



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

May 17, 2022

Beloved,

Grace and peace to you in the name of One who makes us one, Jesus Christ our Lord.

"I just don't understand why," he said to me, shaking his head, "why would someone drive so far to do this to us?"

We were walking away from the scene in front of the Tops supermarket on Jefferson Avenue in Buffalo on Sunday afternoon. Walking in the same direction, I asked, "Is your family safe? How are you doing with all of this?" He said they were safe, and as the tears fell, asked he this question of God as much of me.

"I just don't understand why. Why would someone drive 3 1/2 hours, to do this to us?"

There is so much in that question to breakdown. *Why* do dreadful things happen to good people? Why did this happen in *this* place. Why *would* a person drive so far to perpetrate such an atrocity?

*"We have heard with our ears, O God,
Our ancestors have told us,
What deeds you performed in their days,
In the days of old..."*

*Yet you have made us like sheep for slaughter,
And have scattered us among the nations."*

*Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?
Awake, do not cast us off forever!"*

(Psalm 44:1, 11, 23)

Most of these questions I have no answers for, I join in with the petitioner, and pray the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when sighs are too deep for words.

What then are we to say about these things?

If God, who is maker of heaven and earth, creator of our first ancestors and of all nations, who calls each one of us “good” and “beloved” and “inheritors” of abundant life, is for us, then what are we to say about these things?

Our first witness is rooted in our Lutheran theological identity. God in Christ has come down to us, to the world, because God loves God’s people so much. God in Christ through the whole church is present on the ground, on the scene. Since the event happened, ministers of and around Buffalo have been on the scene to hold those who are falling, comfort those grieving, and pray with those watching and witnessing. God is here.

Our synod, church-together, is also present through the ministries of the Community of Good Neighbors which accompanies families on the Eastside of Buffalo, in addition to Holy Trinity, Parkside, Grace, and the greater Niagara Frontier Conference. Pr. Kwame Pitts, Dean Jeremiah Smith, and Pr. Imani Olear, Assistant to the Bishop, are coordinating local responses for donations of time, food, and resources for mental health care.

Our second response is that for those of us of European descent, we are called to acknowledge the pain, conflict, and hatred in our communities and culture, and spend some time in the discomfort of this tragedy without trying to find a “quick fix” to the issue. Contributions to the victims’ funds and ministries to Buffalo are a support, but they are not a cure, or even a band-aid, for the underlying issues of racism and white-supremacy that were at the core of the motive for the assailant.

Let us be of one mind. We in the Upstate New York Synod and in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reject racism and a white-supremacy worldview and mindset. We renounce the ways scripture has been used to support genocide, enslavement of people, oppression, and mass incarceration. We acknowledge, lament, and repent in the ways we have been complicit in a white dominate culture which supports competitive individualism, binary ways of problem solving, seeking comfort over reparations, and centering power within, thereby marginalizing the experience, voice, and thoughts of others.

What then shall we say about this?

God is present. God’s love is active in the world. God’s love was visible on Saturday in the love and service of Tops associates, in the love poured out by neighbors who stopped to care for those who were harmed, in the courage of the security officer and first responders, police officers and paramedics. Love was visible in a community which began to envelope itself in care and support. Love is ongoing in the outpouring of resources for the immediate needs of those directly impacted. Love is palpable by the



various calls, messages, texts, and emails sent to those who live in Buffalo, each one wanting to know “are you safe?” So, let’s say that “God is here.” Love is here.

And too we will sit, remember, reflect, and consider our own selves and our communities. How is God at work in our lives and in the life of our Congregation? How is the love of God in Christ making “all things new?” How is God at work in you to make God’s love known, knowing the brokenness that we have experienced? How is God using you as an instrument of God’s love and peace?

Finally, beloved, we are convinced, amid all of this, as we grieve and lament, remember, and resolve, that:

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:37-39)

Thanks be to God.

Yours in Christ,



Bishop Lee Miller II
BishopMiller@UpstateNYSynod.org
315.299.4955 ext. 106

