

The Rt. Rev. J. Scott Barker

Diocese of Nebraska

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I'm Scott Barker, presently serving as the bishop of the Diocese of Nebraska. I'm answering personal reflection question number 10: Tell us about a biblical image or metaphor that resonates with this moment in the life of the church and the role of the presiding bishop.

Gosh, there's so many beautiful Bible stories that would work to answer this question. I've run through countless possibilities in my head, but I keep coming back to what I think is probably the central metaphor of the entire Christian endeavor, which is the idea of carrying the cross of Jesus. I'm drawn to the image of the cross, first of all, because it centers Jesus in this conversation and this moment. Before we can talk about taking up our cross, we have to talk about the cross. And the fact that that reminds us of the person of Jesus and His sacrifice that saved humankind and continues to be the heart of the gospel that we preach feels really important as we talk about endeavors for this moment in the life of the church and imagining our futures together.

I also find the vision of carrying the cross really compelling because I feel like it calls us back to the work especially the Baptismal Covenant, and all the difficult and promising challenges we make about caring for one another and loving across boundaries, and doing the work of reconciliation and forgiveness and love that to me, is the heart of discipleship. And I have always felt that if human beings and followers of Jesus could really do those things that we promise when the bishop comes to visit and renews those baptismal vows, we would build a church that was irresistibly attractive to others, and certainly that would make a major difference in the world. So, carrying the cross feels important for the church as well.

In terms of the work of a bishop and presiding bishop, I think of the bishop's ordinal and phrase there that I memorized when I became a bishop and that I carry with me every day of my life and it's the phrase about how a bishop is called to follow after the one who came not to be served, but to serve and gave his life as a ransom for many. That is a cruciform picture of ministry. That is how I have understood episcopal ministry.

And at times that's been difficult, but I have tried to find the joy in it and have often wondrously located that joy, even when it's been a lot to carry. If that's been true for the bishop of Nebraska, this past decade, I can only imagine how much more important it would be for the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, both to lead in a way that was genuinely sacrificial, and oblation, but equally to continue to seek after the joy in that through prayer and companionship, and most of all, just knowing that Jesus is alongside in every moment.