



Coming Home ... Going Forward, Together – A Pastoral Letter to St. Thomas’s Parish

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace ... Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” Matthew 11:28-30, The Message

“Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: “God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism ... Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:16-20, The Message

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Since Wednesday, the world has been spinning much like a dwarf star coming to the end of its lifespan, imploding in on itself. I know how hard it is been for so many. It has been hard for me. Not just simply to discern all that unfolded in our political process and election on Tuesday, but the rampant anger in our not-so-civil discourse, publicly and privately, for much too long, much too long. This dwarf star feeling of implosion has been magnified by 1000 times for me in these days. Many of our parish community remind me often of the power of our words, how much our words matter. From the words I have heard and read on social media, I am reminded of this truth, bearing a deep and broken heart for so many, for myself.

What I have learned to do first when life as life goes seems out of my control is to **be still ... to pray ... to listen**. Carrying into this prayer sanctuary are my “go-to” verses from Matthew’s Gospel, and the image of an Arizona sunrise as my prayer icon. I have been intentional in going to my recovery community early morning meeting with friends along this road as I. After our hour of sharing experience, strength, and hope in the stories we are, the stories we are becoming by God’s grace, we close our time in prayer together – first the Serenity Prayer followed by the Lord’s Prayer. I have been praying both many, many times in these days. So I share what I am hearing – the operative word being “I am hearing” not your hearing – and what has emerged that I humbly, prayerfully, and carefully share with you.

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change ...” For better or worse, the freedom of our democratic political process gives voice and vote to ALL in our land. This is not the gift for many others in our world. It is our responsibility to use this gift to the best of our ability to elect those who will serve in governance of our community, our state, and our nation. What has emerged from this gift is the election of the 45th President of the United States Donald Trump. He may or may not be the one for whom you cast your vote, but our democratic process, when all said and done, has spoken. As President Obama said in meeting with the President-elect yesterday, the time to move forward TOGETHER is now.

“The courage to change the things I can ...” Many of my recovery sponsor’s over the years seems to share the same wisdom in times when they are in discord with others. It is a simple prayer statement – **Bless them ... Change ME!** When all is said and done, the one thing I can change is how I engage with life in the days ahead, the words I use to speak to others, the heart I open to listen deeply to others where they are now, where I am now, and where WE might begin to go and grow forward, together. This is THE choice I have in my control, the choice I can make. The change is in me ... the change IS me.

“And the wisdom to know the difference.” This can be the tricky part for me because my selfish way will tell the Holy One **reactively** what the next best thing is to me to say or act out. This usually happens when my prayers are short and untethered from my scripture anchors. I need time of deep prayer, the deep prayer that guides me to **respond not react, listen more and speak less, be connected to community in presence with the others, together.** For me, it is only through the engagement with others in recovery, and within this fragile vessel we call a community of faith, that I can best emerge into life again in ways that BRINGS life to others, and through this, life abundantly to myself.

With this invitation, I offer the following that may be of helpful presence for you. First, I share what each Vestry servant leader receives when giving of their time and talent to leadership of our parish. It is the model by which we seek to be with one another, speak with one another, and listen to one another in our monthly meetings, and beyond. It is called **Respectful Communication Guidelines** from the Reverend Eric Law of **The Kaleidoscope Institute:**

- R** = take Responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E** = use Empathetic listening
- S** = be Sensitive to differences in communication styles
- P** = Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak
- E** = Examine your own assumptions and perceptions
- C** = keep Confidentiality
- T** = Trust ambiguity because we are *not* here to debate who is right or wrong

Second, I have been and will continue to be present with you and for you to offer my ear to hear, my heart to listen, in sacred space together. This Sunday morning, November 13, I will be present in the seating circle in the Great Hall between the 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. service, and after the 10:30 a.m. service, where we can just be together, as this fragile community of faithful, together.

As I have done in these days so I will continue to do by holding you and me, our country, and our world in the prayer from our Book of Common Prayer **For the Human Family ...**

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

In holy peace, grateful always,

Fr. Paul Gennett, Jr.+