

“WE ARE ONE IN THE SPIRIT, WE ARE ONE IN THE LORD”

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Colossians 3:12-17

John 12:20-23

Two days ago, on Friday, we, as a nation, celebrated Veterans Day. We remembered with gratitude all those who have served our nation in the armed forces. We remembered their service, their sacrifice, their dedication to keeping our country safe and free. We thanked them and those who serve even today for helping to safeguard the rights we all have as Americans – and perhaps, because it was this week, we remembered especially that one of the precious things they protect for us is freedom of speech.

And boy, have we used that freedom this week! All of us had the freedom to speak at the polling place. And we did, and it's done.

But that freedom of speech brings with it, too, opportunities for division, and oh my, have we seen that as well. From the very start of the campaigns, which seems like years ago, but really was probably 18 months or so. But from the very start, it was ugly. It seemed that this presidential election was built on rancor, bitterness, vitriol, name-calling, suspicion – well, just plain ugliness.

And sadly, it drew so many people in – not just the politicians, but people like you and me. Friendships were broken, things were posted in social media that never would have been spoken face-to-face, outright lies were told, names were called – it was, just plain ugly.

And then, the election happened on Tuesday, and a whole new chapter began. In the words of Charles Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” For some American, it was the best of times, they are elated at the results. It signals a new beginning, a break from things they think have held our country back, a fresh start led by a person from “outside the Beltway,” outside of old-school politics. For them, it is good, and they are thrilled.

But for others, Tuesday marks “the worst of times.” (And, by the way, there are people on both of these sides right here in this room today – I know that for a fact.) So for some, Tuesday's results were devastating. They mourned, they wept, they worried. I happened to talk to a friend this week who is an educator with his doctorate and leads an educational institution who told me that, after the death of his mother and the death of his father, and a health scare he had gone through, this

election result was one of the worst things he'd ever been through. It shook him to his core, and he's trying to work his way through it.

He's not alone. As much as the people who are happy with the election results are rejoicing, so much so are those who are unhappy mourning. That's just the way it is. And let me say this – everyone has a right to feel the way they feel.

But it's left our country deeply divided. And while it might look hopeless, I don't think it is. And I'll tell you why. I think we, as Christians, can help lead the way to unity.

We take our lead from the One who prayed for unity in this morning's Gospel lesson – Jesus himself.

A pastor from Dallas, Texas, by the name of Paul Rasmussen wrote these words to his congregation this week:

“Today, the outcome of the election has brought with it a sobering exposure to raw emotion. Some of you are thrilled. Some of you are despondent. Some of you are scared. Some of you are hopeful. Some of you are indifferent. And some of you are just glad it's over. Whatever the case, I hope you will support one another – love one another.”

And then, he said this, which I think, is worth the price of admission! “One of Jesus' greatest traits was an extraordinary ability to relate to and love people who were nothing like him. Let's see if you can do the same. If you feel victorious, don't gloat. If you feel devastated, don't hold offense to those who cannot relate to your grief. Just try and live out our call to kingdom-like behavior.”

Friends, I think that's how unity can come – if you and I live out our call to kingdom-like behavior. And that kingdom-like behavior is spelled out quite clearly in the epistle lesson we heard from the Book of Colossians.

So, let me, for a few more moments this morning, speak to some of those behaviors that can bring about healing.

First, listen – listen to people. Let people who see things differently from you, speak, and when they do, listen to them – really try to hear what they have to say. It's sometimes so difficult to do, because I know that my natural inclination is to, instead of really listening, start to formulate my counterpoints.

No, we need to listen to each other. Let me give you an example from my own life on how well that works. I say, unashamedly, that I have liked President Obama. I think he's been a good President and I think he and his family have

represented us with dignity and class here and around the world. I will miss them after he leaves office.

I also know that some of you, even hearing me say those words, think I'm crazy. You can't wait until he's out of office and you've told me so.

But here's what I want you to know. A while back, someone I really admire told me they thought President Obama was the worst president we've ever had, and it really upset me that they said it, because I like this person a lot, and I thought it was a pretty ugly sentiment. But then, we talked and I listened to what the person had to say, without trying to have a comeback in defense of the President. And what I came to understand was they felt the way they did because some of the President's legislation had hurt them badly in their professional life, and in fact, they didn't hate him as a person, they just didn't like the way he was doing the job. And you know what? I got it. It took away my anger. I understood where they were coming from. We still didn't agree. They still think he is the worst President ever, I still admire him – and you know what, we're still friends, and it's okay. You heard what it said in that children's book, right? "If you respect someone, you try to understand why they think or believe something – even if you don't think or believe it yourself. They have an equal right to their opinion." (*Everyone Matters*)

Sometimes we just need to listen to each other, let each other speak, agree to disagree, and dwell in unity. You know, John Wesley is said to have once spoken these words: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things, charity." Amen to that, brother John.

So first, to move toward unity after this division, we should listen to each other. Secondly, please give people who are hurting in the wake of the election some time and space. Time does, indeed, heal wounds. The intense feelings of Wednesday, got less intense on Thursday, and so on. Initial fears will hopefully lessen with the passing of time. But people need to be allowed to feel what they're feeling, without being told they're being ridiculous, or they need to get over it. Give people time and space, respect what they're going through, don't tell them that they're wrong – just give them time and space. In the passage from Colossians, Paul calls it "bearing with one another."

Thirdly, pray. Pray for everyone. Pray for those who won, pray for those who lost, pray for those who are rejoicing, pray for those who are mourning. Pray. Give all of them up to God. Nothing can chip away bad feelings better than time in prayer, because it's hard to hate someone and pray for them at the same time. And, if you're having trouble, pray for yourself.

In the days since the election, I find myself praying for President-elect Trump fervently, because, like everyone else who enters that office, he has no idea what

he'll be facing, and the pressure he'll be under. And I pray for Hillary Clinton that she'll find rest and healing in the Lord, and I have to say it made me happy to see the picture of her going for a walk in the woods with her husband and their dogs a few days after the election. She's going to be okay, but, the greatest gift we can give to her and Donald Trump is the gift of prayer.

A fourth thing that I think can lead us into unity is doing good. In the midst of our angry, divided country we can show what love looks like by doing what Jesus commanded – feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, visiting prisoners, welcoming strangers, being kind to others, speaking kindly to others, caring for the last, the lost and the least. We get so divided because we're fixated on ourselves, unity can come when we fix on others, and try to help wherever and whenever we can.

The fifth, and next to the last thing I want to say, is that we need to dwell more on what we have in common in this country, than on the things that draw us apart. We all love our country or we wouldn't have such strong feelings about the election. We all want to live in peace, we want people to be able to prosper, we want to live in freedom. We have so much in common, but we tend to forget that when we draw battle lines over candidates or issues. We feel strongly because at the root of it all, we all love our country. If we remember that, we can work through anything.

Finally, and most importantly, for we who call ourselves Christians, we need to remember who we are and whose we are. We are God's children, first and foremost, before we are citizens of any country, of any political party, of anything. First and foremost, it's God. Period.

As one United Methodist pastor put it this week, "The ultimate hope for our world does not lie in a political election, nor a political platform. It lies in Jesus Christ. Our constant hope is not found in Democrats or Republicans, liberals or conservatives, but in the power of Jesus Christ to change lives and transform community. We must help people to remember that God is still sovereign and God is still in control." (United Methodist News Service, 11/11/16)

He's right, friends. God is still in control, and life is more than presidential elections. The divisions we're dealing with right now can be healed, but you and I have a part to play in that. So may we listen to one another, give others space and time, pray, do good, focus on what we have in common, and most of all, remember that God is still sovereign, God is still in control, and all will yet be well.

So I want to close with a little mental picture for you to take with you today. Charles Osgood, the wonderful television personality who recently retired from the CBS Sunday Morning show, once told about these two little old ladies who lived in a nursing home. Both of them had had serious strokes. One of them was paralyzed

on her left side, the other paralyzed on her right. Both of them had been wonderful piano players. One day, a person at the nursing home brought them both into the lounge, sat them down on the same piano bench, and with one only able to use her left hand and the other only able to use her right, still they made beautiful music together, and hearts that had been devastated were filled with joy and gladness. New music came out of what had been broken.

So may that be said of our country in the days and weeks ahead. Trusting in the power of God to make it happen, may it be so.

Amen.