



THE EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE OF
WISCONSIN

A Word to the Diocese of Wisconsin Regarding the Election

11/6/24

Approximately one-half of Americans are waking up today disappointed or dismayed, while the other half is waking up relieved or rejoicing. We live in a sharply divided and contentious society. This is true of the nation. It is true of Wisconsin. And each of those emotions and more will be represented in most of our churches on Sunday.

Our politics are profoundly polarized. Much of the rhetoric has been reckless, dishonest, and dehumanizing. We find one another almost incomprehensible. Consequently, it is easy to feel wary of each other, leaving us all with a deep sense of dis-ease.

I have a sticker on the back of my phone and on my laptop that says: **“Refusing to harden your heart is a radical act.”**

It *is* a radical act and has always been so. It does not conform to this world, which tends to exaggerate divisions and suspicions between people. It is not easy. It opens us to being disappointed and hurt. Keeping our hearts supple toward neighbors, strangers, and enemies—supple toward those whose political choices baffle or offend us—is hard. But this is at the core of the Christian message and of Christian practice.

This past weekend, we celebrated the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls, remembering those whose lives were so shaped by the Spirit of Jesus Christ that their hearts remained supple rather than hardened.

Julian of Norwich, who lived in a time of devastating plague and profound political turmoil, refused to harden her heart.

Roman Medved, sent to the Gulag under Joseph Stalin where he died, refused to harden his heart.

Maria Yudina, a Russian piano prodigy who daringly stood up to Stalin and was known for reckless acts of compassion, refused to harden her heart.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Corrie ten Boom, Andre and Magda Trocme and the villagers of La Chambon, Edith Stein, Sophie Scholl, and many others risked their lives for the sake of strangers in opposing the Nazis. They all refused to harden their hearts, even toward those they opposed.

Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, Diane Nash, and others of the Civil Rights movement risked their lives to oppose the oppression of the Jim Crow South. Even when Lewis and Jim Zwerg (who grew up in Appleton) were beaten senseless together by a mob of men, they refused to harden their hearts even toward those who beat them.

Others, in less obviously dire circumstances, have also exhibited this refusal to harden their hearts—Therese of Lisieux, Evelyn Underhill, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, and many others.

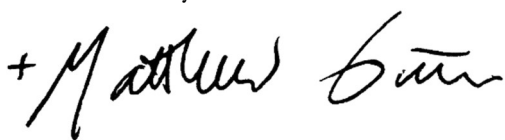
The saints and other faithful Christ-followers were able to resist the hardening of their hearts because they believed that the Mystery at the heart of it all—God—had taken on flesh in Jesus and entered into the beauty and joy of human life as well as the all the frustration, tragedy, and terror that mar that beauty and joy. And more, they believed that in his death and resurrection, Jesus overcame the power of Sin and Death and revealed that love and joy are deeper and truer than tragedy and terror. They believed the love of God transcends even the starkest human divisions and calls us to live in the truth that we belong to all others.

The examples above demonstrate that refusing to harden our hearts does not mean passivity. We are still called to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.” We are still called by our baptism to “renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God.” This is true for all of us regardless of how we are feeling about this election. **And we are all called to refuse to harden our hearts.**

That we might be a people who can do that, let us:

- regularly, frequently, and persistently sink our hearts into the heart of God in prayer such that we abide in the Mercy and Delight
- pray for God’s mercy on those with whom we disagree in humility seek to understand one another and resist cheap caricatures of others recognize that many are feeling their lives more are precarious today than yesterday relentlessly defend the vulnerable
- read about people who refused to harden their heart, including any of the examples above
- be welcoming, even when uncomfortable, to discourse for there is love in the supplication of a heart intentionally left open
- relentlessly “seek peace and pursue it” and reject all violent rhetoric, posturing, and action
- relentlessly pursue honesty with ourselves and speak the truth in love
- relentlessly cling to the assurance of God’s love for us and others, and resist all that is unloving
- remember that there is nothing – *nothing* – that can separate us from the love of God and as Easter people we live in the expectation of the restoration of all things

Under the Mercy,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Matthew Gunter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Right Reverend Matthew Gunter

Bishop of Wisconsin - Episcopal Diocese of Wisconsin