

HOW WE MOVE FORWARD AFTER THE ELECTION

The Rev. Mark D. Wilkinson, Rector
St. Aidan's Episcopal Church
Virginia Beach VA 23452
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The idea for this service tonight came from a discussion with a number of my Episcopal colleagues across the country. They were all hearing and experiencing the same angst and distress over this election from people everywhere. Some of my colleagues in the counseling world report a huge increase in appointments with many reporting PTSD symptoms because of what has been said in the various campaigns and what they have experienced over the past year.

One person told me that they went to the doctor for a physical and the nurse asked, "Are you experiencing any signs of depression?" He replied, "Other than over the election, no I'm fine." She replied, "You will not believe how many times people have said this over the past three months." I can tell you, he was not saying this as a joke, but was absolutely serious.

I was both surprised and pleased when the reporter from the Pilot called and asked me about the service. I was absolutely stunned when I opened the paper Monday morning to see my picture and the article above the fold in the banner position. Obviously the editors of the Pilot see the same division and discord that will long be remembered as the hallmark of this election cycle.

So the challenge is where do we go from here? As the President of the teacher's union in Solon Ohio I became very familiar with conflict resolution. As a pastor that training has served me well. One of the teachings of conflict resolution is that when the conflict escalates to level 4 or 5 where the desire is not just to beat the other but the desire is to destroy the other, it is difficult if not impossible to deescalate the conflict. I fear that is the level that many have reached and it is my hope and prayer that we can do the impossible and bring the level of conflict down. I have faith that we can, for as the Angel Gabriel told Mary, "nothing is impossible with God." However that means we have to let God show us the way.

The first step is to move out of the black and white duality that demands us to think if I am right, then you the other are wrong. This has been one of the themes that Fr. Richard Rohr has been writing about the past few weeks. Richard Rohr wrote last week: *"We see this in our current political climate in America and much of the world. The United States has suffered eight years of nonstop gridlock and opposition to any creative governance. It mirrors Newton's Third Law of Motion that "every action elicits an equal and opposite reaction." Today many people are reverting to tribal thinking, denial, fear, and hatred, rather than turning to compassionate, creative solutions to real challenges of poverty, climate change, and the many worldwide forms of injustice."* The first step is identifying and acknowledging the problem.

That brings me to the readings that I selected for tonight. Psalm 51 was selected because in many respects it is a confession of sin. When we sin against our neighbor then we sin against God. Our definition of sin is the breaking of relationship with God, with other people and with creation. I doubt there are many of us that are not guilty of this sin during the past year. So just like in AA one of the first things we must do is acknowledge our part in the division. Then ask for forgiveness. Ask "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Nothing will change until we acknowledge and ask forgiveness for our own part in the division. Knowing that God will forgive us and can change our hearts, then and only then can we move on to changing our own behavior and our outlook on how we treat others.

This brings me to the passage from 1 Corinthians that I selected. Now Corinth has very close parallels to our world today. I truly believe that what Paul says to the church in Corinth he could just as easily say to the church and our society today. Fractious, bickering, and divided pretty well describes that early church as well as our world. We do not know the exact issues since we only have what Paul wrote to the church. What better book to turn to this evening as we close out what has to be the most contentious and bitter presidential campaign in our country's history.

Chapter 13 is so well known that most of us read it or hear it at a wedding and think oh isn't that nice. This passage is far more than just nice sentiment, it contains in it the very definition of love and as definition of love Paul helps define God. I say this because in this passage, love is a noun not a verb. As a noun, love describes a way of being, in fact describes the very essence of God. One commentator suggests that we can insert God or Jesus into each place where the word love is. When I talk with a couple preparing for marriage and they choose this passage I challenge them to consider, as an ideal, placing their name everywhere that the word love appears.

That is a steep challenge and most of them look at me like I am crazy and you may think I cannot do this. Well not 100% of the time but just think of the change you could bring to your life and the lives of those around you if you only succeeded 50% of the time.

Speaking of steep challenges we now come the parable of the Good Samaritan. A young lawyer asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answers with two very well known passages from Deuteronomy and Leviticus. But wanting to justify himself he asks who is my neighbor. We for the most part do not have a clue about how shocking this parable was to the people of Jesus' time. The Jews universally loathed the Samaritans. They were heretics, unclean, worshipped other gods. People would go out of their way to travel around Samaritan territory. The fact that Jesus chose to open up the definition of neighbor by using a Samaritan as an example of exemplary behavior, would have stunned and possibly outraged his audience.

What Jesus does in this parable is to change and radically broaden the definition of neighbor. And Jesus speaks to us as well as the young lawyer when he tells us that

everyone is our neighbor, no exceptions. Now loving your neighbor does not mean you have to like them, but that requires that you treat them as the beloved child of God that every person is.

Ultimately what I am challenging all of us gathered here tonight and I include myself in this, is to actually work to live the teachings of Jesus. They will know we are Christians by our love should be more than just a song. If everyone in this country who claimed to be a Christian actually followed the teachings of Paul in his letters to Corinth and truly lived into the parable of the Good Samaritan, then we would make progress into healing our badly divided society and world. For make no mistake this is an issue that is bigger than just the United States. We however can and must show the world that we take the teachings of Jesus seriously. You as in individual cannot force another to change, but you can change, you can strive to live into the promises that are contained in our baptismal promises especially the last three.

Please turn in our book of common prayer to page 305

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People I will, with God's help.

I believe with all my heart that this is the way forward. This is how we can begin the healing we so desperately need. The question is will you make a commitment to this call to a Christian life? I pray your answer is yes, with God's help. AMEN!