

May our words and more especially our deeds give comfort to those who are oppressed and denied justice

RESIST!! RESIST!

When I say Resist, I am not channeling the words of radicals from the 1960's. I am channeling the words of our Presiding Bishop the Most Reverend Sean Rowe. Let me read what he wrote in his 4<sup>th</sup> of July Message

*Churches like ours, protected by the First Amendment and practiced in galvanizing people of goodwill, may be some of the last institutions capable of resisting this administration's overreach and recklessness. To do so faithfully, we must see beyond the limitations of our tradition and respond not in partisan terms, but as Christians who seek to practice our faith fully in a free and fair democracy.*

*We did not seek this predicament, but God calls us to place the most vulnerable and marginalized at the center of our common life, and we must follow that command regardless of the dictates of any political party or earthly power. We are now being faced with a series of choices between the demands of the federal government and the teachings of Jesus, and that is no choice at all." End quote*

Where does this guy get off telling us to resist? Isn't he a follower of Jesus. Yes, and I contend that's why the Presiding Bishop counsels us to resist.

Jesus repeatedly resisted authority. He overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple. He frequently healed on the Sabbath contrary to the religious authorities. He resisted the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Through his teachings he challenged the rigid teachings of

religious authorities, instead emphasizing love , compassion and mercy. Didn't Jesus say that we should give to the government what it is entitled to, but follow God as a higher authority. "Render unto Caesar..." During his trial he refused to answer both Herod and Pontius Pilate who wanted to know if he was the King of the Jews by responding: "You say that I am..."

As Presiding Bishop Rowe pointed out, we do not engage in partisan politics. We should not demonize those who belong to a different political party. Indeed, I can honestly say that over my lifetime some of my best friends have been and are today Republicans. But politics and religion can never be inseparable, even more so today. Adain, I am not talking about partisan politics. Partisan political deals with issues such as whether we increase spending on highways or our national defense, whether we provide health services through private insurance or public assistance. I am not talking about eliminating free admission to National Parks on Juneteenth and Martin Luther King Jr's. birthday but adding it on a sitting President's birthday. I may disagree with those decisions and even find them reprehensible, but they are partisan political decisions. Such issues should be resolved through civil discourse of which sadly there is little left in our society, even in the halls of Congress. I do not talk of these political decisions; I talk of the moral decisions our government is making.

I am talking about when our government does evil. This is what we must resist. Our treatment of immigrants comes to the forefront as morally wrong, whether we are Christians, Jews or Muslims. Our forbears Abraham, Jacob, Ruth and Naomi, Moses and David were all refugees. The Old Testament **Leviticus 19:33-34 and 24:22** –states "When the alien resides with you in

your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

As the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, “The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.”

The government has masked individuals without any identification grabbing people off the street and disappearing them into government camps in alligator and snake infested swamps far from their homes without any contact with their families or legal representation. This is not a political decision, it is a moral decision and ,brothers and sisters, I say it is pure evil and must be resisted.

Grabbing a 5-year-old with bunny ears from his front yard and removing him with his father to a detention facility almost 1,000 miles away is evil.

Deporting individuals to third countries where they never had a connection and where they may be placed in a central American prison where they receive the greeting, “welcome to hell.” That is not a political decision, it is a moral decision and I say it is an evil one which we have an obligation to resist.

Our country has at least a professed foreign policy of supporting human rights. At times we slip and at times *real* politics gets in the way. Lest I be accused of antisemitism let me preface my next remarks with a brief introduction. My father was Jewish, and both his parents were Jewish and although difficult to trace, I am confident that the Jewish heritage went back

countless generations. It is a heritage I am proud of. I believe in the right of the Jewish people to be safe in the State of Israel. At the same time the State of Israel has conducted a terror campaign against the Palestinian people which has leveled their homes and has denied them access to basic medical care and food, leading to mass starvation. In my opinion, and that of many others, it is a crime against humanity. Our government has supported Israel's actions in Gaza. That is morally wrong and must be condemned and resisted, just as the evil actions of Hamas must unequivocally be condemned.

Our government has attempted to withdraw special immigration visa status from Haitian refugees and some Afghan refugees. It wants to deport them back to Haiti and Afghanistan, respectively. Haiti is a country which is so dangerous that our government says all Americans should avoid. It is ruled by violent gangs. What reception can these people expect. We all know about Afghanistan where young girls can't even be educated. Quite frankly, I believe any Afghan sent back from the United States to Afghanistan faces death. These are immoral decisions which we must resist.

How do we first resist.?As Christians we begin with prayer. Prayer is not simply a passive self-indulgence, It is an active effort to discern God's call to us. Praying for an outcome is not enough. God will not smite those in government who act with hate toward our brothers and sisters. He doesn't seem to do much smiting anymore. Instead, God acts through those of us who follow His guidance. When we pray for change, we must discern how we can be instruments of change. When we are faced with evil acts of Government , we must, in the words of Sean Rowe, "Resist" and for emphasis, I say "resist, resist, resist".

I am talking about political actions that should and necessarily must not offend our beliefs as Christians.

How do we then resist. We can petition our government officials as many have done in Howard County to urge our County Council to prevent the operation of an ICE detention facility, as our Interfaith Refugee ministry has done. We can bear witness, hopefully peacefully, against ICE activities as many brave citizens of Minneapolis have done. As we have seen, even peaceful activities may entail some risk. The bishop of New Hampshire A. Robert Hirschfeld announced, “ I have told the clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire that we may be entering into that same witness” as past church people such as the Freedom Riders did. “I’ve asked them to get their affairs in order, to make sure they have their wills written. Because it may be that now is no longer the time for statements, but for us — with our bodies — to stand between the powers of this world and the most vulnerable.” Bishop Craig Loya of the Diocese of Minnesota endorsed those remarks, stating “This may be a time when we are called to put our own bodies on the line, to stand with those who are marginalized and targeted in this moment.. As followers of Jesus, we’re called at our core to stand with the oppressed, to stand with those who have been wronged, to stand with a grieving community of people who are deeply sad and whose hearts are broken “ As stated by Sean Rowe at a vigil in Minneapolis, “We keep resisting, advocating, bearing witness and repairing the breach,” “We keep sheltering and caring for those among us who are immigrants and refugees because they are beloved by God, and without them, we cannot fully be the church.”

Certainly, we would be more steadfast if all faith leaders were at our sides with strong words and deeds, but if we must resist alone we shall follow our Christian calling.

How do we confront federal agents who are committing evil acts? This is hard, and I know that I do not always practice what I am preaching. As Christians, we must not confront them with hate. Like it or not, they are Children of God, albeit ones we believe have gone seriously astray. As the Dutch Catholic priest and theologian, Henri Nouwen wrote: "When we refuse to see the image of God in others, we prepare our hearts for violence. Racism and genocide begin not with weapons, but with a failure of love." We can condemn their actions without condemning them as human beings...let God choose to do that. They and those who support them are not enemies but unconverted fellow human beings. If anyone says "I love God" but hates his brother, he is a liar for whoever hates his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." First Epistle of John Chapter 4 verse 20

I want to conclude by mentioning two resisters who are being honored by the Episcopal church this week.. The have dates set aside in our church calendar to honor holy women and holy men.

The consecration of Barbara Clementine Harris, First Woman Bishop of the Anglican Communion is recognized today. Bishop Harris was a black woman who had a long history of resisting. She was a Freedom Rider and she registered black voters in Greenville Mississippi. She was an advocate for gay rights, and she lambasted the Episcopal Church for racism and sexism. Clearly, she was a resister and now the Church honors her. She was truly a forbear of the Most Reverend and Right Honorable Sarah Mullally, the

first woman to serve as Archbishop of Canterbury and Spiritual Head of the Anglican Communion, whose election was confirmed 10 days ago and who will be formally consecrated in March.

The second person the Church honors this week is Absalom Jones; In 1802 he became the first black to be ordained as an Episcopal priest. He was born a slave, but in 1778 his enslaver, a vestry member at two different Episcopal churches manumitted Absalom who took the surname Jones as an indication of his American identity. He originally belonged to a multi-racial Methodist church in Philadelphia, but that congregation decided to require blacks to kneel and pray on the second floor. After their prayer Jones and other blacks resisted, they walked out of the service. He was a fierce advocate for the abolition of slavery, for black equality and for black self-empowerment Our church honors him on the anniversary of his death on February 13, 1818.

We have a long, albeit uneven history of resistance as a church. It is that history which our Presiding Bishop is urging us to continue in the face of injustice. Please pray upon what you can do.

Let me close with a prayer written by Absalom Jones: "Give peace in our day, we beseech thee O thou God of Peace. And grant that this highly favoured country may continue to afford a safe and peaceful retreat from the calamities of war and slavery for ages to come." Amen

