

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

November 20, 2022  
Christ the King

Luke 23:33-43  
Jeremiah 23:1-6  
Psalm 46  
Colossians 1:11-20

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For the past two days, I have been at our Diocesan Annual Convention, and it was one of the most joy filled gatherings I have ever been a part of. That's a big compliment to give any large gathering where you are voting on church policy. But this year the joy was palpable as we all are emerging out of our time in COVID and as we consecrate a new Bishop in December.

We felt joy when we learned our Diocese is now 100% debt free and that church pledges to the Diocese are the highest they have been in recent years. We celebrated the growth of many of our local churches and welcomed new clergy about to be ordained. We laughed and caught up and hugged and realized that for many of us we were meeting for the first time in person.

I mean...isn't it incredible that hundreds of people both lay and clergy can come together each year with one common bond...the bond of the love of Christ. And with that love we are able to find hope and courage and joy because we are all bound together through that love. I want us to dive into what that bond truly means for who we are today.

Now, when we talk about a bond, we are talking about something that holds two or more objects together. Think of what you learned in 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class...all living things are created by bonds...chemical bonds that help organize atoms so that they can form a stable state for growth. Bonds create a cohesive unit that can then be joined with other cohesive units. Without bonds there is not life.

To be honest, that's the extent of my science knowledge so let's take that imagery of bonds into something I know more about. Let's apply the importance of a bond to people (you and me as a body of faith) and let's apply it to the health of our communities. What binds us together for good and for growth?

For Christians, that bond is Christ. Can we agree on that? Our reading from Colossians says simply...<sup>17</sup>*[Christ] himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* All things hold together. That's the bond.

And, not only does Christ hold together all things, he also makes them strong.

*“<sup>11</sup>May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power....”*

In other words, with Christ we are stronger together. With Christ we can grow. With Christ we can experience joy...individually and in community. But to do that we have to keep coming together time and time again. Our common bond of Christ MUST rise above everything else...our divisions, our politics, our gender, our social status, our sexuality. We have to look to something greater than ourselves and once we agree on that we need to start agreeing on something else. We need to agree to love.

I don't mean easy love...I don't mean love for people who agree with you or look like you or who live in your same neighborhood. The kind of love that binds us together is the kind of love that binds ALL of us together. And that's not easy. If it were easy, our world would look a whole lot different than it does right now.

At Convention, we pass all different kinds of resolutions. Some are specific to a program we want to create or a project we want to fund. Other resolutions are larger religious, political, or social statements. These resolutions clarify a stance of the Diocese. And they encourage congregations in the Diocese to live into that resolution as fully as possible.

So, with all of the joy that Convention encompassed this year, I found it extremely telling that we also passed Resolution R-5 on Civil Discourse. R-5 states that the Convention,

*“...calls upon all Episcopalians to practice civil discourse in our political life, while not making peace with evil and injustice; and Whereas, In the Diocese of Virginia, we seek to demonstrate empathy and esteem for all beloved children of God, believing in the inherent worth of different cultures and perspectives. We proclaim in our Baptismal Covenant that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.”*

It further goes on to state that because of our increasingly divided country we need to strive more than ever to be a community bound by the love of Christ.

Specifically, it tells us what that true civil discourse based upon the common bond of Christ's love will..."exercise...patience, integrity, humility and mutual respect in civil conversation, even (or especially) with those with whom we disagree."

And that..."Accepting the standards of civil discourse means never inflicting harm on others through words or actions and taking responsibility when we do so."

I wanted to take a moment to read some of the Resolution to you. I want you to take it in.

- practice civil discourse while not making peace with evil and injustice
- live with patience, integrity, humility, and mutual respect
- take responsibility when we do harm others

Think of the disconnect we are living with in our world right now. Our common bonds seem more and more relegated to our familiar contexts. To the things that make us comfortable.

And our comfortable contexts have generated a familiarity with uncivil discourse, with hate, with violence, with greed. Cindy and I were talking about it the other day in the office after the killings of those beautiful, innocent students at UVA. Instead of outrage, our initial reaction was numbness. Our familiarity with violence and hate have created a normalization of evil and sin. And we seem to be reacting that way to such a wide range of issues in our world and it's driving us a part.

Thus, the R-5 Resolution is meant to be a wakeup call to each and every one of us. That our common bond is outlined right in our Baptismal Covenant...to respect the dignity of every human being...not just in thought, not just in word, not just in theory, but in real, life-giving action that seeks justice. In life-giving action that seeks peace. In life giving action that seeks equality for ALL of God's children.

So, how does that look? How does it look in Goochland? At UVA? In the Ukraine? In Iran? If Jesus were walking along side us this very minute how would Jesus show love? I can guarantee you one thing...Jesus didn't practice easy love. He practiced radical, powerful, bold love that changed the world.

It makes me wonder...how would our world look different if we truly upheld our common bond of Christ? Could we take our common bond of Christ's love and actually use it to grow something so much greater than we can even imagine?

My take-away from Convention this year is that we absolutely can celebrate our joy but we can never allow our joy and celebration to overshadow the on-going work of the Gospel that we are called to embody. Joy is the energy that drives us forward and enlivens our hearts so that when we come to divided, contentious times we can approach them with an open heart as well as a bold heart. With a love driven conviction to uphold dignity and goodness.

We can claim Christ as our King every single day that we let love lead our actions. Hate and violence are not the bonds that will ever build a better tomorrow. Only love can do that. Amen.