

# A Letter from Bishop Stevenson

January 20, 2025

*“And Jesus said, ‘Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”*

~ Matthew 25:37-40

My Dear Siblings in Christ in the Diocese of Virginia:

I sit at my desk at the end of a momentous day; a day in which The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was remembered and celebrated across this nation and around the world, and a day in which this nation once again transferred authority from one democratically elected president to another.

Like many of you, I have watched and listened to speech after speech today, and public prayer after public prayer. I have been listening not just with the ears of an American citizen, but also with those of a disciple of Jesus, the Son of God. And while I am thankful for the safe and clear practices of democracy, I must say that I am troubled by much of what I heard in respect to how I am called to live as a follower of the One who defined power as love for others, and love as sacrifice of self-interest.

As Bishop and chief pastor of the Diocese of Virginia, I feel led to be direct about a couple of things in the days before us: First, every human being will be respected in our churches, regardless of race, creed, gender expression, nationality, or in any other category or classification of humanity. Every human being will be respected from our pulpits, in our pews, and through our ministries. Rhetoric in the public square that dehumanizes any person or group of people, or is designed to strike fear in people’s hearts, is contrary to the gospel and is to be called out as such.

Further, we are to remember that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were themselves refugees (see Matthew 2:13ff), fleeing for their lives for a season. And, as Jesus points out without equivocation in Matthew 25, how we treat the stranger and those in need has a direct bearing on our relationship with God in heaven. Given these things, we must provide safety to the fearful and stand boldly against tyranny of speech or action.

And, I must say that the use of Christian language, or of any scriptural language, to advance a case that God values one nation in this day and time more than another is contrary to the gospel. For God so loved the world, not one people, that he sent Jesus to bring salvation.

My friends, Jesus is Lord – no one else. The Holy Spirit is the source of wisdom and comfort – not any political affiliation. Our Father in heaven is love and life – not any earthly ruler. We are the beloved of this God. All of us. And while none of us is worthy of that love, my prayer is that we do our best to honor it by our very lives.

Love Jesus. Embody justice. Be disciples. For we are the Diocese of Virginia.

Yours in Christ,

The Right Reverend E. Mark Stevenson, Bishop of Virginia