



A Pastoral Letter to the Regional Church
The Reverend Thaddaeus B. Allen on June 2, 2020

Baptized, Vulnerable, Together and Wise

As life unfolds in terrifying and uncertain ways, I have been leaning and reflecting on my baptism more and more. As a lad in the village of Bethany, West Virginia, surrounded by the Saints of the Bethany Memorial Church who promised to love us into the moment, the good confession was made with my Pastor's Classmates and neighborhood friends. We stood together in the holy sanctuary and proclaimed for the world to hear that "We believe". Together we confessed the truth that Jesus Christ was (and is) Lord and Savior of the World. Yes, it was personal, but it was so much bigger than that. It was for the whole world, and our confession was a genuine offering of our very selves to live lives that embodied our words. We made the Good Confession and we did it together.

In our tradition, baptism follows the Confession of Faith, and so in the first week of June, we were baptized. The holy waters were blessed, prayers were offered, and we one by one entered the waters of the baptistry and emerged as Christians marked indelibly with the Gift of the Holy Spirit. In the public arena of the sanctuary, we were made one with God and with each other. It was a gift. It was important. It was also a sign that our families and church family had done well in getting us to this point. We now bore personal agency and moral responsibility for how we carried ourselves as baptized members of the Body of Christ.

As is right and customary, we were quickly fed for the mission of the rest of our lives of ministry. Bread and wine, body and blood, strength and forgiveness, were lovingly prepared, consecrated and served to the Body. Together we were strengthened for the journey. At no point in my catechism, in my baptism, or in my first taste of the Eucharist were promises ever made that ease of life would accrue to me. In fact, if an easy life was promised, I reckon I would not really need to be surrounded by a family, word or sacrament. Surrounded, though, we were. Surrounded thus we are. I thank God for this reality; I thank God for this, especially, now.

In our confession, baptism and practice of being gathered by the Eucharist, we show the world a powerfully humble attitude and posture. In our Christian life and witness we display to the world a vulnerability that could be misunderstood, but let us not misunderstand it. In sharing the faith and in sharing bread and wine we essentially says to our brothers and sisters, now I give you Jesus. We are literally sharing in word and sacrament the Risen Christ who reigns and loves and who is with us still. This is a vulnerable posture to take, and it is a vulnerable position to place ourselves in. Vulnerability means that we consider the other as made in the image of God. When we make ourselves appropriately vulnerable to each other, we also yield ourselves to the reality that God is alive in the other, and that we may be shaped, formed, fashioned, convicted and even corrected by engagement with another. As a church we must always count on the fact that we will love one another unconditionally and without reservation. Vulnerability tells the world that we

trust in the fact that we are one. Christian Unity is still our Polar Star, so let us Keep North and let us stay vulnerable to one another.

In a world that is marked by virus and racism, togetherness arrives on the scene as a slippery concept. Like a baptismal journey, or a service of Holy Communion, the only way to travel for us is together. Stay close and let us stay mission focused. Do not let personal opinion divide us. Stay vulnerable and keep confessing that Christ is Lord. Christians can never say I have no need of you; in fact, we need each other now more than ever. An angry world is a ripe arena for division, but it need not divide us. Let us Keep North and hold each other's pain, rather than dismissing it.

As I understand it, when a brother gets sick, I am sick. When a sister is killed, I am killed. When children do not have enough, then my children do not have enough. When one I love is in pain, then I feel pain. If an elder cannot access medical care or resources, then it is as if my parents or grandparents are locked out of what they need. If a brother or sister are angry, then I am called to be salve of understating and solidarity. I guess it would be easier to discount the other, but our way makes no room for this. Thanks be to God that we have been given a family, word and sacrament for this difficult journey of togetherness.

I hope that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will also call upon the wisdom that God has blessed us with. We are a thinking people and are called to offer wisdom and grace. Wisdom is grace! So in these days, I hope that we will be smart and discerning. Let us be humble enough to recognize that we do not know everything, and let us recommit ourselves to a life of learning and growth. Let us be discerning enough to know that there are many out there promoting and feeding lies in a very real effort to divide and conquer God's good people. Let us not fall for that. We are smart and wise when we are functioning well. Sleep on things, reflect on ideas, study the facts, and source facts prior to senselessly sharing on media platforms. Let us add to the truth of the world and not contribute to the mess that is in front of us. All of our actions, words, and witnesses must be shared thru the lens of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let there be no doubt or confusion that we now bear personal agency and moral responsibility for how we carry ourselves as baptized members of the Body of Christ.

Today I pray for a peace that passes all understanding. I pray that we each will be agents of God's good grace and vessels of holy love. I pray that we will all live into our baptism and be vulnerable, together and wise in ways that bless all of God's children and even the whole creation. I pray for the end of the deadly COVID 19 virus, and I pray for the end of the deadly virus of racism. I pray for a church that is gentle with each other and for one that draws out the best in each of us. I pray that we will visibly be the Body of Christ. Making right the the things that are all wrong is not an easy task. Fortunately we are prepared and nourished for the day. Blessedly we have each other as well. Truly, we are not, and have never been, alone.

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