

Fear and Promises

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The first text message I received this morning after the election was, "I'm absolutely terrified about the future." Some people will read that sentence and agree that this election result is terrible for our country and the world. Others will say, "No one needs to be afraid. We live in the United States." If you are in the first group, I invite you to continue to pray and work for the good of all. If you are in the second group, I invite you to pray and work for the good of all. And I invite you to understand the fear of your siblings in Christ. The reason for the fear is some of the things that have been said during this election cycle. Some people who are immigrants are afraid because President Trump has promised the largest deportation effort in American history. Some people in the LGBTQ+ community are afraid because there has been talk about rolling back their rights and taking away legal protections. Some people are afraid because the voices of Christian Nationalism have gotten louder and more prevalent. Many people are afraid.

In the aftermath of yesterday's election, almost everyone can agree with this: our country is deeply divided. However, it is simply not true that the divisions today are worse than they have ever been. The divisions were worse in the 1860s when the Civil War tore our country apart. As divisive as things are now, I pray that we are still a long way from states leaving the Union and taking up arms. But it is still a scary time for many people.

When President Trump was first elected in 2016, I was teaching a class at Bay Path University in Massachusetts. The university administration instructed all professors to take time at the beginning of classes to give students an opportunity to talk about the election. In the class I was teaching, some students expressed fear about the future, and others struggled to understand why anyone would be worried. Some of the fears expressed by those students in 2016 came to pass. For example, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, and it became impossible for women in some states to access abortion, even in cases of rape and incest.

If you are not afraid and if you are wondering why other people are, I invite you to try to see the world from a different point of view. Think how a gay person who is married might be afraid that their right to be married could disappear just as the right to an abortion disappeared for many women. Imagine how it feels to be a person who immigrated to the U.S. from Guatemala who is waiting for an asylum decision and fears deportation.

If you are afraid, I invite you to lean into God's promises. These promises are not for easy times but for difficult times, times of turmoil. The Israelites almost never experienced times of prosperity and peace. The early church existed and grew under tyrants who worked to destroy it. The Roman Empire persecuted Christians for centuries. It was not easy for the people of Israel or the saints of the early church. They suffered, but they were also blessed. If you are feeling fearful, if you are feeling depressed, be encouraged by the witness of those who have gone before us. Jesus loves you. You – and those you care about – are precious in God's sight. Let us continue to bear witness to the God who loves all people. As always, the Church has work to do. We need to strive for justice and peace, and we need to remind the world that everyone is created in God's image. As always, we remember that God is at work in us, through us, and through many other people.

When God's people were in exile in Babylon, when their Temple and their nation had been destroyed, and there seemed to be no reason to hope that things could ever get better, God gave these words to the prophet Isaiah for the people of Israel:

"Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you,
I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"

(Isaiah 41:10)

God also gives these words to you.