakeup call; a foretaste of the great feast of love Jesus intends to share with all humanity and all creation…
…extravagant gifts which meet our needs and turn our world toward wholeness and healing.

Being followers of Christ means sharing these gifts; recognizing our need for unity; meeting our neighbors with mercy; and doing it all with courage.

As we attend to the business of our congregation, let's remember that.

Let mercy be our lens and courage our means for following Christ, so that all whom we encounter will know his abiding love.

Amen.