

**Pastoral Message**  
**The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson**  
**September 30, 2018**

Good morning.

I am writing this letter to you from New York where I am staying with my son and his family. They had plans to attend a wedding of a close friend but Sam's father-in-law broke his hip and so they needed my help to stay with the children overnight. So here I am, of course.

Sermons are, in part, pastoral letters to congregations. I am not with you to preach but my pastoral responsibilities extend even in my absence. Therefore, I want to share with you some thoughts about the tumultuous national scene that many people witnessed this past week. I've heard from many of you and feel the need to offer some comfort (meaning strength). I continue to be aware that we come from many different backgrounds and perspectives and therefore often see events through the different lenses of our various experiences. Currently, I am referring to the matter of the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing involving the nomination of Bret Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. There are lessons to be learned in hard times.

In Saturday morning's *Wall Street Journal* Lance Morrow comments,

The story of the Kavanaugh affair had the elements of a black-and-white movie from long ago. ...It would have to be filmed in black and white because the issues came mostly in black and white, and the contrast between the two antagonists told you things about the country's differences, which are getting to be irreconcilable—a matter of alternate realities. The hearing brought us into the presence of F. Scott Fitzgerald's idea that the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two mutually contradictory ideas in the mind simultaneously without losing the ability to function."

"Mutually contradictory ideas" or radically different perspectives. A key phrase in today's Gospel from Mark is this:

"Jesus said, *'Those who are not against us are for us.'*"

Jesus offered this to his disciples as they struggled with the contentious opposing sides in the development of the early Church— their ministry and mission. Its wisdom sounds a bit like Scott Fitzgerald’s observation about the ability to embrace differing ideas and perspectives in order to function well. This broad embrace is also a hallmark of the Episcopal Church—the ability to welcome, listen to, and respect a broad spectrum of ideas and perspectives— not just with tolerance but with genuine interest and a commitment to honor all people as we search together for truths and wisdom. And so we need one another to keep the balance and the ability to function as a whole.

As I sit here with my grandchildren I think about what our deliberations will mean for them. They are the ones effected by what we do and say. Meanwhile, I love to read stories to them so I open a book called, *InvisiBILL*. (That’s what grandparents do!) This particular story is about a little boy in a family of busy people. When the little boy speaks, the mother is too busy to hear him because she is checking her messages on her whatchamacallit. His father is talking on his thingamajiggy. His Brother is focused on his science book. And his sister is juggling potatoes. It was then that a terrible thing happened. Bill turned invisible. And so the story unfolds about this invisible little boy. Even though he waves his arms and shouts, they do not see or hear him. Then he writes a note to his family. “Good-bye Forever.” Only then do they start to worry and to look for him. They realized how much they missed him. They realized how their own actions made him invisible. They were sorry. Only then, did Bill become visible again. Odd little story, perhaps. But maybe it can help us recognize something about the messiness some of the roots of the contentiousness and anger and divisions we are witnessing and experiencing.

“And Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Those who are not against us are for us.’”

We all need to be heard. We all want to be understood. We all want to be valued. We all want to be a part of what is going on. Let us make this ministry of inclusion and reconciliation a centerpiece of our mission and ministry as a church of Christ—to listen and respect and honor the perspectives and experiences of all people. It is not just the right thing to do; it is a faithful way of living and being with each other.

Blessings, Phebe+