Election 2020: From Forming a More Perfect Union to Forming the Beloved Community to Forming the Earth Community in Integral Ecology
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“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights … We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice …” These words from 1776 and 1787 are indeed familiar to us, United States citizens and residents and to so many people throughout our Earth community. At the time they were written, the Founding Fathers focused on uniting 13 very different colonies into a nation against an oppressing colonial power.

But once that was done, the nation was very far from “forming a more perfect union and establishing justice!” Nearly all of the Founding Fathers themselves claimed enslaved human beings as property. As well, equality was shared only among property owning men, other men and all women not having any voting rights at all. While some of these inalienable rights have been established since by law in the U.S., the nation is still a long way from being “a more perfect union” with “justice for all” established, not just legally, but also in fact. How inspired, though, are these words, for they continue to drive us as citizens and residents toward a more loving and inclusive nation.

Grounding these Constitutional words even deeper, nearly every religious tradition, if not all, have central and claiming teachings, rituals, and ethical practices centered on the common good, on caring for each other concretely, on living in and from Love. For us Christians, the Word could not be more compelling in this regard. In the New Testament, the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, after describing a typical day for Jesus, often insert the summary sentence: “And Jesus went about preaching, teaching, and healing and especially all those who were poor, outcasts, prisoners, blind, lame, and other excluded ones …” Both the Gospels and the Epistles direct us to live as Jesus did, grounded not in our own strengths but in his uniting and compassionate love.

We are described as the people of God; a pilgrim people always moving into holiness; the temple of God; the branches of the Vine who is Christ; the community of Jesus Christ transformed by the Holy Spirit; the communion of believers expressive of the very relational life of God as love. As a new creation, we are commissioned into a ministry of reconciliation: “We are ambassadors for
Christ, God as it were appealing through us. We implore you, in Christ’s name: be reconciled to God. Become the very holiness of God! (2 Cor 5:17-20) In a sense, we are to be the very face of God in our world, as Jesus was!

Martin Luther King Jr., inspired by this biblical faith, collected it up so effectively in this most compelling phrase: the beloved community. “Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” (http://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/bcquotes.html) He stressed economic and social justice as constitutive of this qualitative and quantitative change. So does Pope Francis today in his compelling Encyclical, Laudato Si’, so widely acclaimed internationally by civic and by religious leaders of so many faith traditions. He adds, however, a new constitutive element, Care for our Common Home, our Earth, as an integral part of economic and social justice, caught so profoundly in his phrase, Integral Ecology.

So, what a call we have in Election 2020: to form a more perfect union, to make the community more beloved, to grapple with climate change and economic and social justice as so interlinked! In such a disruptive and dividing time in U.S. history, we ALL need to invoke God’s life in us for guidance and a conversion to civil discourse. We ALL need to study, to engage in fact and value informed dialogue, and we need to vote!